

Integrating Language Learning Strategy Instruction into ESL/EFL Lessons

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This article looks at language learning strategy instruction as a teaching approach to guide learners towards the efficient use of learning strategies while learning a second or foreign language.

Introduction

Language learning strategies are used by learners to complete speaking, reading, vocabulary, listening or writing activities presented in language lessons. Recognizing that there is a task to complete or a problem to solve (Oxford, 1990, p.9), language learners will use whatever metacognitive, cognitive or social/affective strategies they possess to attend to the language-learning activity. However, whereas experienced language learners can approach language-learning problems in a systematic way and are usually successful in selecting appropriate strategies to complete a language-learning task (activity), novices may be less efficient at selecting and using strategies to task (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995, p. 146). Regardless of language learning experiences, both groups of learners, will need instruction in 'how' to use strategies efficiently as a way to improve language learning and performance (Wenden, 1987, p.8; O'Malley & Chamot, 1995, p.81; Cohen, 1998, p.69). One way to direct learners towards the efficient use of learning strategies is to integrate Language-Learning Strategy Instruction into regular language lessons. This article reviews theoretical and empirical rationale for implementing learning strategy instruction in ESL/EFL classrooms and argues that learning strategy instruction is an "instructional paradigm" (Grunewald, 1999, p. 51) that should be integrated into every teacher's language teaching pedagogy. The article is organized by addressing the following questions.

1. What are the learning outcomes of strategy instruction?
2. What does research tell us about learning strategy instruction?
3. How should learning-strategies be taught?
4. How can teachers integrate learning instruction into language lessons?

What Are the Learning Outcomes of Strategy Instruction?

Language learning strategy instruction is a teaching approach that aims to raise learner awareness of learning strategies and provide learners with systematic practice, reinforcement and self-monitoring of their strategy use while attending to language learning activities.

The underlying assumption of strategy instruction is, if learners explore 'how', 'when' and 'why' to use language learning strategies, and evaluate and monitor their own learning (Cohen, 1998, p.69), then they can take a more active role in language learning process. In becoming active participants in the learning process, learners can become more efficient and positive in their approach to learning. Through this reactive approach (Hedge, 1993, p.92) to learning, learners' knowledge of learning strategies becomes procedural (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995, p.145) and a positive backwash effect on motivation levels, self-efficacy, learner autonomy, transfer skills and language proficiency will result.

What Does Research Tell Us about Learning Strategy Instruction?

Research on language learning strategy instruction has been interested in verifying the effectiveness of strategy training. Researchers have experimented with instructing language learners to use selected learning strategies as a way to improve language performance. Cohen and Aphek (1980) trained learners of Hebrew how to recall new words by using 'paired associations and found that better performance in recall tasks occurred when learners formed associations than when associations were not formed (Ellis, 2002, p.157). In an investigation by Weinstein (1978) ninth grade students were trained in how to use a variety of elaboration strategies and apply

them to reading comprehension and memory tasks. The positive results showed students trained in elaboration strategies significantly outperformed the students who received no training (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995, p. 68). In a training project to develop self-evaluation and monitoring strategies, Wenden (1987) reports that providing students with a checklist of criteria to self-evaluate their oral production resulted in successful use of self-evaluation as a learning strategy. The consensus of these investigations and others (Bialystok 1983; Gagne 1985; Sano 1999; Johnson 1999; Dadour 1996) tell us that language learning strategies are 'teachable' and training language learners to use selected learning strategies can have positive effects on task performance and the language learning process.

Research on strategy instruction has also investigated the instructional sequences used by language instructors (not researchers) to implement strategy instruction into foreign language lessons. One of the research interests of Chamot et al. (1988) was to discover how three regular classroom teachers actually integrated strategy instruction into their Spanish and Russian foreign language class activities. The results showed that although 'each participating instructor had an individual way of providing learning strategy instruction' (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995, p. 183), all three instructors opted for direct instruction (informing students of the purpose and value of strategies) and followed a structured sequence of introducing, practicing, reinforcing and evaluating strategy use each language activity.

Research by Robbins (1996) and Grunewald (1999) also provides insights into instructional sequences and teaching approaches. In her research to discover the feasibility of learning strategies instruction in Japan, Robbins (1996) provides a qualitative description of the instructional sequence used to implement strategy instruction at two universities in Kyoto. As a framework for strategy instruction, Robbins used the Problem-Solving Process Model. During each lesson, students were instructed to use the model to plan, monitor, use and evaluate strategies as they attended to language learning tasks. The instructional sequence for each lesson included modeling, explaining, encouraging, and prompting the use of strategies. Grunewald's action research (1999) also provides empirical evidence of how strategies instruction has been integrated into foreign language lessons. As a teacher of German in a Japanese university, Grunewald developed an optional supplementary system of useful language learning techniques (strategies). For each lesson, supplementary learning strategies were identified for each language skill presented in the coursebook and direct instruction of these strategies were integrated into the weekly language lessons. The teaching approach used for strategies instruction included awareness raising, explicit naming of strategies, practice and self-evaluation and monitoring.

How Should Language-Learning Strategies be Taught?

Uninformed Strategy Instruction

There are two common approaches to strategy instruction. In uninformed strategy instruction, students work through materials and activities designed to elicit the use of specific strategies, but students are not informed of the name, purpose or value of the specific learning strategy (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995, p. 153). The most common form of uninformed strategy instruction are textbook rubrics. Language textbooks are filled with instructions such as: 'Read the text, are any of your ideas mentioned?' 'Close your book, can you remember the advice?' 'In pairs, practice the shop dialogue.' These rubrics assume that learners will identify and use the appropriate metacognitive, memory and social strategies. The cues for learners to use specific strategies such as self-monitoring, memorizing and co-operation respectively are embedded in these textbook rubrics (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995, p.153; Cohen, 1999, pp. 79-80). The assumptions underlying uninformed strategy instruction is learners will learn to use the language learning strategy cued by the material and activities presented in textbook rubrics (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995, pp. 153-4). However, pedagogically speaking, there are 3 weaknesses with this assumption. First, of all, there is the reality that not all learners will be linguistically proficient to understand instructions that have been written in the target language. Secondly, not all learners will have an awareness of the specific strategy being cued. And thirdly, without a metacognitive awareness about language learning strategy use and purpose, learners will lose opportunities to increase their strategy repertoire, to successfully transfer strategies to new tasks, and to maintain efficient and long term strategy use (Wenden, 1987, p.159) in their language learning career.

Direct and Integrated Instruction

The second instructional approach is a mirror image of uninformed strategy instruction. Direct and integrated instruction (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995, p.153) informs learners of the value and purpose of learning strategies and helps learners to use, identify and develop learning strategies in a systematic way as they learn the target language. In the direct approach to strategy instruction, the teacher raises learner awareness of the purpose and rationale for strategy use, identifies the specific strategy being used, and systematically provides opportunities for practice and self-evaluation (Oxford, 1990, p.170; Wenden, 1987, p.159). Through this direct and

integrated approach to strategy instruction learners become reactive learners as they increase their awareness, practice, use and monitoring of the language learning strategies they are using while learning a second or foreign language. The learner outcome is an efficient learner who has developed the skills to successfully organize and conduct their own learning events (Wenden, 1987, p.11).

How Do We Integrate Learning Instruction into Language Lessons?

From the above, we saw that to help students 'learn better', teaching agendas would have to focus systematically (Oxford, 1990, p. 170) on raising students awareness of language learning strategies, to highlight the relationship between strategy use and language learning tasks, and to methodically increase students' existing repertoire of language learning strategies. In this final section, we will look at a framework strategy instruction and suggest that language course books can be ideal resources for integrating strategy instruction into ESL/EFL classrooms.

Basic Structure for Introducing Strategies

1. Preview teaching material and activities to identify strategies for instruction
2. Present strategy by naming it and explaining when and why to use it
3. Model the strategy Provide opportunities to practice the strategy with various activities/tasks
4. Develop students' ability to evaluate strategy use Develop skills to transfer strategy use to new tasks

(Adapted from *Scope and Sequence Frameworks for Learning Strategy Instruction* in O'Malley & Chamot, 1995, pp. 158-9)

During preliminary stages of strategy instruction, teachers will probably take a very controlled and teacher-fronted approach of instruction. As teachers become experienced in strategies instruction, they should feel free to adjust the contents and intensity of each step to establish a closer match between their instructional approach and their particular teaching context. The time required for each step is variable. Depending on the difficulty of the activity and the group of learners, it may take a few minutes, or it may only require a brief comment such as 'Did you get it right?' (to cue self-evaluation). As strategy instruction continues with the same group of learners and core strategies become 'recycled', teachers should experiment with the degree of teacher control and time allotted for each step in the instructional sequence.

Instructional resources available for strategies instruction consist of two kinds: published materials designed to teach learning strategies (e.g. Oxford, 1990; Ellis and Sinclair, 2002; Rubin and Thompson, 1994); and language-learning strategies presented in coursebooks. The embedded strategies designed into course book activities are 'perfect' instructional resources to integrate strategy instruction into regular language classes. As instructional resources, these 'embedded' strategies can be identified, modeled and explained by teachers: and practiced, monitored and self-evaluated by students while they are learning the foreign or second language. In addition, since coursebooks tend to recycle strategies, learners will become more efficient in their use, knowledge and development of key language learning strategies.

Conclusion

This article has looked at language learning strategy instruction as an 'instructional paradigm' and has argued that all ESL/EFL language teachers should consider integrating it into their language teaching repertoire. From a learning perspective, direct instruction in how, when and why to use language learning strategies can help learners in the systematic use of various strategies as they learn a second or foreign language (Cohen, 1998, p. 96). In addition, by integrating strategy use and instruction into regular language classes, learners are provided with hands-on practice and reinforcement of strategy use (Cohen, 1998, p. 91). From a teaching perspective, we saw that: strategies are teachable; the format of instruction should be direct and explicit; and strategies instruction contributes to improved language performance and proficiency. It was also shown that the instructional sequence to introduce strategies (present, model, explain and provide practice) is an approach that all teachers can attend to successfully; and the instructional sequence can be adapted to match the needs, instructional resources and time available according to the learning-teaching context. A final comment, integrating language learning strategy instruction into ESL/EFL classrooms is a challenge that all language teachers should take because not only does it help learners become more efficient in their efforts to learn a second or foreign language, but it also provides a meaningful way to focus one's teaching efforts.

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