

# LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

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This article gives a general view of language learning strategies. Each group of strategies is briefly explained. Their application is also added as an example to show how a learner can use them.

## Introduction

The language learning strategies are not newly created strategies, but have been in use by ancient storytellers thousands of years ago. It is said that in the Celtic period it took twelve years for storytellers to fully train. In the first two years they memorized 250 stories. They used mnemonic tools to help remember the narrative. These days the language students use these and other strategies to develop communicative competence.

According to the research of O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper effective listeners used three specific strategies: self-monitoring, elaboration, and inferences while ineffective listeners were concerned with the meaning of individual words. This study demonstrated that the use of certain learning strategies improved learning among students. Learning strategies are defined by Oxford as "operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information". This definition is further expanded to include "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). These definitions show that the weight in foreign language teaching and learning is changing from teacher centered to learner centered instruction. This change has brought language learning strategies to the center of attention for some educators.

## Language Learning Strategies According to Oxford

There are 62 strategies mentioned by Oxford and they are divided into direct and indirect strategies. The strategies used directly in dealing with a new language are called direct strategies. The

three groups that belong to the direct strategies are memory, cognitive, and compensation. The indirect strategies are used for general management of learning. The three groups belonging to this category are metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Here a brief introduction of each group will help explain them.

## A. Direct Language Learning Strategies

The direct strategies are beneficial to the students because they help store and recover information. These strategies help learners to produce language even when there is gap in knowledge. They also help to understand and use the new language.

### 1. Memory Strategies

Memory strategies are based on simple principles like laying things out in order, making association, and reviewing. These principles are employed when a learner faces challenge of vocabulary learning. The words and phrases can be associated with visual images that can be stored and retrieved for communication. Many learners make use of visual images, but some find it easy to connect words and phrases with sound, motion or touch.

The use of memory strategies are most frequently applied in the beginning process of language learning. As the learners advance to higher level of proficiency memory strategies are mentioned very little. It is not that the use ceases, but the awareness of its use becomes less.

Here is an example to apply memory strategy by making association. If a learner wants to remember the name Solange of a French person, it could be associated by saying Solange's face is so long.

### 2. Cognitive Strategies

These are perhaps the most popular strategies with language learners. The target language is manipulated or transformed by repeating, analyzing or summarizing. The four sets in this group are: Practicing, Receiving and Sending Messages, Analyzing and Reasoning, and Creating Structure for Input and Output.

Practicing is the most important in this group which can be achieved by repeating, working

with sounds and writing, and using patterns. The tools of receiving and sending messages are used when learners try to find the main idea through skimming and scanning. It is not necessary to check every word. The adult learners commonly use analyzing and reasoning strategies. These are used to understand the meaning and expression of the target language. These are also used to make new expressions.

Here is an example of a learner who practices with sounds of the words that have letters *ough*. The words through, though, tough, and trough contain ough but sound different. To understand them better the learner may make own phonetic spelling: *throo*, *thow*, *tuff*, and *troff*.

### 3. Compensation Strategies

Learners use compensation strategies for comprehension of the target language when they have insufficient knowledge of the target language. These strategies make up for the deficiency in grammar and vocabulary. When learners do not know new words and expressions, they guess the meaning. A learner brings own life experience to interpret data by guessing.

Compensation strategies are also used in production when grammatical knowledge is incomplete. When a learner does not know the subjunctive form of verb, a different form may be used to convey the message.

Here is an example of guessing based on partial knowledge of the target language. When a learner recognizes the words shovel, grass, mower, and lawn in a conversation, it could be understood that it is about gardening.

## B. Indirect Language Learning Strategies

Indirect language learning strategies work together with the direct strategies. They help learner regulate the learning process. These strategies support and manage language learning without direct engagement and therefore called indirect strategies.

### 1. Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies go beyond the cognitive mechanism and give learners to coordinate their learning. This helps them to plan language learning in an efficient way. When new vocabu-

lary, rules, and writing system confuse the learner, these strategies become vital for successful language learning.

Three sets of strategies belong to this group and they are: Centering Your Learning, Arranging and Planning Your Learning, and Evaluating Your Learning. The aim of centering learning is to give a focus to the learner so that the attention could be directed toward certain language activities or skills. Arranging and planning learning help learners to organize so they may get maximum benefit from their energy and effort. Evaluating learning helps learners with problems like monitoring errors and evaluation of progress. Research has found that compared to cognitive strategies metacognitive strategies are used less consistently by the learners.

Here is an example of arranging and planning learning. For a learner who wants to listen to the news in the target language can plan the task by first determining what topics might be covered in the program. Most news programs have segments of politics and economics. The learner can look up the words related to the topics before listening to the news. This would better prepare the learner.

## 2. Affective Strategies

The affective factors like emotion, attitude, motivation, and values influence learning in an important way. Three sets of strategies are included in this group: Lowering Your Anxiety, Encouraging Yourself, and Taking Your Emotional Temperature.

Good language learners control their attitudes and emotions about learning and understand that negative feelings retard learning. Teachers can help generate positive feeling in class by giving students more responsibility, increasing the amount of natural communication, and teaching affective strategies.

Anxiety could be both helpful and harmful. It is felt that a certain amount of anxiety is helpful for learners because it helps them obtain their optimum level of performance. Too much anxiety has the opposite effect where it hinders language learning. Anxiety often takes forms of worry, frustration, insecurity, fear, and self-doubt. A common high anxiety creating situation for learners is to perform before the peers and teacher when they are not prepared.

Here is an example of how learners try to lower the anxiety. Some listen to their favorite music

for a few minutes before practicing the target language.

### 3. Social Strategies

Social strategies are very important in learning a language because language is used in communication and communication occurs between people. Three sets of strategies are included in this group: Asking Questions, Cooperating with others, and Empathizing with Others.

Among the three, asking questions is the most helpful and comes closest to understanding the meaning. It also helps in conversation by generating response from the partner and shows interest and involvement.

Cooperation with others eliminates competition and in its place brings group spirit. Studies show that cooperative learning results in higher self-esteem, increased confidence, and rapid achievement. Learners do not naturally apply cooperative strategies because of strong emphasis put on competition by educational institutions. Sometimes competition brings a strong wish to perform better than others, but it often results in anxiety and fear of failure. It is important to help learners change their attitudes from confrontation and competition to cooperation.

Empathy is very important in communication. Empathy means to put oneself in someone else's situation to understand that person's point of view. Learners can use social strategies to develop cultural understanding and become aware of thoughts and feelings of others.

Learners can apply the strategy of cooperating with others by doing something together in the language they are learning. Daily telephone conversation with a friend in the target language is an example to practice listening and speaking skills.

### Conclusion

This article has introduced direct and indirect language learning strategies. These two types complement each other. Learners need to apply both for effective language learning. Introduction of these strategies into language classes by teachers would help students to become more efficient learners.

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