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MAIN FEATURES OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

In this article discusses about main features of language learning strategies and gives some recommendation about them.

Introduction. Since the pioneering studies carried out in the mid-seventies (Rubin, 1975; Stem, 1975) there has been an awareness that language learning strategies have the potential to be "an extremely powerful learning tool" (O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper, and Russo, 1985, p.43j, "which results in better proficiency and better self confidence" (Oxford, 1990, p.9).

Awareness has slowly grown of the importance of the strategies used by learners in the language learning process, since ultimately, like the proverbial horse led to water but which must do the drinking itself, even with the best teachers and methods, students are the only ones who can actually do the learning (Griffiths, 2004). As Nyikos and Oxford (1993) put it: "learning begins with the learner" (p. 11).

Discussion. Even though scholars have been working on the subject for quite a long time now, defining and classifying language learning strategies is not an easy and completed task. There is currently no consensus among scholars on what a

learning strategy really means in second language learning or how these strategies differ from other types of learner activities inside or outside of the class. Griffiths (2004) states that learning, teaching and communication strategies are often interlaced in discussions of language learning and are often applied to the same behavior; further, even within the group of activities most often referred to as learning strategies, there is considerable confusion about definitions of specific strategies and about the hierarchic relationship among strategies. Rubin (1975), who was one of the earliest researchers in this field, provided a very broad definition of learning strategies as "the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge", (p.43). Ellis (1986), on the other hand, views strategies for learning and strategies for using, including communication strategies or "devices for compensating for inadequate resources"(p.165),a quite different manifestations of a more general



phenomenon which he calls learner strategies.

Rigney (in O'Malley et al, 1985) defined learning strategies as being "operations or steps used by a learner that will facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval or use of information" (p.23). Then, Rubin (1981) went on to identify two kinds of learning strategies: those which contribute directly to learning, and those which contribute indirectly to learning. She divided direct learning strategies into six types (clarification/verification, monitoring, memorization, guessing/inductive inferencing, deductive reasoning, practice), and the indirect learning strategies into two types (creating opportunities for practice, production tricks) (Griffiths, 2004).

Oxford's grouping of the language learning strategies also complies with the characteristics of good language learners in employing learning strategies, "such as taking advantage of practice opportunities, willingly and accurately guessing, handling emotional issues in language learning, consciously developing the L2 as a meaning system and a structure system, and monitoring one's own speech" (Naiman, Frohlich,& Todesco, 1975; Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1983 in Green & Oxford, 1995, p. 262).

As for today, Oxford's classification is the one which is, more or less, the most widely accepted taxonomy. She made various additions (1992, 1995) in her classification in later years to better identify language

learning strategies. However, it is still impossible to accept it as complete as many more strategies may be identified in the future. Oxford's classification will be explained in detail in a further section, it being the most cited one in the SLA literature.

Conclusion. Oxford (1990) lists the main features of language learning strategies, which are "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more self-directed and more effective", as follows:

1. All language learning strategies serve the main goal of communicative competence. In order to develop communicative competence, learners must interact with language using meaningful, contextualized language. Learning strategies help learners participate actively in such authentic interaction and aid the development of the communicative competence.
2. Language learning strategies encourage learners for greater self-direction. Self-direction is essential for the active development of ability in a new language.
3. Language learning strategies assign new roles for the teacher. Thanks to language learning strategies, teachers get rid of their traditional roles as the authority figures and controllers in the classroom. New roles of teachers include identifying students' learning strategies, conducting training on learning strategies and helping learners become more independent. These changes strengthen teachers' roles making them more varied and more creative.



References:

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