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Abstract

The first part of this paper gives a theoretical overview of language learning strategies, with an emphasis on metacognitive language learning strategies. Metacognitive strategies are methods used to help learners understand the way they learn; processes learners use to think about their own thinking. As they become aware of how they learn, learners will use metacognition in order to efficiently acquire new information, and consequently, become more independent in their learning. The second part of this paper consists of a study into young learners' language learning strategies when it comes to English as a second language, with special attention given to metacognitive language learning strategies. A sample of 15 learners was used in order to find out whether young learners use metacognitive strategies in learning new vocabulary in English. The data was elicited by a task that examined the usage of metacognitive language learning strategies, which included a think-aloud protocol followed by a semi-structured interview. The results show that young learners have an awareness of language learning processes and strategies, but do not always know how to use it in order to improve their learning.

Key Words: ESL, metacognition, metacognitive strategies, young learners

*The hardest kind of thinking is thinking about thinking. (*Anna, aged 9) [1]

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[1] Fisher, 1998, p. 1.

1. Introduction

It is imperative for young learners today to learn at least one foreign language (FL) during their primary education. The development of English as a lingua franca (ELF) contributed to the fact that it became the foreign language i.e. second language (ESL) most commonly taught in formal educational frameworks in Croatia, according to Eurostat's analysis (2012, p. 60).

The research on language learning strategies (LLS) and metacognitive language learning strategies (MLLS) used by young learners (YL) in particular, is quite scarce to date, although it is a field with continual work in progress. The existing research in this area faces another problem; there are no clear borderlines between cognitive and metacognitive strategies that would define MLLS as a distinctively self-standing category. Moreover, strategies used by YL per se are difficult to extract, earning to the fact that adolescents and adults (older language learners) are more capable to report on language learning strategies, and thus the methods used to elicit metacognitive strategies are primarily aimed at more cognitively mature participants.

Let us start by imagining a situation where an English teacher in Croatia tried to teach YL of English ways to learn the colour orange; he or she could tell them to imagine the circular shape of the fruit that carries the same name. Moreover, he or she could point out that the round fruit is orange, and the most likely name-giver for the colour. The noun *orange* starts with an "o", and that might lead learners to remember the word that was causing them trouble. The teacher focused their attention on the way they could facilitate and enhance their learning; what is more, he or she encouraged YL to find ways of remembering a new word, by proposing a somewhat different approach to language learning from what they were used to. The teacher pushed learners to look at the word from different angles and think about the meaning of the word. These actions imply cognitive processes. However, if the teacher wanted to encourage learners to take a step further, she would tell them to make flashcards for the new word; to put it somewhere where they would come across it frequently; to quiz themselves using the same flashcards; to think about why they did not remember the word at first and to try and avoid making the same mistakes; to find a place where they feel comfortable enough in order to remember the word better, or even to try and have fun while doing it. All these "upgraded" activities imply metacognitive processes.

The study presented in this paper aims to explore how nine to 11-year-old learners use MLLS, through tapping into how they learn words in English as their second language.

2. Language learning strategies

Strategic knowledge plays a significant role in second/foreign language acquisition. Language learning strategies have been investigated since the late 1970s and early 1980s, when studies primarily started with the identification of LLS of efficient language learners (Rubin, 1975; as cited in Gürsoy, 2004). Such strategies are used by language learners, including children, consciously or unconsciously, when learning an additional language. Numerous studies have contributed to both theory and practice by showing important results supporting the significant role of LLS for successful language learning. However, the majority of research has so far mostly concentrated on adolescents and adults (for instance, Griffiths, 2007), with fewer studies exploring LLS in children at the elementary school level (e.g., Gunning, 1997; Kiely, 2002; Lan & Oxford, 2003; as cited in Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999).

Chamot (2001) claims that there are two main reasons why LLS gained prominence in the last couple of decades; first of all, by observing strategies used by second language learners during the language learning process, we gain insight into various kinds of processes involved in language learning. This can help us understand processes related to second language acquisition, and identify differences between language learning and learning in general. Secondly, data elicited by research into LLS may help teach less successful learners to use strategies that characterize their more successful peers. This implies two major goals in LLS research: "(1) to identify and compare the learning strategies used by more and less successful language learners, and (2) to provide instruction to less successful language learners that helps them become more successful in their language study" (Chamot, 2001, pp. 25-26).

Two most influential classifications of LLS have appeared over the years; O'Malley et al.'s (1985) and Oxford's (1990). Of course, there have been numerous other taxonomies, but these two are representative enough for the purposes of the paper. Both distinguish between different categories of strategies, depending on the level or type of processing involved.

O'Malley et al. (1985; as cited in O'Malley & Chamot, 1995) divide learning strategies into three major categories: cognitive (strategies that operate directly on incoming information and manipulate it in ways that enhance learning), metacognitive (higher order executive skills that refer to planning, monitoring, or evaluating the success of a learning activity), and social/affective (strategies that entail either interaction with another person or control over affect). MLLS include higher order thinking that is applicable to various learning tasks. This category is even further developed when processes that belong to it are enumerated: selective attention for special aspects of a task, planning and organizing (for written or spoken discourse),

monitoring one's attention to a task, evaluating and checking comprehension of a language activity after an activity has been completed, and so on (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995, pp. 44-47).

The second classification mentioned is the one by Oxford (1990), who divided LLS into *direct* and *indirect* strategies, and further on subdivided them into six classes. MLLS, together with affective and social strategies, fall under the category of indirect strategies, i.e., LLS which do not directly involve the target language. Oxford (1990) mentions three types of MLLS, which she defines as a way for learners to control their learning process: learners have to center their learning, arrange and plan their learning, and, in the end, evaluate it.

In the literature on LLS, a growing importance has been attached to metacognition. As we have seen, it appears among the main types of strategies learners use. Hardi (2014) enumerates five behaviours in the metacognitive strategy category, referring to Gunning's Children's SILL (1997) and the Taiwanese Children's SILL (Oxford, 2003): 1) organizing time, 2) looking for chances to practice English, 3) listening closely to someone who talks in English, 4) checking progress in English, and 5) analyzing mistakes. Considering that all these behaviours closely relate to self-regulated language learning, Hardi concludes that metacognition can be recognized as an individual category that is at hand in the process of language learning.

3. Metacognition

Thinking about thinking is just one simple way in which metacognition can be explained. Cognition about cognition, or knowing about knowing are other ways in which one can describe a word that sounds intimidating when encountering it for the first time. Getting "meta" means to acquire, retain and transfer new content, which takes time, effort, practice, and an awareness of the need to do so. As a side note, Fisher reveals the intriguing history of the word *meta;* it was actually one of the columns to mark the turning point in a race, set in the ground at each end of the Circus in Rome. He claims that along this line the concept of meta-cognition can be seen "as a turning point in our understanding of the mind. The prefix meta has come to refer to something that transcends the subject it is related to" (Fisher, 1998, p. 1).

Livingston (1997) defines metacognition as "higher order thinking involving active control over the cognitive processes engaged in learning" (p. 1). In Hardi's words, it "includes knowledge about when and how to use particular strategies for learning or for problem solving" (2014, p. 40). The official term is most often associated with the cognitive psychologist John Flavell, who is considered to be the founding researcher in metacognition. Developmental

psychology has been the first to investigate the role of metacognitive processes, in the area of children's memory functioning (Sternberg, 1998; as cited in Hardi, 2014).

The concept, though, has been present for as long as humans have been able to reflect on their own cognitive processes, and it has become an important part of the educational framework in the last couple of decades. In his seminal work *Metacognition and Cognitive Monitoring* (1979), Flavell proposes a model of metacognitive monitoring which includes four categories: a) metacognitive knowledge, b) metacognitive experience, c) task and goals, and d) strategies or actions. It is interesting to point out that Flavell claims that the distinction between cognitive and metacognitive knowledge lies in *how* the information is used, more than in a difference in processes. In addition, metacognitive activities usually precede and follow cognitive activities. They are almost inseparably connected, which sometimes makes it difficult to draw a clear line between the domains of cognition and metacognition.

Flavell further on mentions that metacognition may be activated consciously or unconsciously by an individual. This concept became a much discussed subject among researchers in the field of metacognition. Larkin (2010), for example, claims that it is developed during the process of our thinking, and not by reflecting on our thinking, which implies that metacognitive processes are always an unconscious act. However, what interests us the most is the last category Flavell mentions; strategies. In his opinion, metacognitive strategies are designed to monitor cognitive processes, that is, their role is to control one's own cognitive activities, which then lead to a certain goal. When we speak about metacognitive knowledge, we imply that the knowledge we have is actively used in a strategic manner. Fisher (1998) claims that metacognitive awareness includes knowledge of ourselves, and knowledge about the strategies we use to asses a task.

Along these lines, it is important to mention that metacognition is comprised of two basic components: metacognitive knowledge/awareness and metacognitive strategies. Metacognitive knowledge/awareness is the learners' understanding of their own learning processes, while metacognitive strategies refer to learners' regulation and management of their learning, which encompasses a wide range of activities, such as selecting the most useful strategies for a particular task; planning, monitoring, regulating and evaluating one's learning (Schraw, Crippen & Hartley, 2006; as cited in Raoofi, Chan, Mukundan & Md Rashid, 2014). According to Anderson (2002), the metacognitive learning process can be divided into: (1) preparing and planning for learning, (2) selecting and using learning strategies, (3) monitoring strategy use, (4) orchestrating various strategies, and (5) evaluating strategy use and learning.

Schraw and Mohsman (1995) define metacognition as the knowledge and regulation of cognitive processes. They claim that unlike cognition, which only involves the execution of tasks, metacognition encompasses the understanding of how a task is accomplished. Metacognitive processes are important because they bring about conceptual changes in learning, thus enabling longer retention and different application of the material. What is more, Kipnis and Hofstein (2008) state that it is important to encourage metacognitive skills, because metacognitive processes promote learning through understanding, which, on the other hand, implies the possibility that the acquired knowledge can be applied in completely new contexts. Not to forget, metacognitive skills provide the capability of individual learning, which requires the awareness of the individual knowledge and the understanding of how to expand that knowledge. Ceylan and Harputlu (2015) note that learners who actively use metacognition do not only have the knowledge of their own cognitive processes, but are as well aware of the cognitive processes used by others. Let us conclude with Pierce's (2003) view on metacognition:

> Metacognition is an appreciation of what one already knows, together with a correct apprehension of a learning task and what knowledge and skills it requires combined with the ability to make correct inferences about how to apply one's strategic knowledge to a particular situation and to do so efficiently and reliably. (p. 2)

MLLS are essential for successful language learning through overviewing and connecting already known material, paying attention, organizing, setting goals and objectives, planning for a language task, looking for practice opportunities, self-monitoring and self-evaluating. Figure 1 below shows the enumerated processes, contained in the stages of monitoring, planning, problem-solving and evaluating, which are presented as self-standing units interconnected at the same time. In that way, they create better opportunities for learners to gain awareness of their learning processes, which facilitates their learning practices.
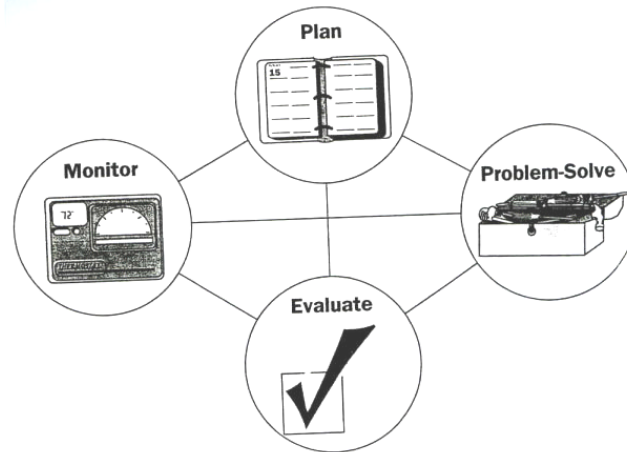
Figure 1. Metacognitive model of strategic learning

4. Cognitive vs. metacognitive language learning strategies

What is the difference between cognitive and metacognitive strategies? There are a number of problems associated with the interrelation of these two terms. Flavell (1979) himself acknowledged that metacognitive knowledge may not be that different from cognitive knowledge. The assumption is that the distinction lies in how the information is used; overseeing the process of achieving a cognitive goal should be the defining criteria for determining that a strategy is metacognitive. In other words, cognitive strategies are used by an individual to achieve a particular goal (e.g., learning a new word), while metacognitive strategies are used to ensure that the goal has been reached (e.g., quizzing oneself in order to see if one has learned the word). Fisher (1998) summarizes the differences between the two strategies by saying that "the metacognitive includes cognitive elements, but cognitive activity does not necessarily include the metacognitive" (p. 8).

Metacognitive strategies most often precede or follow cognitive strategies; in simple terms they imply thinking backwards and forwards. It has been noticed that metacognitive strategies frequently occur when cognitive strategies fail, as in the case of the recognition that one did not understand what a certain text is about after reading it. It is believed that such situations activate metacognitive strategies because the learner tries to rectify the things that have gone wrong (Roberts & Erdos, 1993). However, it is very important to notice that metacognitive and cognitive strategies may overlap in some cases, depending on what the

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[2] J. Clegg: *Metacognition: an overview of its uses in language-learning*

purpose for using the strategy may be. Seeing that they are closely intertwined and dependent upon each other, any attempt to examine one without acknowledging the other would not provide realistic results.

Knowledge is considered to be metacognitive if it is actively used in a strategic manner to ensure that a goal is met. Simply possessing knowledge about one's cognitive strengths or weaknesses and the nature of the task without actively utilizing this information to oversee learning is not a metacognitive strategy. Strategic metacognitive knowledge is defined as "the knowledge about what strategies are, why they are useful and specific knowledge about when and how to use them" (Wenden, 1998, p. 519; as cited in Ceylan & Harputlu, 2015).

Examining YL strategies within the framework of O'Malley and Chamot's scheme, Julkunen (1999) found that Finish 12-year-olds (fifth-graders) applied far more metacognitive strategies that cognitive ones, though curiously enough, planning, a very important metacognitive strategy, was not typical at all. When it comes to vocabulary learning, a study by Ibrahim et al. (2013) investigated into whether there is a positive correlation between vocabulary size and metacognitive strategies (planning, monitoring and evaluation) when no formal strategy training is given to ESL students. The findings showed that students (113 Malay learners of English) were moderate users of metacognitive strategies in vocabulary learning, which may indicate that there is a need for explicit instruction and the implementation of MLLS in ESL.

5. The age factor

In early research investigating LLS in children, the emphasis tended to be on what YL could not do, which resulted in the general opinion that children under the age of seven are not capable of reporting on their own cognitive strategies. However, YL in particular may not be aware, may forget or may consider unimportant some of the learning activities they normally put into practice. As Winne and Perry (2000) have argued, there has been a long tradition of using self-report techniques as a way of achieving understanding of individuals' language learning processes. Self-report interviews ask the learners to make generalizations about their cognitive and metacognitive behaviours by looking into how they would respond to hypothetical situations. These instruments depend upon the respondents' ability to give a reliable report of their language learning processes.

It is generally accepted that when an adult learns a language, they are able to think about how the learning occurs and consciously apply strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995).

Flavell (1979) states that children are not able to talk about their learning in the same fashion as adults are. On the other hand, it has been argued that children can indeed understand and discuss their process of learning (Ellis, 1999). In fact, *learning how to learn* is a key factor to any discussion of metacognitive awareness, as children need to acquire the necessary skills to understand how they are learning a language, and then apply this knowledge to their learning both in and beyond the classroom.

When it comes to the development of MLLS, Larkin (2010) claims that studies have shown that metacognition does not necessarily develop with adulthood. He proposes that it needs to be encouraged and developed through emphasising not the *outcome*, but the *process* of learning. What is more, Laursen and Mogensen (2015) claim that language is a mobile resource, and cannot be perceived as something unchangeable and permanent; therefore, it is difficult to view language as an object of gradual evaluation. Authors such as Pennycook (2012; as cited in Laursen & Mogensen, 2015, p. 83), underline the importance behind unexpectedness in acquiring another language: "What does it say about our expectations and ideas that something becomes or is unexpected?". Laursen and Mogensen (2015) also point to a thought provoking idea by Heller (2007) who says that as soon as we look closely at real people in real places, we see languages turning up unexpectedly. She emphasizes that we see languages taking *unexpected forms*. Indeed, there *should* be a general "deconstruction of the linear notion of competence" (Laursen & Mogensen, 2015, p. 90) in order for us to see what lies behind the borderlines of a field that incessantly changes, be it language learning, acquiring of a language, or any other process that still lies beyond the reach of our thorough comprehension.

Chamot and El-Dinary (1999) claim that metacognitive awareness begins at quite an early stage, saying that YL are indeed capable of describing their learning and thinking processes, but in a way that does not always comply with the expectations of the researcher. Some authors (e.g., Berk, 2003; Veenman & Spaans, 2005) argue that metacognitive strategies emerge in children from eight to 10 years of age, and expand during the years thereafter. Moreover, it seems that certain MLLS, such as monitoring and evaluating, appear to mature later than others (e.g., planning). Most likely, MLLS already develop during preschool or early-school years at a basic level, but become more academically oriented once formal education requires the explicit use of a metacognitive repertoire. Fisher (1998, p. 8) mentions four levels of metacognitive awareness, as adapted from Swartz and Perkins (1989):

1. *Tacit use* : children make decisions without really thinking about them
2. *Aware use*: children become consciously aware of a strategy or decision-making process
3. *Strategic use*: children organise their thinking by selecting strategies for decision-making
4. *Reflective use*: children reflect on thinking, before, during and after the process, pondering on progress and how to improve

Fisher does not, however, explain whether these levels of awareness are age-related, or whether they occur individually in different stages of a child's development.

According to Piaget, third, fourth and fifth grade learners are in concrete operational stages. There are several reasons for collecting data from nine to 11-year-old learners. Children in the first and second grade of primary school (seven and eight years) have a shorter attention span than older learners. Furthermore, while first and second graders are still developing their reading and writing abilities, third, fourth and fifth grade learners have already developed those abilities to a greater extent. In addition, it is presupposed that affectively, fear and anxiety are more dominant in younger children, whereas third, fourth and fifth grade learners supposedly have lower affective filters. If children become too anxious or afraid during the process of questioning, the validity of the results could possibly be negatively affected.

In the last decade, research using new methodologies has begun to present a more positive picture of young children's metacognitive capabilities. Observational studies in naturalistic contexts, as well as the development of age-appropriate tasks which are meaningful to young children and reduce the dependence on their verbal activities, are a key to the recognition of metacognition in young learners (Whitebread et. al., 2010; as cited in Efklides & Misailidi, 2010).

6. The study

6.1. Objectives

The aim of the study was to investigate MLLS in vocabulary learning used by young Croatian learners of English as a foreign language. In addition, we wanted to see whether MLLS change with age.

6.2.   Sample

A total of 15 YL, ages ranging from nine to 11, participated in this study. They were divided into three groups; group A – five third-graders (nine-year-olds), group B – five fourth-graders (10-year-olds) and group C – five fifth-graders (11-year-olds). The sample consisted of nine girls and six boys. All participants were speakers of Croatian as their first language (L1), and they had been learning English since their first grade of elementary school as their second language (L2).

It should be mentioned that the definition of the age group considered to be young YL varies to a great extent. YL is a term that can sometimes include children up to the age of 14 (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2011; as cited in Hardi, 2014), seeing that primary school education in Croatia starts around the age of seven and finishes around the age of 14.

Every participant was informed about the general aim and purpose of the study, and it was made clear to them that their participation was voluntary and that the data obtained would be anonymized. Prior to this, the teachers had collected written consents from the parents agreeing to their childrens' participation in the study. For the purposes of securing anonymity, learners were referred to using numbers (L1, L2, L3...).

6.3.   Instruments and procedure

According to Larkin (2010), there are five ways of tapping into learner's metacognitive processes, and they are, as follows: observation, questionnaires, interviews, tests and think-aloud protocols. Considering that the participants in this study were children ranging from nine to 11 years, it has been decided that data would be collected by a combination of think-aloud protocols in a cognitive verbal task, giving way to the usage of cognitive strategies (the first part of the study). In this way, learners would be eased into a "let us think about thinking" mindset, followed by semi-structured interviews on MLLS (the second part of the study).

Although Pramling (1988; as cited in Fisher, 1998) thinks that the focus of teaching should not be on cognitive strategies, but on the metacognitive ones, she nevertheless divides the processes of thinking into three stages, the first one being the level of *cognitive description* where the focus is on WHAT the child is thinking about certain contents. The second level is the level of *cognitive extension* where the focus is on HOW the child is thinking about content. The third level is metacognitive thinking, where the focus is on the child's thinking about their own thinking about the content. In our study, we wanted to achieve the sequence proposed by

Pramling, in order to get as much output from the learners as possible. It is, however, important to note that Fisher (1998) warns the reader that Pramling's distrust of cognitive strategies lies in the fact that her research is primarily centered on pre-school children; if children are at a concrete operational stage, generalisable skills may not seem very relevant. Be that as it may, we decided to let the learners choose the direction they want to take when it comes to answering questions on MLLS they used in learning English as a FL. Some children were asked more subquestions than others, in order to produce sufficient data on their strategies.

All tasks were chosen according to the learners' language abilities and in consultation with their English language teachers. The participants were interviewed individually in a separate room, in their native language, so as to overcome any misunderstandings due to the limited knowledge of the FL. The interviews were transcribed and analysed; during the analysis of the interviews we did not apply any of the already established categorisation of strategies, but opted for a data-driven classification.

As has already been mentioned, the study consisted of two parts (see Appendix). The first part of the study had two tasks. In the first task, learners were presented with two sets of two sentences: 1) "**Snarks** live in the woods. **Snarks** are funny and they sleep in trees", and 2) "My grandfather was a **catchman** when he was young. He helped people". Learners were asked what the nonce word in green meant. After they offered an explanation (or after they did not succeed to explain the word), learners were presented with a picture that was supposed to help them figure out the meaning of the word by providing visual context. In the second task, learners had to guess the meaning of the same nonce words used in the sentences in the first task. However, in this case the nonce words were not given in sentences, but were presented in the environment of other words that form a conceptually similar group; *snark* was accompanied by *penguin* and *lion*, whereas *catchman* was accompanied by *teacher* and *fireman*.

The noun *snark* is not a word devised for the purposes of this study; however, it does not have any meaning. It was coined in 1876 by Lewis Carrol, in his poem *The Hunting of the Snark*, which is characterised as a nonsense poem[3]. It was selected because of its phonetic similarity with nouns that denote animals, such as *snake* or *shark*. *Catchman*, on the other hand, was coined specifically for the purposes of this study. Considering that a great number of professions include the noun "man" in themselves, it was meant to give the learners an incentive in ascribing meaning to a word which they have not encountered before, but which falls under the domain of words known to YL, such as *policeman, fireman, postman,* etc.

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[3] The poem borrows the setting and some creatures from Carroll's earlier poem *Jabberwocky*, present in his novel *Through the Looking Glass* (1871).

In the second part of the study, learners were asked questions on MLLS:

1. *How do you usually learn a new word in English?*
2. *When do you think you know a word?*
3. *Do you know how many English words you have learnt?*
4. *Do you think you could express yourself or make yourself understood in English?*
5. *Besides practising words at school and at home, what other opportunities do you have to learn words?*
6. *How would you improve your vocabulary?*
7. *When you are fed up with studying English, how do you make yourself study again?*

6.4. Results and discussion

6.4.1. Overall general observations

The size and composition of the sample in this study limited the extent to which the results could be generalised and presented in percentages. However, the transcribed interviews offered interesting information on young learners' views on how English vocabulary could be learned. Participants exhibited an awareness of the language learning processes; this could be seen from the MLLS they were mentioning in the semi-structured interviews. MLLS, as had been expected, did not occur solely by themselves, but in combination with cognitive strategies.

Most of the YL from group A, and some learners from group B, showed insecurity when questioned; it was visible that they were coping with their thinking processes due to extended periods of silence, in which the interviewer had to encourage them persistently, assuring them that whatever they said would be accepted, and that there is no right or wrong answer. What is also interesting to mention is that learners were quite surprised by the questions they had been asked; it seemed as though they were not accustomed to such a way of talking about the acquisition of a second language. Fear of making mistakes or saying something wrong was noticeable as well, which could be supported by the raising (interrogative) intonation in some of the learners' answers. Questions that required the greatest amount of reflection were followed by significant periods of silence, especially among the members of group A and B. Group C showed apparently lower levels of insecurity, evidenced through more fluent and eloquent answers, which is in favour of O'Malley et al. (1985), who noticed that higher level learners, meaning those who are both older and more proficient, are more able to incorporate metacognitive control over their learning than lower level ones.

It was not surprising that many of the key strategies that learners reported on required the use of certain resources, such as textbooks, workbooks, notebooks, dictionaries, books in general, TV, films, videos, songs, YouTube, Google, parents, teachers... In addition to reading, watching TV/films, and using social media in English outside of school, YL had also been learning and practicing English through playing online multi-player video games. Although this study did not look into gender differences in YL, it became quite obvious that the male participants were much more involved in computer games, which provided them with rich vocabulary input. Female learners, however, reported on watching TV, films and listening to songs, as a way of acquiring new English words outside the school context.

6.4.2. Cognitive verbal task

The task YL were facing in the first part of the conducted interviews was aimed at the cognitive strategies they used when presented with unfamiliar English vocabulary. The information attained could not be processed in a quantitative manner owing to great differences found in the learner's answers, and because of that they will be presented descriptively. However, it has to be emphasized that the results of the first part of the study, the cognitive verbal task, do not play a role as important as the results in the second part, where MLLS of YL are directly questioned. As has already been mentioned, MLLS precede, interfere with and follow cognitive strategies, occasionally even to the point where one cannot see the clear borderline at which the first one begins and the second one ends. Thus, a task that encourages young learners to use cognitive language learning strategies was needed to stimulate them to think about language, and furthermore, to give rise to thinking about their thinking about the English language.

There was not one most common given answer referring to the meaning of the word *snark*, before the picture was shown to the learners. Almost half of the learners, six of them, could not offer any kind of an answer without visual evidence, whereas others were giving answers such as: *squirrel, shark* (context is not taken into consideration; phonetic similarity is crucial), *snake* (phonetic similarity)... When asked why they decided on a certain animal, learners usually offered answers that were translations of the sentences in front of them. After they had been presented with the picture, most YL managed to provide an answer, although some focused solely on the visual context, without taking the sentences into account. This could be seen when a few learners said that the word *snarks* meant *šuma*. Others offered answers such as: *životinja, vjeverica, lisica, sova*, etc. or stuck to their initial responses. It could

be seen that group C provided translations of the word *snark* mostly without needing any visual evidence, whereas groups A and B needed the picture in order to guess the meaning of the word. Also, when it came to comprehension, it was noticeable that the level of comprehension of group A was the lowest, evidenced through extended periods of silence, the most frequent need for encouragement, as well as for additional information that was given to them in order to elicit more proficient answers.

In the second part of this task, learners offered even fewer answers when faced with the word *catchman*. Without having visual reinforcement in front of them, nine out of 15 learners could not provide a meaning for the unknown word. The remaining learners were quite imaginative in their answers: *superman, superhero, player, fireman, hunter* and *fisherman*. L12, from group C, showed an analytical processing strategy by using word structure to conjure up meaning. Unfortunately, this was not as helpful for him as one would think:

- o I: What could "catchman" mean?
- o L12: (silence)
- o I: Hm? Can you think of anything?
- o L12: Not really.
- o I: Does the sentence not help you?
- o L12: Well, I know that "catch" means "uloviti", but I don't know, I can't connect it to anything.
- o I: You can't connect it into one word?
- o L12: A-a.

When the learners were presented with the picture that was providing visual context, the answers they gave became more context-related; the most common ones were *policeman* and *soldier*, but more general answers were given too, such as *worker*, or *a profession*. Some of the learners did not change their answers when presented with the picture. Unexpectedly, L14 gave a very imaginative response, connecting the two sentences he was presented with meaningfully, which was not initially planned for the participants in the study to do:

- o I: What do you think the word in green means?
- o L14: *Hunter.*
- o I: Why?
- o L14: Because he hunted when he was young. And he helped people.

- o I: Aha. And what made you think the word means *hunter*?
- o L14: Because there was probably many of them.
- o I: Many of what?
- o L14: Squirrels.
- o I: Aha! You think it applies to the sentences from before?
- o L14: (nods)

Table 1. The meaning of the nonce words in context

GROUP:	A (3rd grade)	B (4th grade)	C (5th grade)
EXERCISE 1			
1st SENTENCE *What do you think the word in green means?*	1. people – P: animals / squirrels 2. 0 – P: animals / woods / squirrels 3. squirrel – P: animals 4. 0 – P: woods / animals 5. 0 – P: woods / squirrels	6. 0 – P: fox / animals /squirrel 7. 0 – P: woods 8. woods – P: 0 9. 0 – P: nature / woods 10. shark – P: owl	11. shark / animal – P: 0 12. lemurs – P: foxes 13. snake – P: fox / owl 14. owls – P: squirrels 15. shark / squirrel – P: 0
2nd SENTENCE *What do you think the word in green means?*	1. 0 – P: policeman 2. 0 – P: soldier 3. superman – P: 0 4. 0 – P: person who protects children / soldier 5. 0 – P: policeman	6. 0 – P: 0 7. 0 – P: someone who helps people / soldier 8. player – P: profession / policeman 9. 0 – P: worker 10. fireman – P: 0	11. 0 – P: a person who helps other people 12. 0 – P: nurse 13. superhero – P: 0 14. hunter – P: policeman 15. fisherman – P: 0
0 – no explanation of the word given P – answers given after the visual context / picture			

Task two was designed to see whether the learners, after they had been faced with sentences that provide a certain context, could ascribe meaning to the same words presented in the environment of other words that were already known to them. The questions asked were: *Which words are new to you? What do they mean?* Surprisingly enough, some learners were not even aware of the fact that the words they were supposed to ascribe meaning to were the same words they encountered in the previous sentences. This predominantly happened in group A, the youngest learners, which is contributed to a shorter attention span than in groups B or C. Only one learner in group A noticed that the words repeat themselves; others offered new explanations of the words. For example, L3 and L4 both said that *snark* meant *shark*, without even mentioning this possibility in task one. The situation in group B was better, but not to a

great extent; as well as in group A, some learners did not connect the two tasks and could not offer a meaningful answer. Others however, repeated the answers already given, without getting confused. Interestingly enough, YL in group C did not give any new solutions because they were completely aware that the words were the same ones used in the previous sentences. Some of the learners even pointed out that the words they could not identify in task one, were the same words that were causing them trouble in task two.

Table 2. The meaning of the nonce words in a group of words

GROUP:	A (3rd grade)	B (4th grade)	C (5th grade)
EXERCISE 2			
Which words are new to you? What do they mean?	1. snark-0 / catchman-0 2. snark-snake / catchman-0 3. snark-shark / catchcman-someone who types on the computer 4. snark-shark / catchman-0 5. snark-0 / catchman-policeman	6. snark-0 / catchman-0 7. snark-human / catchman-soldier 8. snark-wood /catchman-profession 9. snark-0 / catchman-0 10. snark-0 / catchman-policeman	11. snark-0 / catchman-0 12. snark-0 / catchman-0 13. snark-0 / catchman-0 14. snark-shark / catchman-hunter 15. snark-0 / catchman-0
0 – no explanation of the word given			

6.4.3. Types of metacognitive strategies

Around 30 different strategies (cognitive, metacognitive and social/affective) were identified in the first and second part of the study. It was also kept in mind that not all behaviour could be accepted as strategic. The MLLS that were targeted by the questions asked in the second part of the study were: 1 – organizing time to study English; 2 and 3 – showing awareness of one's own knowledge, evidenced through self-managing; 4 – showing awareness of one's own capabilities i.e., strengths and weaknesses; 5 – looking for occasions to learn new English words outside the official school context; 6 – setting targets in language learning; and 7 – putting oneself into a motivating learning mood. The data elicited by the interview will be provided in the relation to the above mentioned aspects.

1. How do you usually learn a new word in English?

The first question was asked to gain insight into the ways in which YL plan and organize their language learning i.e., how they go about setting goals and reaching them.

The most frequent answer to this question in group A included: reading the new word in the learner's textbook, workbook or notebook, writing it down, revising it and speaking it out aloud, as well as asking for help from parents. Learners insisted on learning by repetition, which includes reading the word many times, writing it down or saying it out aloud frequently. These actions all refer to low processing vocabulary learning strategies. Repetition as a cognitive or metacognitive strategy (it depends on the goal the learner strives to reach) is used efficiently in one's mother-tongue, and therefore can sometimes be extensively used in the attempt to master English vocabulary, especially among YL who are not experienced language learners. It could be noticed that group A had the tendency to resort to the most usual and formal ways of learning an unknown word; those that are practiced in a formal classroom environment. However, it cannot be said that there was a general lack of strategic behaviour, which was obvious from the way L5 learns:

- o L5: Well, I look up words in my English book. Then I write them in English on a piece of paper, and I do this a couple of times until I remember them.
- o I: By writing?
- o L5: By writing. And when I have to learn to speak, then I also read the words and I say them out aloud a couple of times, and then, after, ammm, a couple of hours, I go through them once again, to see if I didn't forget them.

The first impulse of YL in group B, when it came to learning a new word, remained the same; they looked it up in their textbook, workbook or notebook, read it, wrote it down and revised it. But they also mentioned dictionaries and computer games as a source for acquiring new words, which was not present in the answers of group A. When asked how he learned new words, L8 reported:

- o L8: Well, through games, and I also use an English dictionary.
- o I: On the internet?
- o L8: Yes. Some words.
- o I: And how do you learn them? You just look them up?

- L8: No, I remember them, and... I look them up in a dictionary, which is at the back of the textbook, and also in the textbook.

Low processing vocabulary learning strategies were still used by learners in this group; they manifest themselves through oral repetition, note taking and using a dictionary for comprehension purposes. However, a shift from learning a language in the formal classroom environment was already noticeable in the learners' awareness of the fact that one can learn English outside the school context.

Group C answered the first question in a slightly different way; they mentioned using computer games, films, Google, YouTube, i.e., the internet, mobile phones and tablets, along with everything else that the younger learners had already referred to. Learners in group C showed awareness of the fact that they were surrounded by English on an everyday basis, and actively sought for opportunities to make use of such situations by incorporating their knowledge in the school context. This was clearly stated by L11, who was quite aware of his use of metacognitive language learning strategies:

- L11: Well, I mean, when I come across a word, I don't know, while playing a game, watching a movie, or something like that, if I come across a word that is, like "suspicious" to me, I immediately say: "I have to look it up". And then I look it up either on Google, or I take a dictionary and find it. Because I'm interested in it. And I don't know, I like when our teacher shows us a text, and tells us how to read through it and make connections. Somehow I learn that way.

Four out of five learners in this group said that in most cases they were familiar with the English words encountered at school; learners did not have to learn them because they had already acquired them beforehand. L12 says:

- L12: Well, I don't really study. I don't study English because I am, like, good at it, but usually when I learn a new word in class, I revise it. Because I already know most of the words from before, I don't really learn them.
- I: So the words you are taught in school are already known to you?
- L12: Aha.
- I: And if a word was completely new to you, how would you learn it?
- L12: Well I try, if it's in my notebook, to learn it by heart.

- I: By reading?
- L12: Aha.

When asked how he usually learned new words in English, L14 says:

- L14: I play games, or watch some people who talk in English, and movies and videos too. And sometimes, when I'm interested in something, I look it up.
- I: And how do you learn words for school?
- L14: Well, I sometimes read them a couple of times. I don't really study that much.
- I: Why? Is it too easy for you?
- L14: Yes. I already know a lot of words from all the games I have played.

Furthermore, L13 decorated her own word cards in order to make learning new vocabulary easier and more enjoyable, which is a way of organising one's learning material, a metacognitive strategy. After L13 was done with the cognitive processing of learning a new word, she checked her own oral production, which was a clear sign of monitoring, another prominent MLLS:

- L13: So first of all, I cut out little pieces of paper, and then I write the words down and I decorate them so that it is more enjoyable to learn. I write them down, and that way I revise them.
- I: Using the pieces of paper?
- L13: Yes.
- I: You read the words a couple of times?
- L13: Well, I read them, and… I read, and then I cover them up and say them out aloud by heart, something like that.

The assumption that MLLS precede and follow cognitive language learning strategies proved to be true in the case of this 11-year-old learner. Further on, L15 was aware of the fact that learning English was easier for him when it occurred within the content of computer games. Moreover, what L15 noticed was that he could apply the strategies he used in his Croatian language lessons to his English language lessons, which is an example of strategy transfer from one language to another i.e., transferring already acquired knowledge to new contexts:

- o L15: Well, I spent a lot of time on the computer, on my mobile phone and on the tablet. I'm always on YouTube, watching games, and learning along the way. And it's easier for me to remember games than the things we learn in school.
- o I: Why do you think it's easier for you to learn through games?
- o L15: Well, because someone comments on games, I listen to it and remember it. I always remember games.
- o I: And when you have to learn words for school?
- o L15: Well, I do the same. I revise with some... For example, in Croatian, our teacher told us to take our book and write words, and determine their... (silence)
- o I: Gender, number, case?
- o L15: Yes.
- o I: And you do the same for English?
- o L15: Well yes, but not that many words are new to me.
- o I: You already know them?
- o L15: Yes.

As can be seen from the example above, the benefits of metacognition came from using different planning and organizing strategies, such as self-questioning or monitoring your own production. Some learners even reported on transferring their knowledge to different contexts. Taking everything into account, the answers showed that the participants in group A demonstrated lower levels of independence in using MLLS than those in group B and C. In addition, the ways in which learners acquired new words changed from group A, to group B and group C; a development from using textbooks and workbooks, to playing games and using other tools in learning the English language is noticeable.

2. When do you think you know a word?

The second question was asked to see whether YL had the ability to recognize what they know and what they did not know i.e., whether they were aware of their own language knowledge. Although that may seem simple, there is a significant difference between understanding a word as it is explained to you compared to being able to explain that word to somebody else.

Interestingly enough, but not surprisingly, a couple of the learners from group A sought their parent's confirmation to be sure that they had learned a new word. L1 said: "Well, I ask my mum if I have learned the word, and then she tells me whether I have or haven't". This statement could easily be identified as a social strategy, which was in our case most commonly used by learners in group A. Studies have shown that the use of social strategies decreases with age. Since these strategies involve learning with the help of others, primarily family members, it could be an indication of the fact that the child's knowledge of English slowly surpasses that of the family members, or that such help is not necessary anymore because YL can manage on their own. Another learner from group A presented herself as an independent learner:

- L3: Ammm, after 5-10 minutes I quiz myself, without looking at the paper.
- I: You quiz yourself? Your mum and dad do not help you?
- L3: No, I do it on my own. Sometimes dad helps me.

YL in group B gave great significance to the meaning of a word; learners said they mostly knew a word when they were familiar with its form and meaning. Some learners showed language awareness through insisting on learning how to write and spell it in English. L7 claimed to know a word under the following circumstances: "When I know what it means, when I know how to pronounce it and to write it down". Parents likewise played a significant role when it came to these learners, although their role was slightly different than in the previous group; parents quizzed their children at home and helped the learners gain awareness of the words they had not managed to acquire. What is more, participants in group B thought that the very process of learning, the fact that it takes time to learn something, was by itself a warranty for knowing a word. When asked the question, L10 said: "Well, when I go through it at least five times, then I think I already know it".

Group C gave the greatest variety of answers; they showed an awareness of the complexity of the issue. Parents were not mentioned as a resource for ascertaining one knew a word; instead, learners self-managed by quizzing themselves. MLLS implied the learners' wish to organize learning or to evaluate knowledge by means of testing themselves. It is interesting to note that two learners in this group explicitly used the expression *in my head*, L11: "Now, for example*, in my head* I know that this is the word I am looking for and that it has a certain meaning, but I like to try out the word, use it in a sentence and, I don't know, do some exercises in my workbook, check if they are correct", and L15: "I think of a question *in my head* and I answer it. And when I look into the solutions and my answer is correct, then I know

it". Some learners even gave unexpected answers to the question *When do you think you know a word?*, such as: "When I've already heard the word", or "When I'm hundred percent sure", which could be interpreted as a sign of confidence judgement, since learners evaluated themselves on how certain they were about the accuracy of their response.

3. Do you know how many English words you have learnt?

The third question was posed as a kind of extension of the second one, in order to elicit even more information on the learner's awareness of their own language learning, i.e., vocabulary they have acquired so far.

All of the learners in group A, except one, said that they do not know how many English words they had learnt. This negative answer was indicative as well, considering that at the beginning of their metacognitive development, children produce mental verbs referring to knowledge states, such as *know*, *think*, *don't know*, which was quite obvious in this study. The third question caused the most trouble in eliciting a response from the learners, especially in group A. L2 reflected on previously acquired knowledge, when asked how many words in English she had learned:

- o L2: (silence)
- o I: What do you think?
- o L2: (silence)
- o I: You don't think about it?
- o L2: It's not that, but we have been learning a lot of stuff…
- o I: Aha, and then you can't remember…
- o L2: Yes, all the things from second grade, I can't remember everything, but we learned a lot of stuff.

However, there was one exception in group A; L4, who, when asked how come he knew how many English words he had learnt, answered: "Because you remember them".

Group B could not verbalise how many words they had learnt, but it was noticeable that they attached great importance to the period of learning that preceded the current moment. The temporal dimension was significant to them. L6 answered: "In third grade we changed two teachers, and... And since the first grade I've forgotten quite a lot. But then when I revise, then I remember those words". On the other hand, some learners gave an exact number of the words they had learnt until now, such as L8, who said he knew around hundred words. When asked to explain, he continued: "Well, I have learned them before, and I have been learning them for

four or five years". As expected, learners emphasised the process of learning words primarily, whereas the result, in the form of a specific number of words, could not be clearly given.

Group C was quite confused and undecided, claiming that it was not possible to know how many words one had learned because, as L13 said: "That's too many words". However, when faced with further questions on why this could not be possible, they hesitated in providing explanations. L11 noticed:

- o L11: I do know a lot of words, you know, I heard them and I know what their meaning is, but, for example, I couldn't write them down or use them in a sentence. So, it depends; I may know, I don't know, around 50 grammatically correct words.

By saying this, L11 showed great awareness of what it means to know a word. However, other learners in this group were more self-confident, such as L12, who said: "Well, I know. I know quite a few, because I watch a lot of things in English, and I am very interested". Another proposition was interesting as well; L15 gave a suggestion on how one could keep track of how many words one had learnt: "You write down all the words you know, and then when you remember new ones, you write them down every day. You write down every word you know and then count them". His idea of memorizing all the words one had learned was laborious, which could point to the learner's awareness of the time-consuming processes involved in acquiring and attaining a word.

The answers given by the learners showed that there was not a unified way of knowing how much words one knows. Whereas YL in group A, simply answered that they did not know the exact number, group B, and more significantly, group C, said that they did not know how many words they knew, but some of them managed to offer explanations that provided insights into the ways they think about learning a language. Learners mentioned different aspects of acquiring a word; through exposure to the English language (listening), by knowing the grammatically correct form of the word (writing) and through reading. Interestingly enough, YL did not mention speaking as a way of finding out how many words they knew; this could be attributed to low speaking proficiency levels the learners still experienced in their oral production.

4. Do you think you could express yourself or make yourself understood in English?

The fourth question was asked to examine the learner's resourcefulness and the awareness of their own capabilities; in other words, they were invited to speak about their

strengths and weaknesses when it came to the English language and to evaluate themselves through self-monitoring.

Every member of group A was somewhat hesitant when answering affirmatively to this question. Learners emphasised that they would be able to use only basic vocabulary they had formerly acquired. They frequently fell back to their ESL classroom environment; it seemed as though that was the place they felt most secure and comfortable in when using English. However, when saying that she actually could communicate in English by using some basic sentences she knew, L3 added: "But I wouldn't know those complicated sentences. I would just remain silent and turn around".

Group B was not significantly more confident when it came to their abilities to communicate in English, although L10, after answering affirmatively, said: "Well, I've been studying for four years now, I ought to know something". Other learners pointed to the fact that even if they could express themselves, it would only entail the basics of everyday communication in English, which they had already grown accustomed to.

The opinion did not change greatly in group C; all of the learners hesitated with affirmative answers. However, one learner gave an explanation of why she would hesitate in making herself understood in English, showing considerable awareness of her own weaknesses in this phase of language learning. L13 explained:

- o L13: I mean, not just now, because I'm still ashamed to talk in English, but maybe later, when I'm in the seventh or eighth grade.
- o I: Why are you ashamed to speak in English?
- o L13: I don't know. (laughs)
- o I: Do you think you can't speak well?
- o L13: I might say something wrong…

There had been another curious answer to this question in group C; L15 said that he could communicate in English, but only if his interlocutor was British. Apparently, he was not really able to understand American English.

Learners in all three groups showed a significant lack of self-confidence when it came to their capabilities to use English in everyday conversations; strong awareness of their own incapability was evidenced through their answers. This could be justified by taking the learner's age into account. However, group C, gave the most detailed answers when speaking about their strengths and weaknesses in language learning, which might suggest that they wanted to provide contextual proof of their supposed lack of proficiency.

5. Besides practising words at school and at home, what other opportunities do you have to learn words?

By asking the fifth question, we tried to find out whether YL were actively looking for occasions to learn English outside the formal classroom environment.

Most learners in group A mentioned travelling or visiting relatives abroad as one of the best opportunities for learning new words. L3 said that she would travel to England with her father, who was fluent in English and would translate for her, adding that she would listen to him and learn by trying to speak on her own. It was obvious that repeating after someone, i.e., learning by imitation, was at play. Other opportunities that were mentioned by YL were watching television or playing computer games, which once again provided learners with words they encountered in the school context later on. When asked where he could learn new words, L4 said:

- o L4: (silence) I don't know.
- o I: Where do you come across English?
- o L4: Sometimes in computer games.
- o I: How come?
- o L4: Sometimes a thing appears, and its name is written in English, and then I figure out what it means.
- o I: Can you give me an example?
- o L4: I'm playing "Dragon City". And then I get dragons and such stuff.
- o I: And then you remember words, by playing it?
- o L4: Mostly yes.
- o I: What words, for example?
- o L4: For example, ammm, (whispers: "What's the name for it?"), "gift", then "sell"…
- o I: You didn't learn that in school?
- o L4: I did. In school and in the game as well.
- o I: Where did you first encounter these words?
- o L4: In the computer game.

Knowledge and awareness of additional sources of information was shown when L1 explained: "You go to "Translator", write a word in Croatian, and then it says how it's written in English".

The dictionary was the most mentioned tool for learning new words in group B, alongside computer games, TV, films and songs. In addition, L7 mentioned extracurricular English language lessons, in a school for foreign languages. It seemed as though the step towards perceiving English as an omnipresent language (in the Croatian context) had still not completely been made in this group; some learners did not seem to be aware of the great amounts of input they had been exposed to by indulging in all the activities they had already mentioned. When asked the question, L10 answered:

- L5: Well, ammm, by using my dictionary. And… Only by using my dictionary.
- I: That's the only place where you encounter English words?
- L5: Yes.

Unlike groups A and B, which were not marked by great differences in their answers, group C differed considerably; learners did not resort to dictionaries or travelling as their primary resource. It could be noticed that their awareness of the presence of English in their day-to-day life was quite developed. All of the YL belonging to this group mentioned playing computer games, watching films and TV as an opportunity to learn new words. L12 mentioned visual reinforcement as a way of learning new English words: "Well maybe you can watch something on TV, and learn, because you connect the words with the pictures. And you can also watch someone's videos on the Internet. Stuff like that". What is more, two learners used the indicative expression *to pick up words*, which showed their awareness of the notion of unintentional learning:

- L11: "You read something on the internet and you *pick up words*, or you watch a movie and learn. A lot of people say that, for example, when a child is small and watches cartoons in a foreign language, the child acquires a lot. And I like to play computer games very much, and I make connections".

Curiously enough, L13 also mentioned acquiring (*picking up)* the German language by watching German cartoons, adding that this actually was the easiest way for her to learn a language. It should be mentioned that the notion of *picking up* words might be a product of picking up metacognitive strategies from adults. In addition, learners belonging to group C mentioned that by playing computer games, they had learned words that were not taught in

school. Moreover, some of them claimed not to know the meaning of some of these words in Croatian.

There were no significant differences in the answers of groups A and B, when it came to their awareness of opportunities to learn new English words. Although learners in all groups exhibited a certain amount of familiarity with the notion that English surrounds them on an everyday basis and that they can use these opportunities to improve their language skills, group C was the group that took the most advantage of different occasions for learning English. However, group A was the only group where as much as three learners mentioned travelling as a source for language learning, whereas group B and C did not think of such opportunities.

6. How would you improve your vocabulary?

The sixth question was supposed to stimulate learners to speak about setting goals i.e., targets in learning the English language.

When asked how they would go about enriching their vocabulay, learners in group A once again resorted to textbooks and notebooks; they would read the words, write them down, and try to pronounce them. However, L3 had a different idea on how she could expand her vocabulary, which partly overlaps with a possible answer to the fifth question, because she was speaking about occasions to learn new vocabulary outside the formal educational context:

- o L3: Ammm, I would go on a trip with my English teacher. Not to England, but here somewhere, in Croatia. And while sightseeing, she would ask me "What is this? What is that?" and in that way I would learn.

Even though L3 did not speak about specific goal-setting, she mentioned the teacher as a provider of input *outside* the classroom.

Group B resorted to textbooks and dictionaries once again. However, some learners were quite selective in their approach; L6, for example, said that she only learned those words that were necessary for having good results at school. When asked why this was so, she answered: "I also have tennis and majorette practice so I don't have that much time. I learn only the things I need for school, so that I know these words that are important for school". She clearly used a metacognitive strategy of organizing and planning her time for learning through setting clear goals, since she had a number of extracurricular activities that she had to take into consideration. Vocabulary could also be improved through playing computer games, according

to L8, who, interestingly enough, deliberately changed the language in some of the games he played from Croatian to English:

- o L8: Well, I study for my English lessons, and then I also adjust the language in some games to English, so that everything is written in English.
- o I: You adjust the language in the games to English on purpose?
- o L8: In some games. Once I get bored with Croatian, I switch to English.
- o I: How come?
- o L8: In order to understand more words.
- o I: That's great!
- o L8: Well yes, I don't even know what the word "infinity", used in a game, means in Croatian.
- o I: Only in English? Could you try to explain the meaning of the word?
- o L8: Well, it's something like "beskonačnost".

Considering that they had already partly given their answers to this question in the previous one, learners in group C only referred to reading books, studying persistently and looking up unknown words in dictionaries.

The answers have shown that the younger learners (group A) set more uniformed targets than the older ones (group B and C), whose approach was to expose themselves to as much English as possible in order to become more proficient. Whereas group A focused on reaching the goals that their school environment and language teacher had set, group B turned their attention to, within the exception of the school context, other resources through which they could reach their goals. Group C was not held back by the demands of the formal educational framework in reaching their targets, although their answers did not provide any unexpected ways of improving their vocabulary.

7. When you are fed up with studying English, how do you make yourself study again?

The seventh question was asked in order to look into the ways YL motivate themselves to study English; in other words, to see how they put themselves into a learning mood through controlling their own learning environment. They were encouraged to speak about how they persuaded themselves to prepare for learning new English words. Furthermore, learners were urged to report on how they regained their concentration, to see the level of their metacognitive control; the participants were asked how they usually overrode boredom while learning. A number of interesting answers were elicited; it was visible that the learners had less trouble

answering the last question, which could be attributed to the fact that it did not comment on language processes directly.

The majority of learners in group A reported on thinking about bad grades they would get if they did not study; that was the main driving force that made them learn. However, the satisfaction of getting a good grade was not the only thing that could compell learners in this group to learn; L3 admitted:

- o L3: Well, I imagine getting an F, which would make me very sad. And my mum told me she would buy me a mobile phone if I finish school with flying colours. Then I imagine not getting it, not having an A at the end, getting an F... Then I make myself study.

A clear goal had been set, although in this case, the motivation behind it was completely extrinsic. Nevertheless, setting goals is a metacognitive strategy. Interestingly enough, learners did not mention playing computer games as a way of preparing for studying, which was something that would be expected from the youngest participants in this study.

Group B was a rather playful group when it came to this question, which meant that playing games was often their incentive for studying. Only one learner, L6, was motivated by satisfactory test scores as a means to continue studying:

- o L6: I want to have good test scores or do good in my oral examination, so I study until I'm hundred percent sure that I know it all.
- o I: Did it ever happen that you were not confident in your knowledge?
- o L6: No, I always do my learning, and then sometimes when we have a test, as we did just yesterday, then I feel insecure about some words. But then I know that I have to stick to what I have learned, so I write it down.
- o I: And is it usually correct?
- o L6: Yes.

Confidence judgment was at play once again; it was visible that the learner needed to decide whether to provide an answer (if the level of certainty was sufficiently high), or to refrain from answering altogether (if the level of certainty was low). In the end, L6 showed self-confidence in relying on the things she had learned. The process of thinking about her own thinking was at play. The rest of the learners in this group mentioned playing computer games first, and going back to studying afterwards. It was also said that one should be physically and psychologically

ready for learning English. L10 said: "Sometimes when I come home from school I have something to eat, then I play a little on the computer, and after that I turn it off and study". However, computer games were not the only reported way YL could rewind and return to studying afterwards. The awareness of language teaching strategies was especially visible in the learner's frequent inclusion of testing as part of their learning process. The ways they suggested this should be done probably reflected what they had already experienced in class or at home. L9 reported on an interesting metacognitive method by which she sometimes made herself study; role-play through imitating her teacher:

- o L9: I learn through interesting things.
- o I: Such as?
- o L9: Ammm. I pretend to be a teacher of English.
- o I: How do you play this game?
- o L9: Well, my brother is the learner, and then I give him exercises, and in that way I'm learning too.

Learners in group C partially resorted to playing games, but also to other methods which helped them go back to their studying. L11 spoke very maturely about the way he pushed himself to learn more, describing his view on the purpose of studying English:

- o L11: Well, I calm down, count to ten and tell myself that I have to study. I mean, I don't HAVE TO, but it will come in handy in my life and it would be okay if I learned it. I drink a glass of water, and I study.

The metacognitive strategy of defining the purpose of learning was at work as a motivator through which the learner encouraged himself to study. Another learner, L13, exhibited an interesting coping mechanism, where she productively used boredom in the sphere of games as a motivator for learning: "I take out my mobile phone and play games such as, for example, *Snappy Bird*. Then it starts to get irritating, and I return to studying". L15 included other people (parents) into his equation, but he also set goals of a more materialistic nature:

- o L15: I think about something that I want really bad, like a new mobile phone, for example, and then I put in a lot of effort, so that my parents can see that I'm trying. Or if I want to play on the computer, then the goal is to do the studying as quickly as possible so that I can use the computer.

It could be noticed that L15 was thinking in terms of affective strategies; he sought out his parent's approval, filtered through the prospect of a reward.

The development of the need to prepare oneself for learning is quite visible in he answers to the last question. Whereas bad or good grades were the only incentive for learners in group A to put themselves into a learning mood, playing games or pretending to be a teacher were the main answers given by the learners in group B. Group C gave diversified answers to the question, which showed their awareness of the necessity to create good conditions for fruitful learning.

6.5. Conclusion

An effective system must be able to monitor and regulate itself. Although young children are often assumed to have extremely limited metacognitive skills, there is evidence in this study which indicates that YL may have higher metacognitive awareness than previously assumed. Participants were willing to think about and share their experiences on how they learned words in English, and to speak about the strategies they applied. They employed MLLS in order to improve their language learning, but were not always aware of utilizing them. In addition, the results showed that the learners did not use exclusively metacognitive strategies for their learning, but included as well a set of other key strategies that were useful for better learning achievements. While learners in both group A and B showed a strong awareness of the difficulties they faced in learning English words, the results indicated that the strategies used by older learners in group C were more focused in terms of orienting them towards successfully solving their problems, which might be the result of a higher level of cognitive maturity. However, the MLLS they used were also more prominent due to longer exposure to the formal educational system. Younger learners, on the other hand, succeeded in identifying their major difficulties, but were not as successful in diagnosing the appropriate strategies to help them overcome their problems, which could be attributed to a lover level of cognitive maturity, a shorter timeframe spent in a school desk, as well as to less experience in language learning. Younger learners were not yet sufficiently equipped to use metalanguage, which does not mean that they did not employ MLLS. It has to be kept in mind, as Fisher (1998) argues in her text, that metacognitive development in individual children varies widely.

Learners' metacognition can be developed through pedagogical interventions; teachers can get learners involved in activities and process-based lessons which could lead them to develop their metacognitive knowledge in language learning. Too often learners are taught

what to think, but not how to think. Metacognition encompasses all that has already been learned, what has not yet been learned, as well as the realization of your own thinking pattern and learning methods, and the decision on what is yet to be learned. Therefore, it is worthwhile for teachers to understand the importance of metacognition in language learning, considering that it helps learners to become autonomous and self-regulated learners. Learners can become more active by taking initiative in learning and realizing their main strengths and weaknesses in the target language, through the use of metacognitive strategies.

As far as practical application of metacognitive language learning strategies in teaching goes, Fisher (1998) suggests making the language of thinking and learning explicit, and implementing it into classroom discussions. The aim is to model the vocabulary we want the children to use in their own thinking and understanding of learning by using it ourselves to describe our teaching. Before a certain task, we could start with prompts and questions such as: "This lesson will be about...", "Is this similar to a previous task?", "What do I want to achieve?" and "What should I do first?". During the task, we could ask ourselves: "Am I doing things right?", "What can I do differently?" and "Who can I ask for help?". After we had done the task, we could conclude with: "What worked well?", "What could I have done better?" and "Can I apply this to other situations?". As teachers, we need to find effective ways of scaffolding what we want our learners to learn and model the way we want them to apply this learning. We need to be more explicit about what we are doing and why we are doing it.

7. References

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8. Appendix

<u>PART 1</u>

TASK 1

What do you think the word in green means?

1. **Snarks** live in the woods. **Snarks** are funny and they sleep in trees.

2. My grandfather was a **catchman** when he was young. He helped people.

TASK 2

Which words are new to you? What do they mean?

a)

    1. penguin
    2. snark
    3. lion

b)

    1. teacher
    2. fireman
    3. catchman

PART 2

Questions on metacognitive language learning strategies:

1. How do you usually learn a new word in English?
2. When do you think you know a word?
3. Do you know how many English words you have learnt?
4. Do you think you could express yourself or make yourself understood in English?
5. Besides practising words at school and at home, what other opportunities do you have to learn words?
6. How would you improve your vocabulary?
7. When you are fed up with studying English, how do you make yourself study again?