



Review of Teaching and Researching Language Learning Strategies

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Language learning strategies is one of the most popular areas of research in the field of English language teaching since understanding the concept does provide insights into how languages are learned. The idea goes as far back as 1960s (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990), and therefore, through the years, the theoretical views and the scopes and designs of research studies have undergone significant changes in parallel to the changes in theories of language and language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The early studies were informed by behaviourism in which language learning is considered to be based on the notions of stimulus and response and behaviourists claim that learning takes place by means of repetition and imitation (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Echoing this assumption, language learning strategies were seen as observable learning behaviours (Stern, 1983) that affected learning directly (Rubin, 1987). Therefore, the main impetuses of early empirical studies were to portray the best ways to learn languages by identifying language learning strategies that good language learners employed (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). This was believed to be helpful for so-called worse language learners to recognise how to become a better language learner.

Given that language learning is far beyond imitation and repetition of what good learners do, behaviourism received heavy criticism since it neglects the creativity of language and complexity and abstractness of linguistic rules (Chomsky, 1959, cited in Mitchell & Myles, 2004). These views led to a shift to understand how individuals with different characteristics dealt with the target language and learner variable was proposed to be an important factor that affected the use of language learning strategies (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). This invalidated the idea of identifying good ways to learn a language and language learning strategies were investigated from learners-

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as-individual's point of view with reference to the fact that each learner has different characteristics that influence language learning process.

Two books by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) were a turning point in the area of language learning strategies. O'Malley and Chamot relate language learning strategies to cognitive theory of learning and highlight the importance of language learning strategies in enhancing comprehension, learning, and retention of the information. Oxford, on the other hand, considers communicative competence as the main goal of language learning and defines learning strategies as "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, 1990:8). Oxford's emphasis on the concepts such as 'learning for fun', 'affective issues', and 'learner autonomy' provided a new perspective to theorise and investigate language learning strategies.

In her 1990 book, Oxford proposed a language learning taxonomy and introduced a scale called Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The taxonomy comprises six strategy categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Oxford groups memory, cognitive, compensation strategies as direct strategies and metacognitive, affective, and social strategies as indirect strategies. SILL, which is based on this taxonomy, is a 5-point scale that comprises 50 items in six categories mentioned above. Since the reliability of the scale is high across many cultural groups ($\alpha=0.93-0.98$) (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995), SILL attracted many educational researchers and became most widely used scale in strategy research (Chamot, 2005).

Despite its popularity, this initial taxonomy of Oxford has limitations and the research studies in which SILL was implemented identified the strengths and weaknesses of the taxonomy. Firstly, the main limitation is the categorisation of strategies as direct and indirect strategies. Learning is a complicated process in which particular types of strategies affect learning in different ways in different situations. Therefore, it is not possible to consider strategies as having direct or indirect impact on learning. Parallel to this assumption, Hsiao and Oxford's (2002) confirmatory factor analysis did not provide support for categorising strategies as direct and indirect strategies. Secondly, Oxford's categorisation of memory strategies was also limited. In memory strategies, Oxford proposes ten different strategies that are grouped in four categories and SILL comprises items that are relevant to these strategies. However, as pointed out by Goh and Kwah (1997), since there are various other memory strategies that can be used in language learning, SILL cannot test learners' use of memory strategies. Thirdly, in her taxonomy, Oxford does not consider the fact that strategies could be combined and multiple strategies could be implemented to solve a particular language learning problem. This is argued by Macaro (2004) who offers the term 'strategy clusters' to indicate the use of a combination of strategies.

The gaps in Oxford's initial taxonomy and the developments in the conceptualisation of language learning strategies in the last two decades made it necessary to develop a new model to teach and investigate the concept. Oxford's recent book, 'Teaching and Researching Language Learning Strategies', addresses this gap and introduces a new language learning strategy model: The Strategic Self-Regulation (S²R). As the name suggests, the model is mainly informed by self-regulated language learning theory because Oxford considers self-regulation as "one of the most exciting developments in second or foreign language learning" (p.7). Pintrich's (2000) definition of self-regulation provides a thorough description of the concept:

"An active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment" (p. 453)

Informed by self-regulation, the S²R model shifted the focus of language learning strategies to the assumption that "learners actively and constructively use strategies to manage their own learning" (p.7).

There are important differences between the S²R Model and Oxford's 1990 taxonomy. Firstly, in the S²R Model, Oxford disregards the categories of memory, compensation, and social strategies and groups compensation and social strategies under a new category called 'sociocultural-interactive'. In this category, she emphasises the role of 'culture' and includes strategies that are used to 'deal with sociocultural contexts and identities'. The second new perspective is the emphasis of the S²R Model on the use of meta-strategies. Unlike other taxonomies and models, this model includes meta-strategies for each strategy dimension, including meta-cognitive strategies, meta-sociocultural-interactive strategies, and meta-affective strategies. Oxford provides a rationale for this theory by asserting that meta-knowledge is not only relevant to cognitive strategies but also affective and sociocultural-interactive ones. This is because deploying any type of strategy requires using a meta-strategy which "help[s] the learner know whether and how to deploy a given strategy and aid[s] in determining whether the strategy is working or has worked as intended" (p.18). Thirdly, in her 1990 taxonomy, Oxford introduces strategies in phrases such as 'paying attention', 'setting goals and objectives' some of which are ambiguous. However, in the S²R Model, Oxford provides basic functions of each strategy (e.g. paying attention to cognition more broadly) and sample tactics associated with the related strategy (e.g. I pay attention to the explanation in every lesson, because it is important for doing the exercises) which provides a better understanding of the function of these strategies. It is noteworthy that these tactics are flexible in nature and could be adapted in different contexts.

The book, 'Teaching and Researching Language Learning Strategies', comprises four sections: 'S²R Model of language learning', 'Authentic Uses of Strategy Assessment and Strategy Assistance', 'Researching Learning Strategies', and 'Resources'. In the initial chapter of Section One (Chapters 1-4), the author introduces the concept of self-regulation and defines 'self-regulated second language (L2) learning strategies' as "deliberate, goal-directed attempts to manage and control

efforts to learn L2” (p.12). Oxford provides a rationale for including a ‘meta-strategy’ for each strategy category and supports this idea by outlining the characteristics of the S²R Model in detail and revisiting the relevant concepts such as ‘mediated learning’ (p.27), ‘deep approach’ (p.29), and ‘learning styles’ (p.37).

In the following chapters of this section (Chapters 2-4), Oxford discusses the three dimensions of the S²R Model: a) cognitive, b) affective, and c) sociocultural-interactive. These chapters are structured similarly and comprise five sub-divisions: a) introducing each dimension through metaphors, b) explaining the meta-strategy, c) explaining the strategy, d) discussing the relevant theories and concepts, e) providing a summary and concluding remarks. Using metaphors by referring to the relationship between managers (meta-strategy) and workers (strategy) seems useful as it allows readers to recognise the distinction between the functions of strategy and meta-strategy.

In Section Two (Chapters 5-6), Oxford deals with research and teaching issues of language learning strategies. In Chapter 5, she explains different data collection methods such as observations, verbal reports, colour-coding, learner portfolios, interviews, discourse analysis, and questionnaires and discusses the advantages and limitations of each method. She also introduces a number of popular scales that can be implemented in quantitative research studies and explains the quality issues with reference to the concept of measuring validity and reliability in quantitative research. This chapter is a useful resource especially for novice researchers who are interested in language learning strategy research as it provides detailed information about issues that should be taken into consideration in investigating the concept. In Chapter 6, before discussing strategy instruction, Oxford underlines that strategy teaching is not limited to direct and teacher-led strategy instruction but addresses the fact that “different learners, given their varied learning needs and proficiency levels, often require different sets of strategies and different kinds of strategy assistance” (p.175). This indicates that, according to the S²R Model, teachers should perceive that individuals with different characteristics may need different types of teaching instruction. Therefore, before providing instruction, teachers should recognise the characteristics of the learners such as their needs, wants, expectations, and learning styles and provide appropriate teaching instructions. Oxford emphasises culture as one of the important factors that should be considered in strategy instruction and provides some examples of good strategy instruction. The chapter also deals with factors to consider in strategy instruction and presents a strategy instruction cycle that comprises six stages (p.184). Instructors who wish to incorporate strategy instruction to their classrooms will find this chapter useful as it provides practical insights that could be helpful in designing strategy instruction.

Section Three (Chapters 7-8) is a guide to conduct research on self-regulated L2 learning strategies and a review of previous studies focused on six language areas: reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary, and grammar. In Chapter 7, Oxford goes beyond the research issues that are discussed in Chapter 5 and introduces different paradigms relevant to strategy research by introducing ontological and

epistemological viewpoints of positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, post-structuralism, and pragmatism. Oxford links these worldviews to research methodologies which are introduced in three sub-divisions of this chapter: (a) quantitative, (b) qualitative, and (c) mixed methods studies. In presenting the differences of these methodologies, Oxford describes research methods, models, and validity of each methodology. These sub-divisions offer a practical overview for conducting strategy research, in that the author provides some examples of how to use particular methodologies and briefly illustrates the designs, results, and conclusions of the previous studies. Researchers could find this information very useful as it offers a comparison of the research studies that used different methodologies to investigate language learning strategies. In Chapter 8, Oxford synthesises the findings of previous studies and introduces some theories that are relevant to reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary learning, and grammar learning strategies. This chapter also points to some research gaps which could be addressed in future research studies. These issues are worth considering when designing a strategy research with a focus on particular language areas.

Section Four (Chapter 9) is a short chapter that comprises two parts. In Part One, Oxford revisits the major aspects of the S²R Model and displays its four dimensions in which the learner is the central focus of the learning process (p. 267). In Part Two, she introduces some useful resources for researchers, such as professional associations, journals, online bibliographies, and databases.

All in all, this book offers new perspectives on teaching and investigating language learning strategies and is a highly relevant and practical resource for teachers, teacher educators, and researchers. The book provides useful insights into how to teach language learning strategies. Furthermore, it exposes the gaps in strategy research which could be addressed in future research studies and offers detailed guidance on how to investigate the concept which could be very helpful, especially for novice researchers. This book has already attracted researchers to investigate language learning strategies in the S²R Model's perspective (e.g. Griffiths et al., 2014; Harish, 2014; Ma & Oxford, 2014) and this empirical tendency will provide different stakeholders with a better understanding of the relevant concepts and allow for generating practical implications to improve the effectiveness of language learning.

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