L2 Learning Strategies

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STATEMENT OF FOCUS

Perceptive second/foreign language (L2) learners are those who are aware of and use appropriate strategies for learning and communicating in a second language. The purpose of strategy use is to improve performance in the learning and use of one's second language. Strategies are the conscious actions that learners take to improve their language learning. Strategies may be observable, such as observing someone take notes during an academic lecture to recall information better, or they may be mental, such as thinking about what one already knows on a topic before reading a passage in a textbook. Because strategies are conscious, there is active involvement of the L2 learner in their selection and use. Strategies are not isolated actions, but rather a process of orchestrating more than one action to accomplish an L2 task. It may be helpful to view strategy use as an orchestra. Rarely does an instrument sound good alone. However, when combined with other instruments, beautiful music results. Although we can identify individual strategies, rarely will one strategy be used in isolation. Strategies are related to each other and must be viewed as a process and not as a single action.

Einstein offers a very interesting definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Research consistently shows that less successful language learners often use the same strategies over and over again and do not make significant progress in their task. They do not recognize that the strategies they are using are not helping them to accomplish their goal. These less successful learners seem to be unaware of the strategies available to them to successfully accomplish a language task. Successful L2 learners have a wider repertoire of strategies and draw on a variety of them to accomplish their task of learning a language.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the research on L2 learning strategies within the context of current language teaching methodologies, to consider important developments in L2 strategy research, to identify current directions, and to anticipate the future of L2 strategy research. A single chapter of this nature cannot possibly go into the depth that a researcher or teacher needs on the role of language learning strategies. Researchers and teachers are encouraged to do additional reading on their own by consulting the references cited in this chapter. Perhaps the most extensive bibliography
on language learning strategies can be found electronically at http://linguistics.byu.edu/faculty/anderson/learningstrategies/LearningStrategies.html. Consulting works on this list may better prepare researchers and teachers as we all work together to better understand the role of strategies in L2 learning.

L2 LEARNING STRATEGIES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF METHODOLOGIES

Since the mid-1970s, close attention has been given to the role of strategies in L2 learning (Anderson, 1991; Cohen, 1990, 1998; Hosenfeld, 1979; Naiman, Fröhlich, & Todesco, 1975; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990, 1993, 2002; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Wenden, 1991, 2002; Wong-Fillmore, 1979). The early research identified the primary strategies that good learners use while engaged in language learning tasks. Five primary strategies were consistently addressed in these early studies: (1) memorization strategies, (2) clarification strategies, (3) communication strategies, (4) monitoring strategies, and (5) prior knowledge strategies. All this pointed to a new generalization that could be made about L2 learning, when learners actively use strategies to accomplish their language learning goals.

A language teaching methodology typically assumes that if the language teacher follows the steps outlined, the effort will result in effective learning by students in the class. Methodologies often assume that everyone learns the same way. Oxford (1993) and Nunan (1991) each point out that no single method can meet the needs of all learners. The fact that individual learners use a variety of strategies and approach learning a language differently is not taken into careful consideration within the context of most of the methods for language teaching.

Within the context of methodologies, strategies play a central role in two approaches: Styles and Strategies-Based Instruction (SSBI) and the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA). SSBI is an approach to language teaching that places learning style and language learning strategy instruction as a central goal in this learner-centered approach. Learning styles are the general approach one takes to learning; the ways that we prefer to organize and retain information. Teaching learners to be aware of their learning style is known as Style-Based Instruction. For example, you may learn best by listening (auditory), looking at printed material (visual), or by moving around (kinesthetic). Strategies are the specific things that one does to learn. Strategies are typically linked to a learning style. For example, an auditory learner may apply a strategy of reading aloud to hear a text. A visual learner may draw a graphic organizer to help visualize the organization of a reading passage. A kinesthetic learner may walk around while studying new vocabulary written on flash cards. Research data suggest that there is a link between the language learning strategies and learning styles (Rossi-Le, 1995).

An SSBI approach to language teaching has two primary goals: styles and strategy instruction, and style and strategy integration. Style and Strategy instruction involves the explicit instruction of learning styles and strategies so that learners know about their preferred style of learning and how, when, and why to use the strategy. Style and strategy integration involves embedding learning style and strategies into all classroom activities so that learners have contextualized practice. The practice provides reinforcement of the concepts learned during explicit instruction.

Cohen, Weaver, and Li (1997) report on one key research project. The specific focus of their research was to examine the impact of Strategies-Based Instruction (SBI) on speaking for university-level, foreign-language learners. Fifty-five intermediate level learners of French and Norwegian participated in the study. Thirty-two students received explicit SBI while the remaining 23 served as a control group receiving no
explicit strategy instruction. A pretest/posttest design was used to determine whether SBI influenced gains in students’ oral proficiency over a 10-week term. One unique feature of this research is that the subjects were asked to report their strategy use on three specific speaking tasks. These tasks included: (1) self-description, (2) story retelling, and (3) city description. After completing all three speaking tasks, the subjects responded to a strategies checklist prepared for each task. The checklist was designed to capture subjects’ strategy usage during three stages: (1) preparation for accomplishing the task, (2) self-monitoring during execution of the task, and (3) self-reflection following the task. In addition, subjects completed the *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning*. A subsample of 21 subjects provided retrospective think-aloud protocols to justify their frequency of strategies reports. ANCOVA results showed that both groups made gains in their oral language proficiency. This should not be surprising since we would hope that regular language instruction results in proficiency gains. The ANCOVA results indicate that the experimental group outperformed the control group on the third task, city description. Cohen, Weaver, and Li report that SBI “seems to have contributed to the students’ ability” (p. 14) to produce the necessary language to perform the tasks. Overall this research suggests that SBI can have an impact on language learners in the classroom.

Additional understandings of SBI are needed to more fully comprehend the impact of styles- and strategies-based instruction. Very little research has been conducted to examine the full extent to which learners acquire strategies within a SBI approach. Also, researchers must ask whether engaging learners in an SBI approach results in higher levels of language proficiency among the learners? Can we explicitly teach learners to draw on their learning style strengths and then apply the appropriate strategies for accomplishing language learning tasks? Can we teach learners to move beyond their learning style preferences so that they can then apply strategies for learning that are not linked to their preferred learning style?

O’Malley and Chamot (1990) proposed the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA). As this approach has evolved since its inception, it has combined four primary elements for successful language teaching: (1) academic content for language learning, (2) learning strategies, (3) standards-based education, and (4) portfolio assessment. One assumption of this approach is that L2 acquisition is accelerated by an explicit focus on strategies.

Chamot and O’Malley (1994) emphasize that the CALLA framework integrates research from several previous studies and puts it into practice. Their extensive research has resulted in the metacognitive model of strategic learning and the framework for learning strategies instruction.

In spite of the three and one-half decades of research, recent research by Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) points out that “learner differences, such as aptitude, style, and strategies, as a sub-area of second language acquisition, and applied linguistics more generally, have not been integrated into other areas of investigation, and have not excited much theoretical or practical interest in recent years” (p. 589). Clearly, more research is needed on the influence of individual differences and language learning.

**IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS IN L2 STRATEGY RESEARCH**

Five important developments have contributed to the success of L2 learning strategy research: (1) the identification, classification, and measurement of language learning strategies, (2) the distinction between language use and language learning strategies, (3) the relationship between strategies and L2 proficiency, (4) the transferability of strategies from first language (L1) tasks to L2 tasks, and (5) the explicit instruction of language learning strategies.
The Identification, Classification, and Measurement of Language Learning Strategies

Research by Hsiao and Oxford (2002) clearly supports the notion that L2 strategies can be classified in a "systematic manner" (p. 377). Language learning strategies have been classified into seven major categories: cognitive strategies (e.g., identifying, retention, and storage of learning material as well as retrieval, rehearsal, and comprehension), metacognitive strategies (e.g., preparing and planning, identifying, monitoring, orchestrating, and evaluating strategy use), mnemonic or memory-related strategies (e.g., memorization strategies), compensatory strategies (e.g., circumlocution strategies such as using a word you do know to describe the meaning of a word or phrase you do not know), affective strategies (e.g., strategies for reducing anxiety), social strategies (e.g., strategies for interacting with others), and self-motivating strategies (e.g., self-encouragement, relaxation, and meditation, eliminating negative influences, creating positive influences). There is some overlap between affective strategies and self-motivating strategies. Oxford (1990, 2001) refers to the first six of these categories, while other researchers (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Chamot et al., 1999; Cohen, 1996a; Weaver & Cohen, 1997) use a fewer number. Work by Dörnyei (2001) focuses on self-motivating strategies.

A recent research article provides empirical data into how best to classify language learning strategies. Hsiao and Oxford (2002) compared classification theories of language learning strategies. Their research involved 517 college English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners from Taiwan. Participants took the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) that had been translated into Chinese. Fifteen strategy classifications were developed and tested based on classification systems proposed by Oxford (1990), Rubin (1981), and O'Malley & Chamot (1990). The research findings support the classification of L2 learning strategies into six distinct categories: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, memory strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. These six categories correspond to Oxford's six dimensions of strategy classification.

Among the tools available for identifying, classifying, and measuring L2 strategies, the most frequently cited and used include standardized inventories, think-aloud protocols, and reflective journals. Researchers are urged to triangulate the research design so that more than one of these tools is used.

Standardized Inventories. The most widely used inventory for L2 strategy research is Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) report on the successful use of this inventory in gathering data on language learning strategies. One great advantage of the SILL is that reliability and validity data are available. Oxford (1996) reports on the psychometric qualities of the SILL. Reported reliabilities for the ESL/EFL SILL range from .86 to .91 when learners respond to the questionnaire in their second language (English). Translated versions of the SILL have been used in many research projects. Reliability coefficients increase when learners respond in their L1 to .91 to .94. Whether administered in the subjects' L1 or L2, the SILL has high reliability.

Validity for the SILL is likewise high. When strategy use is compared with language performance, evidence strongly favors the SILL. Oxford reports a variety of studies that link strategy use and performance in general language proficiency, oral language proficiency, grades in language courses, proficiency self-ratings, and professional language career status.

Oxford is currently developing a task-based version of the SILL that would be administered in conjunction with specific L2 tasks. This could be a very important contribution to the L2 strategy research.

One additional inventory that shows great promise is a more recent instrument developed by Mokhtari and reported in Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) and Sheorey
and Mokhtari (2001). The Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) focuses on metacognitive strategy use within the context of reading. The SORS was based on a separate metacognitive reading strategy survey developed for native speakers on English, the Metacognitive-Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARS). The SORS measures three categories of reading strategies: global reading strategies (e.g., having a purpose for reading, using context to guess unfamiliar vocabulary, confirming or rejecting your predictions), problem-solving strategies (e.g., adjusting reading rate, focusing when concentration is lost), and support strategies (e.g., taking notes while reading, highlighting important ideas in the text). Mokhtari and Sheorey report reliability for the MARS but not for the SORS. Because it has just recently been completed, more studies need to be conducted using this instrument to determine whether the SORS is as stable an instrument as the MARS from which it was based.


Think-aloud protocols. Think-aloud protocols or verbal report data have been used in many L2 strategy research projects to identify strategies used by language learners (Anderson, 1991; Anderson & Vandergrift, 1996; Cohen, 1996b; Cohen & Olshtain, 1993; Gass & Mackey, 2000). Protocols allow the researcher insights into the language learning process that would not be available without their use. One of the greatest strengths of think-aloud protocols is that researchers are able to gather data on the process of strategy use. We can capture the sequence of strategies that language users implement to complete language tasks.

Cohen and Scott (1996) suggest three categories of verbal reports: self-report, self-observation, and self-revelation. Self-report is a statement of typical behavior. Responses to questionnaires are a form of self-report. Self-observation is used simultaneously to completing a language task or within a very short time after completing the task. Self-revelation data refer to unanalyzed thoughts. Think-aloud protocols typically fall into this category. One key to the successful use of think-aloud protocols is to gather the data as close to the event as possible. Thus, the strategies identified will be those actually used.

Reflective journals. For several years, the use of journals (or diaries) has been advocated as a tool for student reflection (Oxford et al., 1996). Riley and Harsh (1999) outline a research project to compare Japanese learners of English strategy use in ESL and EFL environments. One of the primary tools they used to gather data was a strategy journal. The journal served as a tool to explore learner awareness, development, and use of language learning strategies as well as what effect guided reflection has on the development of language learning strategies.

One common feature of the work of those involved in learner reflective journals is the encouragement for teachers to give learners prompts to select from in making their entry. If you are specifically focusing on language learning strategies you want the learners to make journal entries that focus on their strategy use and not other aspects of the language learning process.

The Distinction Between Language Use and Language Learning Strategies

Cohen (1996a) makes the distinction between language use and language learning strategies. This distinction can be useful for L2 researchers and teachers. Cohen indicates “language use strategies focus primarily on employing the language that learners have in their current interlanguage” (p. 2). Under this umbrella term, the following strategies apply: retrieval strategies (e.g., strategies used to recall learned material;
similar to Oxford’s memory strategies), rehearsal strategies (e.g., strategies used to practice vocabulary or grammar structures), cover strategies (also known as compensation strategies, e.g., strategies used to get around missing knowledge), and communication strategies (e.g., strategies used to express a message). Cohen continues by indicating “language learning strategies have an explicit goal of assisting learners in improving their knowledge in a target language” (pp. 1–2). Language learning strategies include strategies in four common categories: cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective as illustrated earlier.

Although I have listed this as an important development in L2 strategy research, essentially no research has been conducted with L2 learners to determine if this categorization of strategies is valid. Hsiao and Oxford (2002) point out that “in daily reality the strategies for L2 learning and L2 use overlap considerably” (pp. 378–379). The way that Cohen (1996a) classifies strategies within these two categories (language use strategies: retrieval strategies, rehearsal strategies, cover strategies, and communication strategies; language learning strategies: cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective) suggests that employing cognitive and metacognitive strategies only occurs during the learning phase and not the use phase of language. This seems to be shortsighted. As learners move from learning to use they free up cognitive capacity from thinking about the language to knowing how to use it. They are now in a position to implement more cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

The Relationship Between Strategies and L2 Proficiency

The research conducted to date has been consistent in linking levels of L2 proficiency to strategy use. Proficient L2 learners have been found to have a wider repertoire of strategies and draw on them to accomplish L2 tasks. At the same time, research supports the concept that less proficient L2 learners draw on a smaller number of strategies and do so in a less effective manner (Anderson, 1991; Dreyer & Oxford, 1996; Ehrman & Oxford, 1990, 1995; Green & Oxford, 1995). Proficiency can explain from .30 to .78 of the variance in strategy use. There is a strong relationship between strategy use and L2 proficiency.

One thing that researchers and teachers must keep in mind is that there are no good or bad strategies; there is good or bad application of strategies. Anderson’s research (1991) shows that effective and less effective learners reported using the same kinds of strategies. The difference is in how the strategies are executed and orchestrated. Therefore, we cannot suggest that successful L2 learners use good strategies and less effective learners use poor or bad strategies. With a value judgment placed on strategies it would appear that all teachers have to do is teach poor learners the “good strategies” that successful learners use. Unfortunately, it is not that simple. The ways that effective learners use strategies and combine them makes the distinction between them and less effective learners. Cohen (1998) supports this concept. He states, “with some exceptions, strategies themselves are not inherently good or bad, but have the potential to be used effectively” (p. 8).

Transferability of Strategies from L1 Tasks to L2 Tasks

Woltersberger (2001) conducted exploratory research to examine the transfer of composing processes and to determine whether L2 proficiency had any effect on the transfer of the L1 composing processes to L2 composing. Three high intermediate- and three high beginning-level Japanese learners of ESL participated in the research. All were considered experienced writers in Japanese based on responses to a writing survey prepared by Woltersberger. The data collection involved three stages: (1) a background questionnaire, (2) two think-aloud composing sessions, and (3)
post-composing session interviews. The results show that the three high beginning-
level writers used different writing strategies when composing in their L1 and L2. All
three subjects reported thinking in Japanese while writing their essays in English. Five
primary differences appeared during their writing tasks: (1) general translation for
words and ideas into English, (2) back-translation of their English text in order to help
interpret its meaning, (3) finding the vocabulary to express the ideas produced in the
L1, (4) dealing with challenges in lack of English grammatical knowledge, and (5) cor-
correcting spelling errors in English. These five are primarily language concerns that
did not appear while the subjects were writing in Japanese. The three high intermediate
writers used similar strategies while composing in both English and Japanese. They
reported being at ease in both languages while engaging in the writing tasks. There
was transfer of strategies while engaged in writing in both languages. Woltersberger
reports that these results support a threshold hypothesis for L2 writing as has been
reported for L2 reading (Clarke, 1980).

Woltersberger’s research helps inform L2 researchers and teachers about the role of
transfer of strategies from L1 to L2 learning tasks. We can move forward by carefully
considering how L2 acquisition can be accelerated through helping learners draw
more on their L1 skills.

Explicit Instruction of Language Learning Strategies

Nunan (1996, 1997) provides a good rationale for integrating explicit instruction of
language learning strategies into the classroom curriculum: “[L]anguage classrooms
should have a dual focus, not only teaching language content but also on developing
learning processes as well” (1996, p. 41). The primary purpose of instruction is to raise
learners’ awareness of strategies and then allow each to select appropriate strategies
to accomplish their learning goals.

Research consistently shows that the most effective strategy instruction occurs
when it is integrated into regular classroom instruction (Cohen, 1998; Oxford & Leaver,
1996). Some language programs prepare special strategy lessons that are presented.

Brown (2002) provides a very practical guide, firmly based on the L2 strategy
research, on how to approach the teaching of language learning strategies in the
classroom. Teachers and learners are guided through the language learning strategy
process in an effective and organized fashion. One benefit to the research would be
for teachers to apply the concepts outlined in the book and measure the effect of the
instruction on language learning.

Rees-Miller (1993, 1994) calls into question the concept of strategy instruction. She
suggests that because of the mixed results that have been obtained from various
research studies that teachers should be more cautious in accepting the concept of
learner-strategy training. Factors that she suggests that teachers must take into account
include learners’ cultural backgrounds, age, educational background, life experience,
affective factors, and the learners’ and teachers’ beliefs about language learning. Cer-
tainly all of these factors are important for teachers to consider. As Chamot and Rubin
(1994) point out in response to Rees-Miller’s article, all of these variables influence
individual strategy use. They remind us, as pointed out in the definition of strategies
earlier in this chapter, that a strategy is not used in isolation, but rather in an orches-
trated manner with other strategies as part of a process. This should not suggest that
strategy instruction is not effective, but rather give teachers increased insight into
the various factors they should take into consideration when strategy instruction is
undertaken.

Also, Esligter’s research (2000) suggests that there may be a natural tendency to
grow in strategy use without explicit instruction. She suggests that implicit strategy
learning should be given closer attention.
CURRENT DIRECTIONS IN L2 STRATEGY RESEARCH

Strategy Research Within the Language Skills

Researchers and teachers have traditionally approached the language skills through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Larsen-Freeman (2001) suggests that "grammaring" is a fifth skill area that deserves our attention. Significant research has been conducted on the use of specific strategies in each of these language skill areas.

Listening Strategies. Vandergrift is perhaps the researcher most actively engaged in strategy research within the context of L2 listening (Vandergrift 1997, 1999, 2002). In his 2002 published research, he reports on a metacognitive strategy awareness project undertaken with 420 children in 17 different Grade 4-6 classes in Canada. The L2 learners are learning French. What makes this study noteworthy is that it is the first study published that focuses on listening strategy use of children. All classes responded to at least one of three tasks and a guided reflection activity. Data were collected from classes rather than from individuals because of the age of the participants. Teachers recorded all student responses. The three tasks engaged the learners in (1) listening for what to feed animals, (2) listening to descriptions of five families and matching the descriptions with pictures, and (3) listening to answering machine messages and matching activities on the checklist with the name of the person who suggested it. After each of these tasks, teachers engaged the class in reflective exercises to determine how the listeners approached the tasks and what they learned in French. Results indicate that students have a high level of awareness of their strategies for listening to materials in French. They were able to successfully identify the strategies that they had used while engaged in the listening tasks. In particular, learners' use of metacognitive strategies of planning, monitoring, and evaluation during the listening was clear. Vandergrift emphasizes the importance of teaching language content as well as learning processes. This was one of the additional benefits of the research with these young learners.

In addition to this key research study, additional research on the role of strategies and listening has been conducted. The research of O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Goh (1997), Cheng (2002), and Chien and Kao (2002) all add to our understanding of the important role that strategies play during the language task of listening.

Speaking Strategies. Cohen and Olshtain (1993) have applied retrospective think-aloud protocols to get L2 learners to report the ways in which they "assess, plan, and execute" their spoken utterances. The researchers videotaped 15 L2 learners participating in role-play situations with a native speaker of English. Six speech act situations were provided for each learner (two apologies, two complaints, and two requests). After each set of two speech acts, the video was repeated for the learners, who then responded in their L1 to a set of questions about what they were thinking during the role-plays. One of the strengths of this research is the use of the retrospective protocols. The videotape provided the source of the recall stimulus. The learners were not asked to remember great amounts of material before providing the protocol. The tasks were structured so that after each speech act pair the strategies for the two speech acts could be reported. Cohen and Olshtain generalize from the data to classify learners from this study into one of three types of learners: metacognizers, avoiders, and pragmatists. The results indicate that in using strategies to perform speech acts, the subjects utilized four primary strategies: (1) planning to use specific vocabulary and grammatical structures, (2) thinking in two languages, (3) using a variety of different strategies in searching for language forms, and (4) not paying much attention to grammar or to pronunciation. This research supports the claims that learners can be aware of their strategies and report them to researchers and teachers. This awareness facilitates
language learning. Additional research related to learner’s strategies during speaking tasks can be found in the research of Dörnyei (1995).

Reading Strategies. Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) and Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) are conducting significant research on the metacognitive reading strategies of L2 learners. They have developed a new instrument named the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) designed to measure the metacognitive reading strategies of L2 readers engaged in reading academic materials. One of the first studies published that used the SORS reports on the strategies of 152 native English-speaking students and 152 ESL students. The focus of the study was to examine the differences in reading strategy usage between native speakers and non-native speakers of English. They asked three primary research questions: (1) Are there any differences between ESL and U.S. students in their perceived strategy use while reading academic materials? (2) Are there any differences between male and female ESL and U.S. students, respectively, in their perceived strategy use while reading academic materials? (3) Is there a relationship between reported strategy use and self-rated reading ability?

Results show that the ESL students reported a higher use of strategies than the U.S. students. The ESL students reported using a greater number of support reading strategies, which should not be surprising. We would expect learners of English to need more support strategies. When the data were examined overall no significant differences were reported between the male and female readers in this study. However, there was one significant difference in the use of the strategy of underlining information in the text for ESL learners. The female ESL students reported using the strategy more frequently than the male ESL students. Finally, students who had a higher self-reported reading rating reported using a higher frequency of reading strategies than those readers who gave themselves a lower rating. Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) report that “skilled readers…are more able to reflect on and monitor their cognitive processes while reading. They are aware not only of which strategies to use, but they also tend to be better at regulating the use of such strategies while reading” (p. 445). This research contributes a great deal to our understanding of the reading strategies of L2 readers.

Anderson (1991) highlights that “strategic reading is not only a matter of knowing what strategy to use, but also the reader must know how to use a strategy successfully and orchestrate its use with other strategies. It is not sufficient to know about strategies; a reader must also be able to apply them strategically” (pp. 468–469). Additional research on reading strategies can be found in the works of Block (1986, 1992), Carroll, Pharis, and Liberto (1989), Janzen (1996), Knight, Padron, and Waxman (1985), and Song (1998).

Writing Strategies. Two recent research projects in Taiwan highlight the continued interest in learning about strategies used by L2 writers (He, 2002; You & Joe, 2002). He’s research involved 38 Taiwanese college-level writers. These writers were divided into two groups: mastery-orientation (intrinsic motivation to improve writing) or performance-orientation (extrinsic motivation to be better than other writers) classes. The purpose of the division was to determine if the learner’s goal orientations would influence the learner’s strategy use. Results indicated that the writers in both groups reported using strategies classified into five categories: planning, monitoring/evaluation, revising, retrieving, and compensating strategies. Writers in the mastery-orientation group had a higher frequency of reported strategies in the monitoring/evaluation, revising, and compensating categories. The mastery group also produced better essays than the performance-orientation group. Finally, revising strategies and mastery orientation served as two significant predictors of successful writing. What makes this study of interest is that there is an integration of strategy use with writers’ goal orientations.
You and Joe (2002) designed a research study to examine incoherence in EFL learners' writing. They examined the strategies that writers used in solving problems of incoherence in their work. Nine college-level writers were engaged in this research project. After writing a composition, the writers were each interviewed and asked to describe their writing strategies in sections of the essay that were incoherent. Three reasons were identified for the incoherence in these writers' essays. First, the subjects failed to apply the writing strategies that they were aware of for handling difficulties in writing. Second, the writers had a limited number of strategies that they implemented during their writing. Finally, given the limited amount of time for the writing task, writers did not feel they had sufficient time to monitor their strategies and produce the required composition. These nine writers lacked metacognitive strategies, in particular the strategies of planning (e.g., preparing for a writing task), monitoring (e.g., being aware of strategy use during writing), and evaluating (determining if the strategies being used are helping to accomplish the writing goal), in order to improve their performance.

We continue to learn about L2 strategies, particularly when the research is focused on a specific language skill. These two studies represent the growing research in writing. Other articles on L2 strategy use and writing include Anderson (2003), Boshers (1998), Leki (1995), and Paulus (1999).

"Grammaring" Strategies. Consistent with what we have discussed related to L2 learning strategies, the role of strategies in the teaching of L2 grammar has focused more on the teacher's pedagogical strategies than on learner's strategies for learning the grammar of a language. Larsen-Freeman (2001, 2003) emphasizes that we go beyond teaching "grammar" to teaching learners the skill of "grammaring": "Grammar teaching is not so much knowledge transmission as it is skill development. In fact, it is better to think of teaching 'grammaring,' rather than 'grammar'" (p. 255). Sharwood Smith (1993) suggests that "enhanced input" allows learners to focus on elements of grammatical structures that are targeted by the teacher. Krashen (1985) and Ellis (1994) have advocated making input comprehensible for learners. Ellis (2002) suggests that input to become intake "noticing" is the necessary condition. Focusing learner's attention on specific aspects of grammar is the pedagogical strategy to get learners to learn grammar.

What is greatly lacking in the research are studies that specifically target the identification of the learning strategies that L2 learners use to learn grammar and to understand the elements of grammar. Clearly more research is needed on "grammaring" strategies of L2 learners.

The Role of Metacognition and L2 Strategy Research

McDonough (1999) asks a provocative question of whether there is a hierarchy of strategies for language learning. His review of a part of the literature suggests that this is an area of possible future research that should be considered. Of the various categories of strategies identified through strategy research, does any one category play a more significant role than the others? I hypothesize that the metacognitive strategies play a more significant role because once a learner understands how to regulate his or her own learning through the use of strategies, language acquisition should proceed at a faster rate.

Vandergrift (2002) emphasizes the essential role of metacognitive strategies: "Metacognitive strategies are crucial because they oversee, regulate, or direct the language learning task, and involve thinking about the learning process" (p. 559). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) strengthen the importance of the role of metacognitive strategies when they state that "students without metacognitive approaches are
essentially learners without direction or opportunity to plan their learning, monitor their progress, or review their accomplishments and future learning directions' (p. 8).

Metacognition can be defined simply as thinking about thinking (Anderson, 2002). It is the ability to make your thinking visible. It is the ability to reflect on what you know and do and what you do not know and do not do. Metacognition results in critical but healthy reflection and evaluation of your thinking that may result in making specific changes in how you learn. Metacognition is not simply thinking back on an event, describing what happened, and how you felt about it.

Understanding and controlling cognitive processes may be one of the most essential skills that classroom teachers can develop in themselves and the students with whom they work. Rather than focusing students' attention only on issues related to learning content, effective teachers can structure a learning atmosphere where thinking about what happens in the learning process will lead to stronger learning skills. Developing metacognitive awareness may also lead to the development of stronger cognitive skills as well.

Work by Skehan (1989), Vann and Abraham (1990), and Wenden (1998) points out that explicit teaching of language learning strategies does not ensure a successful learning experience. Learners need to be metacognitively aware of what they are doing. Learners need to connect their strategies for learning with their purpose for learning.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN L2 STRATEGY RESEARCH

I believe that three areas deserve increased attention in L2 strategy research in the coming years: (1) the relationship between language learning strategies and learning styles, (2) strategy use in second language learning contexts versus foreign language learning contexts, and (3) the role of computers in L2 strategy research.

The Relationship Between Language Learning Strategies and Learning Styles

We cannot look at language learning strategies in isolation. Strategies are linked to the individual learner's learning style.

Cohen (2000) suggests that in an ideal world teachers would be aware of learners' styles and the wide variety of strategies that are used for these styles. Teachers would accommodate learners to help them progress as quickly as possible in their task of learning the language. This ideal world is not likely to exist any time in the near future. Teachers must therefore teach learners how to self-assess their learning styles and strategy usage and to then help them monitor these issues themselves. Researchers can play a significant role in exploring the explicit links between learners' use of strategies and their preferred learning styles.

Strategy Use in Second Language Learning Contexts Versus Foreign Language Learning Contexts

Riley and Harsch (1999) explored the use of language learning strategies through strategy journals. One major finding from their research was that learners in second language settings as compared to those in foreign language settings report using different strategies. Riley and Harsch report that the second language learners in their study reported using more metacognitive strategies than the foreign language learners. The foreign language learners reported using more cognitive strategies than the
second language learners. Riley and Harsch conclude that the environment influences the learners' need to use certain kinds of strategies.

Research can play a significant role in exploring the use of L2 strategies in different learning environments. In addition to research on the similarities and differences between strategy use in ESL and EFL environments, researchers can consider what role the use of strategies play in academic versus social language use contexts. To better understand strategy use, we must explore how strategy use changes when conditions for language use change.

The Role of Computers in L2 Strategy Research

Computer-assisted strategy assessment is a rich source of potential data still not actively utilized by L2 researchers and teachers. Hyte (2002) and Kohler (2002) have conducted very interesting research projects examining the use of the computer in metacognitive strategy training. Hyte studied the influence of metacognitive strategy training for language learning within the context of computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Two hundred thirty-nine second language learners of Spanish participated in her study. An experimental group (n = 120) received metacognitive training integrated within their CALL training. The control group (n = 119) did not receive the metacognitive strategy training. Hyte found that there was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of their listening strategies. Learners in the experimental group scored higher than those in the control group. One interesting finding was that learners in the control group reported a higher use of metacognitive strategies than learners in the experimental group. Hyte concludes that the metacognitive training increased the awareness of the learners in the experimental group such that they more accurately reported their strategy use.

Kohler’s research (2002) was designed to investigate the effects of metacognitive strategy training on lower-achieving second language learners. Seventy learners of Spanish as a foreign language represented the lower-achieving 30% of a randomly selected larger group. The 70 subjects were divided into two groups. One group received metacognitive strategy training in class on through 20 CALL lessons. The second group served as a control group receiving no strategy training.

Results indicate that the subjects who received the metacognitive language learning strategy training significantly increased their listening comprehension, vocabulary, and phrases mastered. No significant differences were found in grammar usage and performance in specific language tasks between the two groups. Subjects who received the strategy training indicated higher perceived value of the training and use of metacognitive language learning strategies than those subjects from the control group.

One area of research that deserves additional focus is how learners use strategies while engaged in CALL tasks. For example, we need to investigate the strategies that learners use while reading online as opposed to the traditional hard copy reading strategies. Are there any differences in the use of language learning strategies when learners approach language learning through CALL environments versus traditional classroom settings? These are issues that need directed attention by researchers in the near future.

CONCLUSION

Will Rogers is credited with the saying that common sense ain't necessarily common practice. Perhaps what I have addressed in this chapter appears to be common sense to some readers. I believe that in many respects it is, but the reality is that what
is common sense related to L2 learning strategies research is not common practice among researchers and language teachers. There is still much research that needs to be completed for us to better understand the role of strategies and language learning. I hope that we can see a renewed research focus on the use of strategies in these areas.

REFERENCES


42. L2 LEARNING STRATEGIES


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