

Learning Strategies of EFL (English as Foreign Language)

外国語としての英語の学習方略に関する一考察

Chia Su Aie

Introduction

This article is the preliminary part of the study. It discusses only the introduction, the brief reading review and the methodology to be used.

English language has become the compulsory subject in most of the learning institutions in Japan. Moving towards the globalization era, graduates strive to be equipped with not only hard skills of their professional field, but also the ability to converse in foreign language. However, for the monolingual society in Japan, learning a foreign language takes time and continuous effort not only from the learners but also the educators. With the up coming Olympic Games that will be held in Tokyo, in 2020; the government has also proposed changes in the language education methods in order to level up the English language ability among the graduates. Learning a foreign language and mastering it takes years of practice, on top of that a strong fundament at the very early age is also a vital part for a learner to keep developing in the language.

Many of the educators (both native speakers and Japanese) find it hard to bring up the English language ability among most of the undergraduates who carry an average to poor scores since the school years. It comes with many factors such as lack of confidence to speak using the foreign language, fear of making mistake, or limitation of the English language background itself. Most of the undergraduates in Japan is taking the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) English proficiency test, which measures one's ability in everyday English skills of people working in an international environment. learners are provided with enormous grammar and vocabulary lessons that will prepare them for the test. This however lead to the neglecting of the practical use of English and broader understanding of this foreign language. Learners tend to study and memorize the language for the sake of passing the tests. Another factor pointed by the academician

is the usage of Japanese language in the English lesson. English lessons are conducted in Japanese and, naturally the technical part such as grammar is also taught in Japanese language. Most of the undergraduates feel that English language is not a necessity for them. It is part of the educators' responsibility to instill the importance of learning this foreign language to the learners.

It is difficult for educator to change the level of the accuracy of English after a semester or two of teaching the class. The process to improve the ability in a foreign language is not an easy task and time consuming. It is not suitable to apply the same language teaching and learning strategies use in the primary school to the college undergraduates. The fact that the cognitive changes and psychology development in the young adults may need educators to spend some time to tailor a suitable language learning strategies which suit the cognitive level of undergraduates. This study will focus on the foreign language learning strategies practices by the undergraduates from Josai Base College, Japan. By understanding the learners' learning styles and preference, educators can adjust their teaching methods to help the learners in mastering the language.

The usage of SILL questionnaire on the EFL students has been widely investigated for a long period of time. According to the Dörnyei 2005, White, Schramm and Chamot 2007, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) is a popular tool used to measure the language learning strategies practiced by the second language or foreign language learners, the SILL is a structured questionnaire that aims to understand how often learners employ specific language learning strategies in the process of learning a foreign language (Kazamia, 2010).; it helps the educator with the strategy profile of their learners and uncovers to learners the kinds of strategies they practice in the process of learning English as their second language or foreign language (Oxford, 1990).

The survey will be using the Japanese translation version of Oxford's SILL questionnaire, (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning). According the earlier second language study, SILL is considered as the most reliable of the available strategies questionnaires (Brown, Robson, Rosen Kjar, 2001). Only year one students from Josai Base College is targeted to take part in the study. The aim of the study is to understand the best strategies used by learners in acquiring English as foreign language. The result of the survey analysis will be used as the guidelines for the educator to design an effective lesson plans for the learners in order to improve their language ability.

The study carries one simple objective, which is to understand the strategies that are mostly

practiced by the learners. It is a small-scale study, which serves to assist for the future lesson plan designing purpose. As this study will covers the year-one students from the college, the results of the analysis will not be used to represent the whole population of the college. “ The study of language learning strategies in the field of foreign language education is significant only after we can teach the common ways or actions usually selected by good learners to the elementary level learners and by then their learning is facilitated”, (Takeuchi, 2003). By understanding the very basic of the learners' learning behavior such as the psychology of how the learner is influenced by his or her learning environment, the preferences the learners choose to respond to the foreign language, will help the educators to improve their teaching strategies as well.

Reading Review

Some researcher in language learning studies suggested that there is a significant relationship between the language learning strategies and the proficiency of the target language. It is clear that there is more frequent use of language learning strategies as the class level goes up. Learning strategies can be taught to the second language or foreign language learners (Hsiao & Oxford, 1990). From the Oxford dictionary, strategy is defined as a plan that is intended to achieve a particular purpose; the process of planning something or carrying out a plan in a skillful way. Learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations (Oxford, 1990).

According to Oxford (1990), language-learning strategies can be defined as the response or action taken by the second and foreign language learners to control and improve their own learning (Kitakawa, 2008). The objective of the experimental study of Language Learning Strategies conducted by Kitakawa, is to establish the theory of language learning strategies. There was an experiment conducted to understand the relationship between strategies used in Japanese University English learners and their proficiency in English. Language learning strategies differ from an individual to a group. There are common approaches or specific techniques practiced by the learners in the process of second or foreign language acquisition. It involves both mental process and behavioral which are observable. The activities can be categorized into conscious or by intentional, and subconscious. The development of the inter-language is direct and also indirect

(Ellis, 1994). Cohen has suggested that the language learning strategies could not be differentiated by good or bad, it is more on the effectiveness of the tools in helping learners who use the certain techniques for specific tasks with the definite objective to achieve (Takeuchi, 2003).

According to Oxford (1990), the classification of language learning strategies consist of two major groups that are direct and indirect. It is then subdivided into six parts that are cognitive, memory, and compensation, metacognitive, affective and social. The indirect strategies are suggested as to be useful for the four main language skills that are reading, speaking, listening and writing. Looking into the indirect strategies, the metacognitive strategies is said to allow learners to control their own cognition where they are able to coordinate their own learning process by using their own study habits. As for the affective strategies, it helps to regulate emotions, motivations and attitudes. And the third of indirect strategies, it is to help learners to learn the language through the interaction with others. In the case of monolingual society, interaction and language learning need to lead to more international interactions. Kitakawa has argued that direct strategies especially cognitive strategies are more effective than the memory strategies and the compensation strategies; this is because the cognitive function includes the work of remembering and covering.

Researchers have pointed out that each of the six parts carry different strategies. The table below which is referred to the experimental study conducted by Kitakawa provides a clear idea of the relationship between the language learning and its strategies.

Language Strategies	Direct a. Cognitive Strategies b. Memory Strategies c. Compensation Strategies
	Indirect a. Metacognitive Strategies b. Affective Strategies c. Social Strategies

The classification of language learning strategies

Direct Strategies:

Cognitive Strategies	1. Practicing
	2. Receiving and Sending message
	3. Analyzing and reasoning
	4. Creating structure for input and output
Memory Strategies	1. Creating mental linkages
	2. Applying images and sounds
	3. Reviewing
	4. Employing action
Compensation Strategies	1. Guessing
	2. Overcoming limitation in speaking and writing

Indirect Strategies:

Memory Strategies	1. Centering the learning
	2. Arranging and planning the learning
	3. Evaluating the learning
Affective Strategies	1. Reducing the anxiety of using the target language
	2. Self encouragement
	3. Tracking emotional changes (i.e, writing a language learning diary)
Social Strategies	1. Questioning and answering
	2. Network organization
	3. Group working
	4. Understanding the differences (i.s culture and background)

Since 1970s, second language research has been focusing on the study of the differences of individuals in language learning. According to the study of correlation between strategies used and English proficiency carried out by Kazuya Sawada, it is clear that the strategies of the Japanese EFL learners are their positive attitude towards the usage of English in the meaningful way, i.e, trying to find time to read English and making habit of writing in English. Second language learners normally develop an inter-language of their own, that draws not only on the first language or mother tongue they have had already mastered and the second language or the target language that they

are learning, but also from the other elements such as language uses by the teacher and also their own language learning strategies (Cook, 2011).

Methodology

A total of 40 undergraduate year one students from Josai Base College will be participating in this study. The English language standard of the majority is average to poor. A set of translated Likert scale questionnaire SILL will be used. The questionnaire consists of 50 questions where participants need to respond to each of the item by choosing the score that best describe them about their learning behavior. The SILL version 7.0 (ESL/EFL) is originated from Rebecca Oxford, the professor of the Columbia University in New York. It is aimed to provide learners and also educators information about the way learners respond to the tasks of learning a foreign language, and their language learning techniques. The questionnaire will be analyzed using the SPSS statistical software.

The 5-points Likert scale represents 5 different response categories,

- 1 → Never true of me. (This point represent that the pattern or practice mentioned in the statement do not happen in the learning behavior.)
- 2 → Usually not true of me. (This point represent that the attitude only happens occasionally in the learning behavior.)
- 3 → Somewhat true of me. (This point represent that the attitude happens in a fairly regular pattern in the learning behavior.)
- 4 → Usually true of me. (This point represent that the attitude happens regularly and representing an obvious pattern in the learning behavior.)
- 5 → Always true of me. (This point represent that the attitude stated happens almost all of the time and it represent a solid pattern in the learning behavior.)

References

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