

Using Language Learning Strategies In Foreign Language Learning

อภิญญา มาโนชญ์กัญญา*

Introduction

Most people today can speak more languages than one, excluding their mother tongue (L1). As we know, the challenge for learning foreign languages today is keeping up with the growing internationalization of the world order, with English especially becoming increasingly important as the universal means of communication. Therefore, today's foreign language learning is widely spreading as the world changes. This is also reflected in education reforms. In response to education reforms, many schools attempt to adapt the curriculum used to become the national education curriculum. Among other things, this will allow them to teach foreign languages including English to, most notably, children at an early age. Another way young children can learn foreign languages is from people close to them such as their parents, relatives, friends, etc. as they develop their cognitive maturity and mentalinguistic awareness. In learning any foreign language, learners should have competence which is related to an innate "knowledge" of grammatical rules.

Chomsky (1965 cited in Krashen, 1981, p.20) regards competence as the sense that involves some kind of knowledge which is related to the grammatical rules of a language; this 'knowledge' is ordinarily out of conscious awareness...as we know there are large individual differences in this ability, and these individual differences are related to success in learning foreign languages, apparently because this ability is called upon when the student tries to learn grammatical rules and apply them in constructing and comprehending new sentences in that language.

*อาจารย์คณะพาณิชยศาสตร์และการจัดการ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ เขตการศึกษาตรัง จ.ตรัง

Perhaps, the learners' competence levels relate to social environment, age of acquisition, attitudes and motivation. Regardless, everybody can learn foreign language more effectively if they continually practice and use learning strategies.

Definition of learning strategies

O'Malley and Chamot (1990, p.1) define learning strategies as "special ways of processing information that enhance comprehension, learning, or retention of the information." Similarly, Wenden and Rubin (1987, p.19) define learning strategies as "...any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information." Oxford (1990) describes learning strategies as specific action, behaviors, steps, or techniques that learners use to improve their progress in developing learning in second language skills including to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information of the learner.

In summary, learning strategies are the steps, behaviors, styles, skills, and tactics used by language learners in which to engage in learning new languages.

The importance of using learning strategies

As we know, learners have differences of individual characteristics, personalities, attributes and perceptions toward learning processes and learning situations. The important role of using learning strategies is to help language learners enhance the acquisition, storage, retention, recall, and use of new information (Oxford, 1989, p.3). Moreover, it can assist the learner to learn a new language more effectively.

However, strategies are very individual. Some strategies are more useful for some people than others.

Learning strategies used

O'Malley and Chamot (1990, p.8) describe many learning strategies. They can be divided into three main categories. I will briefly describe each strategy below.

Firstly, Metacognitive strategies usually involve thinking about the learning process, *planning* for learning, *monitoring* of comprehension or *production* of language used for the success of a learning activity. For example, learners can use this strategy group (planning for learning, monitoring of comprehension or production of language used) for vocabulary

acquisition. This may be accomplished by the utilization of English-language media such as songs, movies (testing oneself with word tests, or continuing to study a word over time.). In addition, learning listening skills can be addressed. Learners can use this group strategy by being attentive; with listening and try to understand. If they are unable to cope with or to understand what people are saying they can stop listening and think only about what they don't understand. Learners can then continue to listen to new things building on what they have already learned.

Secondly, Cognitive strategies are more specific and more directly related to *selection*, *comprehension* and *retention* of knowledge through the use of engaging strategies. For example, learners can use this strategy group (selection, comprehension and retention of knowledge) in terms of learning writing skills by taking notes from listening to lectures – selecting key points, making rough lists, and then organizing the notes. As well as learning reading skills, learners can use this group strategy to summarize and paraphrase after finishing reading a paragraph. They can jot down their own words in order to make it more comprehensible to themselves.

Lastly, Social/Affective strategies are concerned with interactions in society in order to achieve a goal in learning, which is similar to *cooperative learning*. For example, learners can use this strategy group (cooperative learning) in terms of learning speaking skills by requesting repetition or asking for help when not hearing or understanding something clearly from the conversation partner either directly (e.g. “What do you call...?”) or indirectly (e.g. rising intonation, pausing, making eye contact).

Learners can link and use learning strategies for different tasks given depending on their experiences, existing knowledge, and learning purposes. Moreover, some researchers classify learning strategies differently. A comparison of classification of strategies by three authors is presented in Table A, in which learners can adapt them to suit their own learning.

The effectiveness of using learning strategies toward language learning

As mentioned, everybody uses learning strategies differently depending on their existing knowledge, attributes, and familiarity with learning strategies used to achieve their learning goals. It is important that teachers should know how to facilitate learning by using a broad range of language learning strategies. This also can raise learners' awareness of their own skills which can help them to choose and use the appropriate learning strategies.

There are three simple steps of strategy training as below;

Firstly, teachers should raise learners' awareness by giving them knowledge of strategies that they are going to use. This can help them to know the goals of learning strategies directly.

Secondly, teachers must provide tasks which apply to learning strategies taught. This can help learners know the value of learning strategies used, when they can be used, how to use them, and how to evaluate the success of using each learning strategy.

Lastly, teachers should provide time for learners to learn and practice strategies with actual language tasks such as long-term exercises. This helps learners to develop new ideas or knowledge of using learning strategies.

These three steps of learning strategies can be used for guiding learners to develop their language learning strategies.

Conclusion

What is important is that language learning strategies are the tools which can help learners develop and learn a new language successfully. Learners must select appropriate strategies used along with tasks given and continually learn and practice by using learning strategies. Teachers also must provide opportunities for the learners to apply learning strategies through tasks or activities in which these strategies are necessary to successfully complete.

References

- Chomsky, N. (1965). Aspects of the Theory of Syntax. In S. D. Krashen, (ed). Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning. n.p. Retrieved May 15, 2006, from http://www.sdkrashen.com/SL_Acquisition_and_Learning/cover.html
- O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (1990). Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oxford, R. L. (1989). The Roles of Styles and Strategies in Second Language Learning. n.p. Retrieved April 17, 2006 from <http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9214/styles.htm>.
- _____. (1990). Language Learning Strategies (What Every Teacher Should Know). New York: HarperCollins.
- Wenden, A., & Rubin, J. (1987). Leaner Strategies in Language Learning. Englewood Cliffs, NJ:Prentice Hall.