

Further Education Today: A Critical Review

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A Critical Review of the Fundamental Directions on Language Learning Strategy Research

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Abstract

The unsatisfactory results from a focus on the products of language teaching led some language learning researchers since the mid 1970s to place the learner at the heart of the learning process and hinge upon the language learning strategies (LLSs) that advanced multilingual speakers often deploy to improve their language skills. This growing interest on LLS research was based on the grounds that language learners 'may be empowered to manage their own learning' if they are taught 'to work out the answers for themselves' through using effective LLSs (Griffiths 2013, 1). Although LLS research is very prolific and much has been written and discussed the LLS types and the correlation between strategy use and successful language learning across different learning contexts, very few published papers traced the history and development of LLS research by anchoring it from different approaches to learning language.

No empirical data was collected for this paper; instead, the paper aims to examine the controversy and developments of each of the three major directions on LLS research drawing on both cognitive and sociocultural language learning research perspectives. This paper also suggests some areas that deserve further investigation in LLS research in the coming years.

Introduction

One of the prominent challenges in the field of second language teaching and learning is the noticeable variations in L2 learners' linguistic accomplishments although they might receive similar amounts and quality of exposure to the target language. Therefore, some language learning researchers' concern has essentially paid to learners' individuality factors, in particular the study of LLS use, as an avenue to capture how language learners contribute to their own language learning. LLSs can be either unobservable mental operations such as selective attention, or observable behaviour such as seeking out a conversation partner or both. Besides, LLSs need to involve some degree of consciousness or awareness on the part of the learner because 'the element of *choice*... is what gives a strategy its special character' (Cohen 2011, 7, author's italics). The following discussion will review and describe separately the three main directions pertaining to the field of LLS research.

Review of the Fundamental directions on language learning strategy (LLS) research

The First Direction: Investigating the characteristics of good language learner (LLG) strategies

Language learning strategies (LLSs) research began in earnest with an article by Joan Rubin (1975) on what 'the good language learner' (GLL) can teach us. Rubin's seminal article was an outgrowth of her insightful observations of different learners' behaviours on some French, German, and Spanish classes. At that time (1970), the focus was on the methods and products of language teaching on the grounds that 'good teaching automatically meant good learning' (Cohen 2011, 683). Therefore, Rubin (1975)

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