Language Learning Strategies for English (Second Language) Teachers

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Abstract

People need to learn a second language because of globalization; connections are becoming inevitable among nations, states and organizations which create a huge need for knowing another language or more multilingualism. The uses of common languages are in areas such as trade, tourism, international relations between governments, technology, media and science. Therefore, many countries such as Japan and China frame education policies to teach at least one foreign language at primary and secondary school level. However, some countries such as India, Singapore, Malaysia and Philippines use a second official language in their governing system. Many Indian people are giving enormous importance to foreign language learning, especially learning the English Language.

This article provides an overview of language learning strategies (language learning strategies hereafter LLS) for second and foreign language (hereafter L2/FL) teachers. Teachers may follow

this approach in using LLS in their classes, and summarizes key reflections and questions for future research on this aspect of L2/FL education. It also lists helpful contacts and internet sites where readers may access up-to-date information on LLS teaching and research.

Keywords: second language, learning strategies, teachers, education, information.

1. Introduction

Within the field of education over the last few decades a gradual but significant shift has taken place, resulting in less emphasis on teachers and teaching and greater stress on learners and learning. This change has been reflected in various ways in language education and applied linguistics,

This article provides an overview of language learning strategies (LLS) in second and foreign language (L2/FL) learning and teaching. In doing so, the first section outlines some background on LLS and summarizes key points from the LLS literature. The second section considers some practical issues related to using LLS in the classroom, outlining a three step approach to implementing LLS training in normal L2/FL courses.

2. A Brief Overview

Within L2/FL education, a number of definitions of LLS have been used by key figures in the field. LS as "an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language -- to incorporate these into one's   interlanguage competence". Rubin (1987) wrote that LS "are strategies which contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly. Weinstein and Mayer (1986) defined learning strategies (LS) broadly as "behaviors and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning" which are "intended to influence the learner's encoding process". Later Mayer (1988) more specifically defined LS as "behaviors' of a learner that are intended to influence how the learner processes information". Clearly, LS are involved in all learning, regardless of the content and context. LS are thus used in learning and teaching mathematics, science, history, languages and other subjects, both in classroom settings and more informal learning environments.

Thus, in conclusion it can be said that language learning strategies are specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language. Strategies are tools for the self-directed involvement necessary for developing communicative ability.

3. The Importance of LLS for L2/FL Learning and Teaching

Within 'communicative' approaches to language teaching a key goal is for the learner to develop communicative competence in the target L2/FL, and LLS can help students in doing so. Communication strategies are used by speakers intentionally and consciously in order to cope with difficulties in communicating in a L2/FL. For all L2 teachers who aim to   develop their students' communicative competence and language learning, then, an understanding of LLS is crucial.

In addition to developing students' communicative competence, LLS are important because research suggests that training students to use LLS can help them become better language learners. This section provides an overview of how LLS and LLS training have been or may be used in the classroom, and briefly describes a three step approach to implementing LLS training in the L2/FL classroom.

Three main types of direct LLS are: **Memory strategies** "aid in entering information into long-term memory and retrieving information when needed for communication". Cognitive LLS "are used for forming and revising internal mental models and receiving and producing messages in the target language". **Compensation strategies** "are needed to overcome any gaps in knowledge of the language"   **Metacognitive strategies** "help learners exercise 'executive control' through planning, arranging, focusing, and evaluating their own learning". Affective LLS "enable learners to control feelings, motivations, and attitudes related to language learning". Finally, social strategies "facilitate interaction with others, often in a discourse situation".

4. Contexts and Classes for LLS Training

LLS and LLS training may be integrated into a variety of classes for L2/FL students. One type of course that appears to be becoming more popular, especially in intensive English programmes, is one focusing on the language learning process itself. In this case, texts such as Ellis and Sinclair's (1989) Learning to Learn English: A Course in Learner Training or Rubin and Thompson's (1994) How to Be a More Successful Language Learner might be used in order to help L2/FL learners understand the language learning process, the nature of language and communication, what language learning resources are available to them, and what specific LLS they might use in order to improve their own vocabulary use, grammar knowledge, and L2/FL skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Perhaps more common are integrated L2/FL courses where these four skills are taught in tandem, and in these courses those books might be considered as supplementary texts to help learners focus on the LLS that can help them learn L2/FL skills and the LLS they need to acquire them. In this writer's experience, still more common is the basic L2/FL listening, speaking, reading, or writing course where LLS training can enhance and complement the L2/FL teaching and learning. Whatever type of class you may be focusing on at this point, the three step approach to implementing LLS training in the classroom outlined below should prove useful.

5. Study teaching Context

It is crucial for teachers to study their teaching context, paying special attention to their students, their materials, and their own teaching. By observing their behaviour in class, for example, you will be able to see what LLS they already appear to be using. Do they often ask for clarification, verification, or correction, as discussed briefly above? Do they co-operate with their peers or seem to have much contact outside of class with proficient L2/FL users? Beyond observation, however, one can prepare a short questionnaire that students can fill in at the beginning of a course, describing themselves and their language learning. I ask students to complete statements

such as "In this class I want to/will/won't....", "My favourite/least favourite kinds of class activities are...", "I am studying English because...", etc.. Talking to students informally before or after class, or more formally interviewing select students about these topics can also provide a lot of information about one's students, their goals, motivations, and LLS, and their understanding of the particular course being taught.

An EFL writing text I use brief sections on making one's referents clear, outlining, and choosing the right vocabulary, all of which may be modeled and used in LLS training in my composition course. Audiotapes, videotapes, hand-outs, and other materials for the course at hand should also be examined for LLS or for specific ways that LLS training might be implemented in using them. Perhaps teachers will be surprised to find many LLS incorporated into their materials, with more possibilities than they had imagined. If not, they might look for new texts or other teaching materials that do provide such opportunities.

Teachers need to study their own teaching methods and overall classroom style. One way to do so is to consider your lesson plans. Do they incorporate various ways that students can learn the language you are modeling, practicing or presenting, in order to appeal to a variety of learning styles and strategies? Does your teaching allow learners to approach the task at hand in a variety of ways? Is your LLS training implicit, explicit, or both? By audio taping or videotaping one's classroom teaching an instructor may objectively consider just what was actually taught and modeled, and how students responded and appeared to learn. Is your class learner-centered? Do you allow students to work on their own and learn from one another? As you circulate in class, are you encouraging questions, or posing ones relevant to the learners with whom you interact? Whether formally in action research or simply for informal reflection, teachers who study their students, their materials, and their own teaching will be better prepared to focus on LLS and LLS training within their specific teaching context.

6. Reflect and Encourage Learner Reflection

This section requires teacher reflection, echoing a current trend in pedagogy and the literature in L2/FL education. However, in implementing LLS and LLS training in the L2/FL classroom,

purposeful teacher reflection and encouraging learner reflection form a necessary step. On a basic level, it is useful for teachers to reflect on their own positive and negative experiences in L2/FL learning. As Graham, suggests, "those teachers who have thought carefully about how they learned a language, about which strategies are most appropriate for which tasks, are more likely to be successful in developing 'strategic competence' in their students" (p. 170). Beyond contemplating one's own language learning, it is also crucial to reflect on one's LLS training and teaching in the classroom. After each class, for example, one might ponder the effectiveness of the lesson and the role of LLS and LLS training within it. Do students seem to have grasped the point? Did they use the LLS that was modeled in the task they were to perform? What improvements for future lessons of this type or on this topic might be gleaned from students' behavior? An informal log of such reflections and one's personal assessment of the class, either in a notebook or on the actual lesson plans, might be used later to reflect on LLS training in the course as a whole after its completion. In my experience I have found, that rather than limiting my perspective to specific LLS such reflection helps me to see the big picture and focus on "teaching how to learn" within my L2/FL classes.

In addition to the teacher's own reflections, it is essential to encourage learner reflection, both during and after the LLS training in the class or course. In my research study involving "guided reflection" did this by asking his students to keep a journal in which they completed the following sentences: This week I studied..., I learned..., I used my English in these places..., I spoke English with these people..., I made these mistakes..., My difficulties are..., I would like to know..., I would like help with..., My learning and practicing plans for the next week are... asked her learners to complete simple self- evaluation forms at various points during their course. I used student diaries, questionnaires, and interviews to carry out my research and help her students reflect on their LLS and language learning. These are just a few examples from the current literature of various ways to encourage learner reflection on language learning. As Graham declares, "For learners, a vital component of self-directed learning lies in the on-going evaluation of the methods they have employed on tasks and of their achievements within the...programme" (p. 170). Whatever the context or method, it is important for L2/FL learners to have the chance to reflect on their language learning and LLS use.

One example of implementing LLS training within a normal L2/FL class from my experience in teaching After studying my teaching context by considering my part-time, evening college students (most of whom were working) and their LLS, the course textbook and other materials, and my own teaching, I became convinced that I should not only introduce LLS but also teach them and encourage learners to reflect on them and their own learning. To make this LLS training specific and relevant to these ESL students, I gave a short-lecture early in the course on the importance of vocabulary and learning and using English, and then focused on specific vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) by highlighting them whenever they were relevant to class activities. In practicing listening, there were exercises on multi-definition words, and after finishing the activity I introduced ways students could expand their vocabulary knowledge by learning new meanings for multi-definition words they already know. I then talked with students about ways to record such words and their meanings on vocabulary cards or in a special notebook, in order for them to reinforce and review such words and meanings they had learned.

In order to encourage learner reflection, later in the course I used a questionnaire asking students about their vocabulary learning and VLS in and outside of class, and the following week gave them a generic but individualized vocabulary knowledge test where students provided the meaning, part of speech, and an example sentence for up to 10 words each person said he or she had 'learned'. I marked these and handed them back to students the next week, summarizing the class results overall and sparking interesting class discussion. For more information on the research that I carried out in conjunction with this activity What became obvious both to me and my students in that attempt at LLS training was that vocabulary learning is a very individualized activity which requires a variety of VLS for success in understanding and using English vocabulary, whether or not one is eventually 'tested' on it. Though this is just one example of implementing LLS training in a normal L2/FL class, hopefully readers will be able to see how this general three step approach to doing so may be adapted for their own classroom teaching.

7. Conclusion

This paper has provided a brief overview of LLS. It has also outlined some ways that LLS training has been used and offered a three step approach for teachers to consider in implementing it within their own L2/FL classes. In my experience, using LLS and LLS training in the L2/FL class not only encourages learners in their language learning but also helps teachers reflect on and improve their teaching.

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