

УДК 378.016:811.111(438)

## Language Learning Strategies and the Effectiveness of English Language Teaching at the Tertiary Level Education

**Joanna A. Wasilewska\****Department of Foreign Languages**Wroclaw University of Technology**27, Wybrzeze Wyspianskiego, Wroclaw 50-370, Poland<sup>1</sup>*

Received 31.12.2011, received in revised form 7.01.2012, accepted 3.03.2012

*Research in the field of teaching English as a Foreign Language indicates that introducing language learning strategies and their supervised practising in classroom setting may contribute to effective language learning and students' understanding overall processes of language acquisition. This article presents a theoretical framework of language learning strategies, their taxonomy and definitions. Then it discusses the relationship between good language learners, proficiency levels, effectiveness of the learning process and language learning strategies. Finally, different models of Strategy Based Instruction (SBI) are presented and compared, their benefits are discussed at length. The implications for teaching language learning strategies are enlisted together with suggestions for classroom practice.*

*Keywords: language learning strategies, English as a Foreign Language Teaching (EFLT), Strategy Based Instruction (SBI), Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA).*

### **Introduction to Language Learning Strategies**

Up to date foreign language teaching sees students as individuals, focuses on their needs and the attention to ways foreign language courses are delivered by language teachers. At the same time researchers observe ways of acquiring knowledge and good practises that are typical for successful learners. It is suggested that by introducing effective ways of learning and helping students to assimilate good learning practises, the learning process might be shortened in time, made more accessible and may allow students to

achieve their goals. Moreover, by teaching ways of effective learning we may equip students not only with learning tools but in the longer term, we can enhance self-awareness, independent learning and the feeling of responsibility for the outcomes.

It must be noted that nowadays young employees face constant need to develop their skills and knowledge. Therefore, the tertiary level educational task would not only be to pass knowledge to students but also to make sure that students will be able to continue the process of life- long learning once they graduate.

\* Corresponding author E-mail address: [joanna.wasilewska@pwr.wroc.pl](mailto:joanna.wasilewska@pwr.wroc.pl)

<sup>1</sup> © Siberian Federal University. All rights reserved

This paper presents an introduction to the topic of language learning strategies. These strategies are commonly believed to have accompanied the learning processes ever since teaching began. For many years, however, they were not given adequate attention. In English as a Foreign Language Teaching (EFLT) the first mention of language learning strategies dates back to 1975, when Joan Rubin published her seminal article on good language learners and their learning behaviours. Even at that time the idea of students employing certain ways to accomplish language tasks seemed for many researchers unfamiliar and of no significant importance. In the seventies, when this discussion started, language teaching was still highly dominated by the teacher centred theories. It was believed that students' success relied mainly on teachers' competences. Therefore, many of the former research areas did not investigate the impact of an individual's strategies on the learning processes and language learning strategies started to be explored in the eighties.

### **Definitions and classifications of language learning strategies**

When introduced in 1975, language learning strategies have proved difficult to be defined. So far there has been a number of attempts made by researchers to establish unified terminology and description of strategies but no consensus has been reached by researchers. The word strategy originates from the Greek word 'strategia'. In the EFLT language learning strategies are steps, either thoughts or actions, taken by learners to improve their learning and use of the foreign language. Rigney (1978) described language learning strategies as operations made for acquiring, storing, retrieving and using the information. Tarone presented them as "an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language" (1983:3).

Other researchers, e.g. Wenden and Rubin described language learning strategies as "any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of the information" (1987:19). The definitions were subsequently followed by those of Weinstein and Mayer (1986), Chamot and Kupper (1989), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Stern (1992), Richards and Platt (1992).

In all the existing classification systems language learning strategies are mainly divided into cognitive strategies, metacognitive and affective or social strategies. (Gan, Humphreys, Hamp-Lyon's 2004). These strategies can be deployed by learners either consciously or unconsciously. Among a massive number of existing strategy classifications, probably the most recognized and quite frequently referred to is the taxonomy established by Oxford in 1990. It is based on the division into direct and indirect strategies. According to Oxford direct strategies include memory, cognitive and compensation strategies while indirect strategies are divided into metacognitive, affective and social strategies.

*Cognitive strategies* are mental processes that take place when learning a language. In general, cognitive strategies help learners select the relevant information and reject the unnecessary and confusing material. They relate to brain processes that refer to understanding structures, organizing material, language use and production. The examples of *Memory strategies* are grouping, pairing or making meaningful maps. When students' knowledge is insufficient they can compensate for it by making guesses or inferring from the context. The broader students' general knowledge is, the more correct guesses they can make. Such ways of compensating for the missing knowledge are called *Compensations strategies*.

Another set of strategies are *Metacognitive strategies*, which refer to managing one's

learning. Some learners may find new language information excessive and overwhelming. Metacognitive strategies allow students to cope with overviewing new rules and relating them to prior knowledge, setting goals and objectives, organising learning and evaluating its results. The group of *Affective strategies* is useful when dealing with emotions and motivation. These strategies help students to deal with anxiety in class and lower its levels thus making learning more effective. Affective strategies also enhance positive emotions, which creates learner friendly atmosphere. One of the primary elements of affective strategies has showed to be self- esteem. If students tend to estimate their potential in positive terms, their achievements may be significant. On the other hand, if they feel negative about their capabilities, it will largely inhibit learning results. Affective factors such as reduced anxiety and higher levels of confidence have proved to bear effects on learning outcomes (Khaldieh, 2000). One of the ways that influence positive self- evaluation might be teachers' enhancement and positive opinions.

*Social strategies* are strategies which students can find useful when interacting with other students or native speakers. As languages are a social phenomena and are taught for communication with others, therefore interaction should be considered as natural and crucial. Those students can participate more effectively in language interaction who can learn to operate freely language strategies for asking questions, cooperating with others, who are aware of other people's thoughts and feelings as well as those who are culturally sensitive. Engaging in conversations is a test for a student who can put knowledge to practise and estimate the success of an exchange. Students should seek opportunities for practising interaction with native users of the foreign language. Strategies for social interaction might prove useful also in case of low achieving students

when they fail to understand the target language or need confirmation of their understanding. By using strategies such as asking for clarification, correction or verification students may gain valuable input information for their learning. On the other hand, if students avoid using social strategies, steer clear of cooperating with peers or contacts with proficient language users, they will lack the relevant feedback information. Such examples of avoidance can be dictated by natural inhibition. As to solve this problem teachers may introduce cooperation, competitiveness into their classroom teaching and revise the preconceived cultural and social limitations (Oxford 1990).

### **Good language learners**

Research investigating the success of good language learners revealed that their high achievement is closely related to the frequent use of language learning strategies (Hsiao, Oxford 2002). Firstly, good language learners are aware of existing strategies. They can make personal decisions on how to use and orchestrate strategies to accomplish language tasks. These students score better than others in and outside classroom and in the long term they become more autonomous learners which makes them successful. On the other hand, the less proficient learners tend to make inappropriate strategy choices (Chamot, El- Dinary 1999:20). Research has proved that the absence of metacognitive strategies such as organizing one's learning in time and space, significantly determined students' low achievement (Macaro 2001). O'Malley noted that language learning strategy use is closely related to students' proficiency levels. Higher level students use a considerably wider scope of strategies and can easily match the right strategies for language tasks (O'Malley 1985). The subsequent extensive research on the relation between strategy use and proficiency levels has only confirmed O'Malley's findings.

What makes a learner retrieve correct strategies at the right time and to use them appropriately? The issue must be considered on two levels. Firstly, there are the so called static learner attributes such as i.e. learning styles, gender, social and cultural background. These are learner characteristics which influence the learning process and these are stable. Then, there are variables such as students' motivation, beliefs, etc. These are equally essential to acquiring linguistic knowledge but unlike the static learner attributes, they can be modified by teachers or learners themselves.

### **Strategy Based Instruction Models**

As language learning strategies are clearly teachable, there seems to be a need to include in syllabi modules teaching strategies to students. Such modules, currently known as Strategy Based Instruction (SBI) models have been developed by many renowned researchers (Chamot et al., 1999, Cohen 1998, Graham & Harris 2003, Grenfell & Harris 1999, Harris 2003; O' Malley & Chamot 1990, Oxford 1990, Pressley, El-Dinary, Gaskins, Schuder, Bergman, Almasi & Brown, 1992). The basic difference among different SBI models is that some of them constitute a separate training while other models are integrated with the courses. The more common schemes are the embedded SBI models, probably because course syllabi most of the time do not have space for additional, separate projects.

Strategy instruction models are intended to promote effective learning and create an independent learner, who will be trained in self- management. SBI models can not be viewed as universal for all groups of learners. They require some adjustment to students' age, goals and motivation. They should also be integrated with the context of teaching. The most promising results show SBI trainings that are content related and refer students to their actual

problems. Throughout the SBI students need to realise their individual patterns in strategy use and concentrate on improving these that need improvement (Chamot 2004).

In practice, SBI models for young learners and adult learners are prepared separately. All the models may slightly vary in length but the overall structure remains similar. It consists of the strategy diagnosis, raising awareness stage, practise, evaluation and final assessment of learning results. Some models are based on a plan, which needs to be covered only once throughout the course, others are in a form of one action to be repeated continuously over the course, each time with a different goal. All SBI models contain modules developing students' metacognitive skills and suggest that learning strategies can be facilitated through teacher demonstration and modelling. The importance of providing multiple practice opportunities is stressed so that after the training students can use strategies autonomously. It is suggested that learners should evaluate how well a strategy has worked for them, choose strategies for a task and be able to transfer them to new tasks.

The first stage, which is common for all existing SBI trainings is the awareness raising stage. It is often accompanied by the "think-aloud" procedures, when students can share their experience on using strategies for classroom tasks and homework assignments. The teacher can then compare the discussed strategies with existing lists of strategies and enhance further discussions on their effectiveness. Most of students seem to be interested in listening to their peer' describing techniques for learning. Another tool raising awareness to be used at this early stage could be the SILL questionnaire prepared by Oxford (1990). The questionnaire consists of 60 questions referring to the frequency of strategy use. At the end a student receives an individual description profile that

lists strategies used most often as well as those which are neglected. Once students are familiar with different types of strategies, they can be asked to brainstorm on the range of strategies that could be deployed for language tasks and can list problems for inappropriate strategy use. Some researchers suggest reading assignments for adult learners (Brown 1991, Rubin and Thompson 1994, Paige Cohen, Kappler, Chi, Lassegard 2002). These can be used as homework assignments or may be easily embedded into the classroom teaching, when followed by grammar or reading comprehension exercises.

An example of SBI model that has been in use for many years is the CALLA (the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach) model. Prepared by Chamot and O'Malley in 1994, the model was introduced to the US schools in 30 districts in order to foster teaching through the medium of the second language. CALLA was prepared for students coming from different cultural background and having varied linguistic preferences. It focuses on introducing strategies to students and enhances learners to use them.

### **Benefits of Strategy Based Instruction**

Strategic learners possess the knowledge of a range of strategies, can articulate their learning processes, choose adequate clusters of strategies to perform successfully and independently in language tasks. As to achieve greater results, all students should be presented with language learning strategies. They should be aware of strategy types and be able to identify different strategies. If instructors continually reinforce the use of strategies, students' chances to perform better in language tasks might improve. When taught strategies, students can also start using them consciously and apply in new contexts. Researchers claim that there is evidence that SBI models promote both the learning processes and

have an impact on the product which is the target language (Rubin, Chamot, Harris, Anderson 2007). It might be beneficial to engage students in discussions on language learning strategies and provide strategy checklists in classroom teaching. Students should be encouraged to draw on their knowledge of strategies and practise them in language tasks in and outside their classroom. It is advisable to provide naturalistic language tasks that would increase students' motivation levels, help students raise positive attitudes towards the foreign culture and help them control their emotions by lowering higher levels of anxiety. The fear of ambiguity should be reduced and students should be equipped with strategies to manage anxiety in the possible best ways. This approach calls for training language teachers to become advisors for their students in the area of language learning strategies. Strategy based training can be seen as an integral part of a syllabus.

The relationship between the proficiency level and strategy use indicates that together with the raising proficiency level, students have a wider range of strategies at their disposal (Bruen 2001, Chamot & El-Dinary 1999, Green & Oxford 1995, O'Malley & Chamot 1990, Wharton 2000). Higher proficiency level students seem to make better decisions on which strategies to use and how to deploy them. Therefore, it is suggested that strategy based training should be introduced in lower level groups.

The implications for teaching are that language learners need to be taught not only the foreign language itself but be exposed to explore different learning strategies, experimenting and evaluating, and eventually choosing their own sets of effective strategies. In addition, all learners can profit from learning how to use metacognitive strategies in order to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning efforts (Chamot 2004). The direct relationship between language learning strategies'

use and their influence on students' performance but the issue still needs to be need to be further vividly contributes to more effective learning investigated.

### References

- Brown, H.D. (1991). *Breaking the language barrier: Creating your own pathway to success*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, Inc.
- Bruen, J. (2001). Strategies for success: Profiling the effective learner of German. *Foreign Language Annals*, 34, pp.216-225.
- Chamot, A.U., & El- Dinary, P.B. (1999). Children's learning strategies in immersion classrooms. *The Modern Language Journal*, 83(3), pp. 319-341
- Chamot, A.U., & Kupper. L. (1989). Learning strategies in foreign language instruction. *Foreign Language Annals*, 22, pp.13-24.
- Chamot, A.U., Barnhardt, S., El- Dinary, P.B., Robbins, J. (1999). *The learning strategies handbook*. White Plains, NY: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Chamot, A.U., (2004). *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 1 (1), pp. 14-26.
- Cohen, A. D. (1998). *Strategies in learning and using a second language*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited.
- Gan, Z. D., Humphreys, G., & Hamp-Lyons, L. (2004). Understanding successful and unsuccessful EFL students in Chinese universities. *The Modern Language Journal*, 88 (2), pp. 229-244.
- Graham, S., & Harris, K.R. (2003). Students with learning disabilities and the process of writing: A meta-analysis of SRSD studies. In L. Swanson, K.R. Harris, & S.Graham (Eds.), *Handbook of research on learning disabilities*, pp. 323-344, New York: Guildford.
- Green, J.M. & Oxford, R. (1995). A closer look at learning strategies, L2 proficiency, and gender. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29 (2), pp. 261-297.
- Grenfell, M., & Harris, V. (1999). *Modern languages and learning strategies: In theory and practice*. London: Routledge.
- Harris, V. (2003). Adapting classroom-based strategy instruction to a distance learning context. *TESL-EJ*, 7(2).
- Hsiao, T-Y., & Oxford, R.L. (2002). Comparing theories of language learning strategies: A confirmatory factor analysis. *Modern Language Journal*, 86(3), 368-383.
- Khaldieh, S.A. (2000). Learning strategies and writing processes of proficient vs. less-proficient learners of Arabic. *Foreign Language Annals*, 33(5), pp. 522-533
- Macaro, E. (2001). Analyzing student teachers' codeswitching in foreign language classrooms: theories and decision making, *The Modern Language Journal*, 85(4), pp. 531-548.
- O'Malley, J.M. & Chamot, A.U. (1990). *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Malley, J.M. et al. (1985). Learning Strategy Applications with Students of English as a Second Language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19 (3).
- Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Newbury House.
- Paige, R. M., Cohen, A. D., Kappler, B., Chi, J.C., & Lassegard, J. P. (2002). Maximizing study abroad: A program coordinators' guide to strategies for language and culture learning and

use. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, University of Minnesota

Pressley, M., El-Dinary, P.B., Gaskins, I., Schuder, T., Bergman, J.L., Almasi, J., & Brown, R. (1992). Beyond direct explanation: Transactional instruction of reading comprehension strategies. *Elementary School Journal*, 92(5), pp. 513-555.

Richards, J.C., Platt, J. Platt, H. (1992) Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics. Singapore: Longman Singapore Publishers Pty Ltd.

Rigney, J. W. (1978). Learning strategies: A theoretical perspective. In H.F. O'Neil, Jr. (Ed.), *Learning strategies*. New York: Academic Press

Rubin, J. (1975). What the "good language learner" can teach us. *TESOL Quarterly*, 9, pp. 41-51

Rubin, J., Chamot, A.U., Harris, V., & Anderson, N. J. (2007). Intervening in the use of strategies. In A.D. Cohen & E. Macaro (Eds.), *Language learner strategies: Thirty years of research and practice*, pp. 141-160. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Rubin, J. & Thompson, I. (1994) *How to be a more successful language learner* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

Stern, H.H. 1992. *Issues and Options in Language Teaching*. Oxford: OUP

Tarone, E. (1983). Some thoughts on the notion of "communication strategy." In C. Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in interlanguage communication*, pp. 61-74, London: Longman

Weinstein, C. E., and Mayer, R. E. (1986). The Teaching of learning strategies. In M. Wittrock, (Ed.) *Handbook of research on teaching*, pp. 315-327. New York: Macmillan

Wenden, A. and Joan Rubin. 1987. *Learner Strategies in Language Learning*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Wharton, G. (2000). Language learning strategy use of bilingual foreign language learners in Singapore. *Language Learning*, 50(2), pp. 203-244

## **Стратегии обучения языку и эффективность преподавания английского языка на третьем образовательном уровне**

**Д.А. Василевска**

Факультет иностранных языков  
Вроцлавский технологический университет  
Польша, Wrocław 50-370, Wybrzeże Wyspińskiego, 27

---

*Исследование в области преподавания английского языка как иностранного показывает, что введение понятия «стратегия изучения языка» и её применение на практике в условиях учебной аудитории может способствовать эффективному изучению языка и пониманию студентами общих процессов усвоения языка. В данной статье представлены теоретические основы стратегии изучения языка, её описание и построение. Кроме того, обсуждается, какая взаимосвязь существует между стратегией изучения языка, достижением хороших результатов в изучении языка, опытом работы, а также эффективностью процесса обучения. В заключительной части представлены различные модели стратегии изучения языка (SBI), произведено их сравнение, а также подробно рассмотрены их преимущества.*

*Ключевые слова: стратегии обучения иностранному языку, обучение английскому языку как иностранному (EFLT), преподавание на основе стратегии (SBI), перечень стратегий обучения языкам (SILL), когнитивный подход к обучению языку академического общения (CALLA).*

---