

**LANGUAGE IN INDIA**  
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**Stimulating Language Strategies through Thinking -  
Help for Slow Learners**

**M. Barathiraja & G. Baskaran, Ph.D.**

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**Importance of Communicative Skills and Learning Strategies**

Learning a language involves communicating with other people. Therefore it needs not only suitable cognitive skills but also some social and communicative skills. An attempt has been taken in this paper to characterize good and poor language learners and accordingly create space for them inside the classroom structure to improve the good and set right the bad. Identifying such students itself is a serious task in Indian situation. A number of studies indicate that the developing learners actually undergo the same strategies as those used by the successful learners. Further research is equally going on in institutions dealing with language learning.

An important question to ask at this juncture is why we should be highly interested in learning strategies. Why are some people learning better than others?

**Help for Slow Learners**

We can make the slow/inattentive learners into enabled by following these practices.

1. By raising questions again and again
2. Repeating words over again and again

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3. Trying to work out the rules of the language by forming hypotheses
4. Guessing the meanings of unknown words
5. Ask the learner to frame a new sentence by using the knowledge of language rules.

### **Current Trend: Emphasis on Learners**

There has been a prominent shift within the field of language learning and teaching over the last twenty years with greater emphasis being put on learners and learning rather than on teachers and teaching. And the books are increasingly learner-centered. A large numbers of grammar and study exercises are drafted using this format to make the students learn themselves.

### **Research Orientation**

As parallel to this shift in interest, we seek to learn how learners process new information and what kinds of strategies they employ to understand. Learn or remember the information has been the primary concern of the researchers dealing with the area of foreign language learning. Questionnaires are prepared with the intention of enabling the students to answer the questions raised. For example, if the learner is reading a question like this, “Is this the college where you are learning the art of speaking?,” he or she can easily frame the answer and say, “Yes, this is the college where I am learning the art of speaking”.

### **Usefulness of Learning Strategies – Valuable Clues**

Since the amount of information to be processed by language learners is high in language classroom, learners use different language learning strategies in performing the tasks and processing the new input they receive. The learning strategies are good indicators of how learners approach tasks or problems encountered during the process of language learning.

In other words, language learning strategies, while non-observable in some sense, or unconsciously used in some cases, give language teachers valuable clues about how their students assess the situation, plan, select appropriate skills so as to understand, learn, or remember new input presented in the language classroom. With a short span of time and space, students need to fulfill the learning task.

Every strategy is a raw strategy in some sense, and the learner views or interprets the strategy genuinely in a mystic way. Sometimes the learner may go to the extreme point of leaving the task for some other. At times, the motivating teacher has to come forward to rescue the learner from the pitfall and make him/her learn using the context provided to them.

### **Various Types of Strategies**

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According to Fedderholdt (1997:1) the language learner capable of using a wide variety of language learning strategies appropriately can improve his language skills in a better way.

i. Metacognitive strategies improve organization of learning time, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation.

ii. Cognitive strategies include using previous knowledge to help solve new problems.

iii. Socioaffective strategies include asking native speakers to correct their pronunciation, or asking a classmate to work together on a particular language problem.

Developing skills in three areas, such as metacognitive, cognitive, and socioaffective can help the language learner build up learner independence and autonomy whereby he can take control of his own learning.

### **Building Self Confidence and Competence – Teachers to Become Familiar with Learning Strategies**

Lessard-Clouston (1997:3) states that language learning strategies contribute to the development of the communicative competence of the students irrespective of their age and gender. Being a broad concept, language learning strategies are used to refer to all strategies foreign language learners use in learning the target language and communication strategies are one type of language learning strategies. It follows from this that the language teachers aiming at developing the communicative competence of the students and language learning should be familiar with language learning strategies.

As Oxford (1990:1) states, language learning strategies "... are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed movement, which is essential for developing communicative competence."

Besides developing the communicative competence of the students, teachers who train students to use language learning strategies can help them become better language learners. Helping students understand good language learning strategies and training them to develop and use such strategies can be considered to be the appreciated characteristics of a good language teacher (Lessard-Clouston 1997:3).

If the strategies are not taught to the learners, they may misunderstand and may not be able to apply the same in the learning process. The success rate of the strategy application method involves in many layers as guidance becomes appropriate and meaningful to learning.

### **Why Some Students Do Not Succeed, Even When They Use Good Strategies?**

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Research into the good language learning strategies revealed a number of positive strategies so that such strategies could also be used by bad language learners trying to become more successful in language learning. However, there is always the possibility that bad language learners can also use the same good language learning strategies while becoming unsuccessful owing to some other reasons. At this point, it should be strongly stressed that using the same good language learning strategies does not guarantee that bad learners will also become successful in language learning since other factors may also play role in success.

### **What Should Teachers Do?**

The language teacher aiming at training his students in using language learning strategies should learn about the students, their interests, motivations, and learning styles. The teacher can learn what language learning strategies students already appear to be using, observing their behavior in class.

Do they ask for clarification, verification or correction? Do they cooperate with their peers or seem to have much contact outside of class with proficient foreign language users?

Besides observing their students' behavior in class, the teacher can prepare a short questionnaire so that students can fill in at the beginning of a course to describe themselves and their language learning. Thus, the teacher can learn the purpose of their learning a language, their favorite/least favorite kinds of class activities, and the reason why they learn a language. The teacher should have both the knowledge of the learner and the strategy. What quantum of learning that the learner needs accordingly the teacher devices the method and dose to him.

### **Let Teachers Master These Essentials**

The teacher can have adequate knowledge about the students, their goals, motivations, language learning strategies, and their understanding of the course to be taught (Lessard-Clouston 1997:5).

It is a fact that each learner within the same classroom may have different learning styles and varied awareness of the use of strategies.

The teacher cannot attribute importance to only one group and support the analytical approach or only give input by using the auditory mode. The language teacher should, therefore, provide a wide range of learning strategies in order to meet the needs and expectations of his students possessing different learning styles, motivations, strategy preferences, etc. Therefore, it can be stated that the most important teacher role in foreign

language teaching is the provision of a range of tasks to match varied learning styles (Hall 1997:4).

### **The Role of Textbooks in Mastering Strategies and Implementing Them**

In addition to the students, the language teacher should also analyze his textbook to see whether the textbook already includes language learning strategies or language learning strategies training. The language teacher should look for new texts or other teaching materials if language learning strategies are not already included within his materials. The text should always suit to the need of the situation and the content should somehow be prepared with local colouring – known messages make the learner familiar with the subject which makes the learner concentrate more on the skills.

### **Updating One's Own Method**

The language teacher should also study his own teaching method and overall classroom style. Analyzing his lesson plans, the language teacher can determine whether his lesson plans give learners chance to use a variety of learning styles and strategies or not. The teacher can see whether his teaching allows learners to approach the task at hand in different ways or not.

The language teacher can also be aware of whether his strategy training is implicit, explicit, or both. It should be emphasized that questioning himself about what he plans to do before each lesson and evaluating his lesson plan after the lesson in terms of strategy training, the teacher can become better prepared to focus on language learning strategies and strategy training during the process of his teaching (Lessard-Clouston 1997:5).

### **Task-Based Language Learning Techniques**

Learning a new language can be done by many ways. One can learn by imitation, observation, and by rehearsing the language. If a child learns the art through the parents, the learning process is easy because of the human touch and tolerance. And in the case of the grown up children or students of any discipline, it is not easy because the learners do not show any interest or involvement. Then it was thought of an alternate way which is nothing but Task Based Learning Techniques [TBLT].

The "Task-Based Learning Strategies" focus on how students can use their own resources to learn most effectively. There are 16 task-based strategies in the list. We have divided them into four categories that are grouped by the kinds of resources students already have, or can get, to help them complete specific tasks. By focusing students' attention on their resources, we emphasize their ability to take responsibility for their own learning.

The four categories are:

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- Use What You Know
- Use Your Imagination
- Use Your Organizational Skills
- Use a Variety of Resources

Within each of these four groups, you will find specific strategies that are examples of what the students can do with these resources to help them learn. Some innovative but simple thinking to handle the language learners would be of very much essential at the present juncture because the student community, irrespective of their disciplines, needs a fresh outlook which may not be already in existence.

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