Notes on the Promotion of Language Learning Strategies
in Zengaku Oral Communication Classes †

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Since the late 1970's language learning strategies have become a standard part of the EFL teacher's toolkit. Despite widespread research in the field, many questions related to strategy use and instruction remain unanswered. This paper addresses a number of practical issues involved in learning strategy instruction as it relates to oral communication classes: these include practical considerations involved in strategy choice and methods of strategy instruction. It draws on research outside the EFL field to suggest ways to make strategy instruction more efficient.

Keywords: Language learning strategies, Strategy instruction, Oral communication, Strategy choice, Instructional models

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

The recognition of the importance of the learner in the learning process, the realization that the habits, skills and strategies that learners employed could impact positively on their ability to learn a language, opened up a whole new area of study in the ESL/EFL field (Rubin, 1975). The development of this area, which includes language learning strategies (LLS) seemed to hold great promise for practical application in the classroom, and although significant advances were soon made in the investigation of strategies involved in some parts of the field - second language reading seemed particularly responsive to the use of strategies (Carrell, 1984) – oral skills seem to have proved far from amenable to strategy instruction. Indeed, far from being a panacea for the language classroom, many of the strategies investigated by researchers seem trivial and the results of their research disappointing. Despite this, the concept of learning strategies retains its validity as a means of gaining advantage in specific contexts, and is consistently used with this connotation in other fields. Is it possible to re-envision language learning strategies to gain something of this sense of advantage and employ them effectively in the oral communication classroom? This study will discuss a number of issues relevant to the use and instruction of LLS, with particular reference to Zengaku Oral Communication classes at Sangyo University.

1.2. Problems in the field

Language learning strategies (LLS) have become a valued and highly visible part of language learning and have been given a prominent place in ELT, along with more traditional lexical, grammatical and communicative elements (Oxford, 2002). Though researchers have taken considerable efforts in their investigations of LLS, assuring practitioners of their validity and value, there are still a number of unanswered questions regarding their use and instruction (Chamot, 2005; Gillette, 1994; Macaro, 2006; Stevick, 1990). While Oxford, for example, declared "Appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence" (1990) (p. 1), more than a decade later, Dornyei (2005) was able to cast serious doubt on the existence of LLS through the inability of researchers to adequately explain the difference between strategic learning

activity and ordinary learning activity (p.164).

Part of the problem lies in the definition of the term language learning strategy. Typical definitions such as those given by Griffiths: specific actions consciously employed by the learner for the purpose of learning language (Griffiths, 2003) (p. 367) or Oxford: specific actions, behaviors, steps or techniques that students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills (Oxford, 2002) (p. 4) are so broad and inclusive as to make meaningful conclusions on instruction and development extremely difficult. Some of these actions may be relevant to the classroom and amenable to instruction, but a cursory glance at the items on the lists of strategies provided by the authors might incline us towards Dornyei's point of view. For example, Griffiths (2008, p.90), includes 'doing homework' and 'using a dictionary' among a list of often-used strategies among proficient learners. If a strategy is almost anything that a student uses to 'improve their progress', is there any difference between strategy instruction and normal language instruction? Is there any point in bothering with strategies at all? If they are useful, how do we choose from among the multitude available?

For a teacher, these are questions that need addressing. The ongoing process of teaching and daily engagement with instructional and learning issues in the classroom ensure that the question of whether language learning strategies can be taught in this class and will be of use to these students remain immediate concerns. In attempting to draw together several strands of research, recommendations and examples will be presented on the implementation of language learning strategies in these classes.

2. Zengaku Oral Communication Classes
2.1. Description of classes

These classes are compulsory classes held for the new intake of students in most faculties of Kyoto Sangyo University. They are held twice a week, for one-a-half hours per session, giving a total of around 45 hours of class time per semester. Students must take both semesters, and this is usually done with the same teacher. This gives the students and teachers a relatively large amount of time to become familiar with each other. The classes are streamed into five levels, and though there is slight variation between the levels from year to year (level is determined by a test upon entering the university), teachers have a fairly good idea what to

expect from each level in terms of proficiency and motivation. The upper three levels have both their weekly sessions in a regular classroom, while for the lower two levels, one session a week is a CALL class, which involves the use of English language learning computer software. As the students major in a variety of subjects, motivation varies, and it would probably be an accurate assessment to say that the majority of students are willing to take an active part in the classroom, but spend little time studying English outside the class. This suggests that the primary role of learning strategies will be enhancement of learning in the classroom, rather than self-study outside it.

2.2. The place of strategies in oral communication classes

Why should teachers be concerned about strategy use in oral communication classes? One might be forgiven for thinking that students are already equipped with sufficient learning strategies to enable them to participate successfully in classes, and there is some truth to this. However, mainstream education provides a more useful definition of learning strategies that helps to give a clear sense of their potential: they are "efficient and effective approaches to specific learning tasks performed by students." (Bulgren & Scanlon, 1997/1998) (p.298). Using this definition, we can think of them as presenting options for the processing of information. A glance at the different levels of student ability within oral communication classes allows us to quickly see that there are different levels of English proficiency, ranging from quite high to rather low. The higher levels of proficiency suggest that those students have rather effective (if not necessarily efficient) methods of processing information. The teacher may be able to help them become more efficient, but should not assume they are without effective strategies. At the bottom end of the scale, poor language proficiency can be the result of a number of factors. Among these we must consider the possibility that motivated students lack an effective means of processing linguistic information. Casual observation of these lower level classes provides evidence of many examples of behaviors that must be regarded as inefficient means of learning. This suggests that the teacher's role must combine instruction in both content and the process of learning. If learning strategies can improve these students' ability to engage effectively in learning tasks, and thus further

learning, they must be considered worthwhile investigating. Although this suggests that strategy instruction might be most effective at lower levels, the generally higher motivation and more developed learning strategies employed by higher level students may mean they benefit equally, if not more, from learning strategy instruction, and be better able to learn and adopt the strategies that are taught to them.

3. Strategy Concepts and Research
3.1. Background

Despite the concerns about language learning strategies, they have proven to be a popular concept, perhaps because they appeal so strongly to our common sense. It seems obvious that certain ways of learning are more effective than others. Unfortunately, if there is one thing that the research on LLS does tell us, it is that strategies can be used ineffectively as well as effectively (Gillette, 1994; Griffiths, 2008; Rees-Miller, 1993; Vann & Abraham, 1990). In order to make principled choices about their use in the classroom, we need to know more about the kinds of interventions that are useful and, indeed, practical in specific language teaching contexts. To do this, a greater understanding is required of the way strategies work and the advantages they give.

The development of the interest in LLS is usually traced back to the work of Rubin (1975) and only slightly later, Naiman, Frohlich, Stern & Todescu (1978). These initial studies took the concept of the 'good language learner', and theorised that poor learners could become more proficient if they utilised the same strategies that successful learners used. At around the same time, similar ideas were being proposed in the broader field of mainstream education (Weinstein, 1978). Up until that time, learning was largely regarded as an automatic response to incoming stimuli: it was assumed there was little the learner could do to affect this process. With the growth of cognitive psychology came the gradual recognition that the actions of learners could improve comprehension and retention of information. (Weinstein & Underwood, 1985). It is these actions that came to be regarded as learning strategies. Those that directly affected the processing of subject information are termed cognitive strategies. Actions which affect processing of information indirectly have been classified in a variety of different ways: in the tri-partite division suggested by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) those which manage and direct the learning process are referred to

as metacognitive, while those that deal with a learner's feelings and attitude towards learning are described as affective. Additional categories were recognised (Oxford 1990) and extensive research has been undertaken to examine the different strategies students employ and how they are linked to a number of variables such as gender, proficiency and motivation (Chamot, 2005; Macaro, 2006). The important point remains that however they are classified, strategies are aimed at mediating linguistic input, the environment, or both, to improve language skill.

3.2. How strategies work

Given the broad range that the term strategies covers, it is not surprising that researchers have encountered difficulty in producing consistent findings. It is by no means certain that two strategies such as 'finding opportunities to talk to foreigners' and 'making efforts to write notes in English' can be related in any but the most basic of fashions, yet different actions such as these are routinely lumped together in research. Obviously, some strategies are more easily taught than others, and some are more relevant to the classroom. Some researchers have sought to develop more useful classifications through examining the way in which learning occurs at a cognitive level.

The exact process by which learning occurs is a matter of some debate. Researchers who have related strategies to cognitive theory, have pointed out their value lies in freeing-up working memory to allow it to process linguistic information, which in turn leads to structural changes in long term memory - changes which we characterize as learning (Macaro, 2006). It is theorised that this process, known as automatization (DeKeyser, 2001) or proceduralisation (J.R. Anderson, 2000), is facilitated by the repeated activation of language processes (Macaro, 2006). Simply put, we develop language ability through processing language. Speaking, listening, reading, writing and mental manipulation of language are all examples of this processing. These theories give us some theoretical insight into which strategies might prove effective in class.

From a teacher's point of view, this touches upon the relationship between language learning strategies and task completion strategies or performance strategies (i.e. the way in which the teacher instructs the students to perform certain tasks). Methods that promote fuller engagement with

language should, thereby, at the same time facilitate learning. In teaching styles that include a healthy degree of task-based activity, this seems an important area to look into, as it allows instruction of language and strategies to merge. This is visible in Nunan's approach (Nunan, 2002) and explicit in many non-language learning strategies (e.g. Shumaker, 2009). Indeed, we may go so far as to say, that it is difficult to separate effective teaching strategies from learning strategies, as the former are a means of promoting the latter. Even here, however, it is important to recognise that different strategies may be used by students in their study at home and at school (Yabukoshi & Takeuchi, 2006).

4. Choosing which strategies to teach

4.1. Research using SILL (Strategy Inventory in Language Learning)

So how are we to make choices regarding the kinds of strategies (if any) to be taught in class? Much of the research into LLS has been concerned with the range of strategies used by language learners, and has been carried out using the SILL instrument (Oxford, 1990). Though this gives us an overview of student strategy use, the emphasis is usually placed on the number and variety of strategies employed by students, with the conclusion being that these two factors are important indicators of language proficiency. Although Oxford (2002) recognizes the limitations of this approach, many studies (e.g. Fewell 2010, Kinoshita 2003, Oxford et al. 2004) continue to attach great importance to the numbers of strategies employed by learners. Even a cursory glance at strategy use in other fields (such as business or sport) suggests that the question of variety and numbers of strategies used is dealt with from a far more nuanced perspective: control and depth of engagement with the target and mastery of the strategies themselves are given higher priority.

Indeed, SILL based research, though certainly valuable in providing information on the scope of strategy use among a population of students, seems to be less directly applicable to the classroom. This is partly because the type of data required by teachers who wish to make intelligent use of LLS in their classroom is often not included in this type of research – it gives little help in choosing which strategies to use and in what circumstances they will be most effective. They provide information on the type of strategies students use and the frequency with which they do so, but even among 'good language learners' this cannot be automatically assumed to be a measure of effectiveness or a prescription for teaching to other students (Gillette, 1994). The purpose of strategy instruction is to expose students to ways of learning that are more effective than those they are presently using – it is very possible that these include approaches that are not especially common.

4.2. Insights from other fields

While it is, of course, a very different domain from language learning, the field of business offers some clues into the nature and application of strategies. In this very competitive world, it would be absurd to consider success to be primarily dependent on the number of strategies used by a business. Strategies are typically characterised as "deliberate, carefully considered, and tightly reasoned" (Henderson 2006:2). What tends to predict success is "sustained commitment to one of the strategies" (Porter, 1980: 41). Though this suggests the knowledge of a range of strategies is a pre-requisite to choosing the one that is most suitable (a point that is stressed by LLS researchers, for example Oxford, 2002; Chamot, 2005), the emphasis in business is placed more on an appreciation of and ability to deal with the situation, adapting what is on hand, rather than a menu of pre-prepared responses. What is most useful is the ability to 'think strategically' or 'strategic intent' (Stern & Deimler 2006 xiii) rather than 'knowing strategies'. What is the difference? Thinking strategically is a process of orientation, enabling businesses to "locate themselves in relation to the environment" (Cummings & Wilson, 2003). Knowledge of discrete strategies is of little use without a framework in which they can operate.

In language learning strategies, this aspect is partly addressed through the use of metacognitive strategies, (Anderson 2008; Chamot, 1994; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; NCLRC, 2003; Rubin 2001) which aim at teaching students to exert control over their own learning. However, the stress is primarily on the regulation of individual or orchestrated strategies, rather than what might be termed a strategic approach. The importance of metacognitive strategies should not be downplayed and it is important for any strategic instruction to include a metacognitive aspect, but still, it offers little guidance to teachers on strategy choice.

It seems that some sort of overall approach or framework for choosing strategies is necessary.

5. Instructional Concerns

5.1. Recommendations from ESL/EFL

As well as the question of which strategies should be taught in class, a further question is how can these be taught most effectively? This second question touches on the nature of learning, as discussed above, but for the teacher, a more pressing concern is which instructional features most readily develop skill in strategy use.

The information from researchers in EFL/ESL is scattered and incomplete. As Hassan pointed out (2005) there is little standardisation of intervention packages, or, indeed, data on outcomes of such packages, but there is general agreement on some broad instructional issues (Chamot 2005, Oxford 2002): strategies should be taught explicitly, attention should be given to strategies that students already use, they are probably more effective if integrated into a course of study than if taught separately (such as in a 'how to learn languages' class), and they should include a metacognitive component. However, researchers undertaking more focused investigations have produced a number of contradictory findings that should make us wary of the claims made for strategies in the language classroom. Even in an area such as reading, in which there is a general agreement on both the efficacy of strategy use and methods of instruction, Ikeda and Takeuchi (2003) found that strategy training was more or less successful depending on the proficiency of the learners. Griffiths (2003) similarly reported a difference in preferred strategies between higher and lower proficiency learners. Some studies have produced more specific findings, but although these may correlate strategy use with success (Griffiths 2003; Kato 2005 – the latter compared frequency of strategy use among Japanese university students with their TOEIC scores), these typically examine correlations between proficiency and strategies that students habitually use, rather than the success of strategy instruction.

6. Towards a Strategic Approach

6.1. Introduction

At present, there are a number of unresolved issues regarding the use of LLS in the classroom. In order to utilise strategies in anything more than an ad hoc manner, these issues should be recognised and addressed. To summarise:

- although strategies are believed to be effective means of facilitating language learning, there is little discussion of exactly how and why this is so.
- the LLS that are described in research cover an extremely broad area – they are often not related to each other and many times would fall under the rubric of common sense rather than strategies. This makes the assessment of findings and the adoption of a principled approach to their use in the classroom quite difficult.
- there is little evidence of 'strategic thinking' brought to bear on the problem of learning. Thus there is no overall framework in which to position strategies. In other areas, such as business, this is seen as vital. How do we choose strategies to teach if there is no overall sense of design to the learning?
- explicit instruction is seen as important yet few details are given as to how this instruction should be structured. There seems to have been very little research connecting standards of instruction to success in the use of LLS. From a teaching point of view, this is a serious omission.

6.2. The basics

The approach that seems most suitable for oral communication classes addresses the above points, making use of research from within the ESL/EFL field as well as from other fields, in addition to personal experience. It takes a strategic view of learning, regarding information processing skills as vital for efficient learning, and effective strategies being those which provide students with efficient means of processing linguistic information, while promoting engagement with language. The choice of strategies is based on an appreciation of the close relationship between task completion strategies and learning strategies, thus allowing teachers to tailor strategies to their class goals. Insights regarding instruction are drawn particularly from mainstream education (see below) which provides quite detailed methods for strategy instruction. Though not dismissing the skills the students may already have, its intent is to make their learning more efficient by giving them more efficient procedures for

processing language information in the classroom (i.e. more efficient strategies). It is to be hoped that this will extend to study outside the classroom, but this cannot be the major focus of the approach.

In taking a strategic approach, first it is necessary to ensure students have basic study skills. These are helpful for the learning and practice of any aspect of classroom study. Not only is this 'common sense', but studies (e.g. Griffiths, 2008) show a relationship between use of these skills and success in class. Some of these skills are so basic as to be automatic for many students and regarded as common sense by teachers, but in fact, many of these things are learned behaviors keyed to a particular context. While teachers may see the connection across different fields of learning as obvious, it is not necessarily so with students (Bulgren & Scanlon, 1997/1998). Some, if not many, of these skills may be associated with particular learning situations, and without explicit instructions and reminders to apply them to a new situation, students may not use them.

The skills are often observable in the class, especially with 'good' students. Indeed, it is probable that we regard these students as good because they deploy these skills/behaviors. They include things such as bringing the textbook to class, bringing writing materials to class, taking notes in an organized fashion and doing homework. While these things do not involve the direct cognitive processing of the target language information in the same way that strategies do, they are important for a principled and ongoing commitment to study. One must assume that most teachers already have their list of class rules and requirements, and some of these things will no doubt overlap, but the view of it as the ground-floor of a strategic approach to teaching/learning offers a new immediacy to the value of these skills and behaviors. It also suggests the possibility for more carefully planned means of ensuring they are followed.

6.3. Strategies

More advanced study skills lead us to what I would regard as strategies proper, and involve the purposeful orchestration of skills and processes towards specific learning or information processing goals. This is where teaching strategies and learning strategies meet, or indeed, become inseparable (Weinstein & Underwood, 1985). One of the easiest methods of approaching strategy instruction for learning in the classroom is to stipulate specific ways of completing classroom tasks (see Nunan 2002 for an example). Such 'ways' are no different than strategies. For the greatest effect, a few should be chosen by considering the types of tasks that students often undertake in the classroom. The strategies should be used regularly, so that the students associate specific tasks with prescribed ways of handling them. This allows explicit strategy instruction and reinforcement without divorcing it from language instruction. The question of choice is solved – rather than picking a few strategies from a large selection, they become ways of learning that augment the language instruction that is being given. But is this all there is? Are strategies no more than simply study skills and the way you get students to work in class?

Although there is some truth in this characterization, to say they are *simply* study skills and ways of working in class is to miss the point. Strategies are aimed at effect, and, to return to Henderson's description of them as "deliberate, carefully considered, and tightly reasoned" (ibid) carry the connotation of refinement of variables to focus that effect. In understanding the potential of such common elements of learning as being amenable to strategic application, that the teacher is able to facilitate more successful learning among students. This perspective can be further developed by examining strategy use in other environments to determine in what ways those variables can be refined that could make a difference in the English class.

6.4. Instruction

One such environment, perhaps the most relevant, is mainstream education, where we find learning strategies are also viewed positively and used frequently. For a variety of reasons, the development of strategy instruction appears to have advanced beyond that of the ESL/EFL domain. In particular, there are several areas that I see as key:

6.4.1. Overall approach

First is the importance given to applying an overall strategic approach to learning tasks. This is exemplified by the use of complex strategies involving a number of stages – indeed the term 'strategy' as utilized within mainstream education is perhaps most often applied to this kind of strategy (e.g. PMI – de Bono, 1994; ORDER - Deshler et al.,

2001; 1st TRIP - Rowan, 2010). This approach moves away from the use of discrete strategies, towards thinking strategically about particular learning tasks, so coming closer towards a teacher's primary subject matter. This is particularly important as teachers may be reluctant to teach strategies if they view them as taking away valuable class time from direct language instruction. Indeed, researchers into mainstream educational interventions seem highly aware of the need for teacher cooperation (Deshler et al., 2001). The whole raison d'être for teaching strategies is that they allow learners to achieve results that are superior to those achieved through direct instruction alone: far from taking time away from direct instruction, the time spent on strategy instruction should make direct instruction more effective. This becomes easier to appreciate the more closely strategies are related to the language tasks students undertake in class.

Complex strategies such as those listed above, though arguably somewhat cumbersome, and perhaps inferior to the approaches used by many proficient students, do have the advantage of providing an easily remembered set of steps to be used in specific situations (the name of the strategy is usually a mnemonic). Their purpose is to allow students without good information processing strategies to be able to complete tasks effectively. Thus they seem particularly suited to lower level students. However, personal experience has shown that such students may require an even more structured approach, involving a style of teaching that compensates for the students' own lack of effective learning skills and that, in fact, these strategies are more effective with higher level students who benefit from the extra rigor supplied by the framework of the strategy.

6.4.2. The finer points of instruction

The second key difference in the use of learning strategies in mainstream education is the more detailed consideration given to instruction: a comparison between models taken from the ELT and mainstream education fields (see below) reveals a more refined approach in the model from mainstream education.

In the field of ELT, the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (Chamot 2008, p.270) is made up of the following components:

- Preparation
- Presentation
- Practice
- Self-evaluation
- Expansion
- Assessment

By way of contrast, Schumaker (2009: 32), writing about strategies for students with learning difficulties, lists the following knowledge and skills related to strategy instruction in mainstream education:

- Creating a strategy
- Describing a strategy
- Modeling the strategy
- Leading scaffolded practice activities
  - verbal
  - guided
  - controlled
  - grade-appropriate
- Providing feedback
  - group
  - brief
  - elaborated
- Promoting generalization
- Progress monitoring
- Sequencing instruction
- Creating variations

While the CALLA model (one of the most detailed instructional approaches to LLS in ELT) includes the possibility of including some of these steps in its broader categories, Shumaker's model includes several categories not present in the CALLA model. In particular, the inclusion of 'creating a strategy', 'providing feedback' and 'progress monitoring' combine to provide far greater support to students in their development of strategy use. While not always necessary to follow such a detailed instructional process, it gives us an alternative view of features that might prove valuable to the instructional process, both in terms of the strategies taught, and the instructional process. These seem to be important additions to the approaches commonly employed in ESL/EFL.

6.4.3. Mastery of strategies

Within the mainstream educational approach, there is a particular focus on developing mastery of the strategy through various stages of modeling, scaffolded practice, and expansion to other areas. This focus is a vital aspect of strategy use (Shumaker, 2009) - strategies cannot be expected

to offer extensive benefits if they are not adequately mastered by students. The care given to strategy instruction and the inclusion of a component that tests the degree to which students have learned and can use the strategy are important parts of the whole implementation. Of particular interest are the early stages of modeling in which the teacher presents the problem and introduces the strategy by 'thinking aloud' about the possible means of tackling the strategy, and the stages of the strategy itself. While this means of instruction might seem problematic for oral communication classes, as the medium of instruction is the target language, although careful grading of language is necessary, (as with all instructional processes in oral communication classes), they provide an engaging and effective means of both introducing and reinforcing material, although one that certainly imposes restrictions on the kind of 'thinking aloud' that is possible and makes some forms of strategy instruction, such as reciprocal teaching, which is based upon discussions with students (Palinscar et al., 1991), wholly impractical.

The importance of scaffolding and gradual application of the strategy to a range of tasks, which is hinted at in ESL/EFL instructional models, is dealt with more explicitly in mainstream models: while this degree of support may not be practical in oral communication classes (for a variety of reasons, including time, language and level constraints) it does give an idea of what is considered necessary for successful implementation of learning strategies. Indeed, simpler interventions, while showing positive results, often failed to improve students' scores sufficiently to give them what would be a passing grade in that section of a course (Lenz et al., 2007), suggesting careful attention is required when abbreviating instructional protocols.

6.4.4. Instructional protocols

Not surprisingly, the domain of mainstream education has developed quite a number of instructional protocols involving strategies, many of which are suitable for use in the language classroom. Though many teachers may already be familiar with such approaches, keying them to strategy instruction is an important reminder of the need to ensure learners really understand and can use the strategies they are being introduced to, in order to benefit from them to the greatest degree. An example of this is the Gradual Release of Responsibility instructional model (popularly known as 'I do it; we do it; you do it') (Fisher, Frey & Rothenburg, 2008)

which gradually moves students towards independent completion of a task. The explicit naming and description of such a method is a useful reminder to the teacher of the responsibilities and possibilities of instruction, and can provide a useful baseline from which base instruction. (In ELT, the PPP method - Presentation, Practice, and Production - serves a similar function).

6.5. Further instructional considerations

Thus, although strategy instruction is based upon what teachers already teach in class, it aims at increasing students' ability to perform the task in question to such a degree that the time taken to instruct and practice the strategy produces better results than if that same time had been spent in direct language instruction and practice. To increase the value of the strategy, it should ideally be applicable to a wide variety or great number of tasks, allowing not only refinement and mastery of the strategy itself, but increasing the value for amount of time spent. If a strategy is only used once in a course, it is of quite limited value. If it is used every week, the time spent in strategy instruction will have been better spent. It also allows for the development and mastery of the strategy to take place over a period of time, which makes scaffolding and elaboration activities easier to incorporate into the class. Choice of strategies should therefore be based partly on the frequency with which they will be used – this is directly connected to the tasks the students will be expected to undertake in class.

Another consideration unique to ESL/EFL is the language that is used in the instruction of and execution of the strategy. Chamot (2005) (p.122-123) points out the difficulty of instruction in the target language, questioning the practicality of teaching strategies to lower level students. Though this may be less of a problem for teachers who are experienced in teaching a variety of levels in the target language, it will inevitably impose some limits on how the strategies are taught and require some careful planning before implementation. However, it may also add extra value to the strategy if it allows the reinforcement of particular linguistic features that have been taught. As noted above, the value of a strategy is related to the improvement it facilitates in task performance – the processing of language being among the methods of facilitating such improvement, careful attention to the language of instruction can actually provide benefits

unique to the language classroom. Likewise, the language elements required to execute the strategy are also important to consider. As the use of the target language is part of the goal of the class, the use of strategies that combine speaking can be learning activities in their own right, potentially more authentic than the learning activities they are facilitating. So, in fact, the choice of strategies that include a strong spoken or written component can have added bonuses in the oral communication classroom.

Finally, I strongly believe that students should be able to organize their learning in their own way. If, for some reason, a student rejects these methods of organizing their learning, they should be allowed to do so. However, it is one thing to make a reasoned choice between two methods and quite another to have no effective methods to choose from in the first place. By incorporating these strategies in classroom tasks, students are given the opportunity to develop effective methods of approaching their learning. When they have mastered a strategy, they are at liberty not to use it, but hopefully they will be able to explain their choice and alternative approach to the teacher. If this is the case, then strategy instruction will have been successful with this particular student, even though they choose not to use the strategy they have learnt.

7. Strategies in the Oral Communication Classroom – Examples

7.1. Overview

Below I will present three representative examples of task-based strategies in oral communication classes, together with comments and suggestions for how their strategic content could be increased. I make no particular claims for them as exemplars of strategies that other teachers should follow, but present them in the light of illustrating the strategic content of common classroom tasks and showing how this can be increased. Although they have been used with success to improve task performance, they were not primarily developed as LLS, but as approaches to learning tasks. Seeing them as strategies encourages teachers to actively refine them in the search for greater effectiveness.

The strategies fall into the following categories: speaking, reading, and tracking task performance. Unless otherwise stated, they all include the following features related to implementation: they are applied to tasks that are frequently repeated throughout the semester; they prescribe specific approaches to those tasks; they are introduced gradually and elaborated over the course of the semester; each group of students is taught to use only a few strategies, which are repeated often; they are easy to use and easy to teach.

Although all these learning strategies are related to task completion, there are many other types of strategies that can be used, many of which are more closely related to self-study. However, as the students in Zengaku Oral Communication classes are principally studying English in the classroom, I believe this is the area in which LLS can be most usefully focused.

7.2. Sample strategies
7.2.1. Chat and check

This is a speaking strategy that can be used, with variations, with a variety of levels of oral communication class. Its purpose is to provide students with regular, 'free-practice', allowing them to speak spontaneously. At the same time, it demands a degree of attention to the conversation to be able to give a brief summary afterward. This strategy involves asking the students to chat to their partner for a few minutes; afterwards, one student from each pair is asked to summarise the conversation to the class. Initially, a specific structure is provided:

"We were talking about _____. He/she said _____."

After they have gained familiarity with this structure, additional dimensions to the task are introduced by having other students ask questions to each pair - depending on the wording and content of the question, one or other of pair will answer.

Comments

Although this is a teaching strategy, in that it gets students to speak to each other freely, and then display understanding and allows them to practice in increasingly more pressured situation (the summary, questions and replies being spontaneously delivered before the class), it also functions as a learning strategy in that it sets up a response to incoming information and gives students minimally controlled speaking practice.

Strategic Improvements

- Giving this strategy a name would allow students to identify this more strongly as a specific strategy, rather than simply what a teacher habitually has them do in class.
- Key, identifiable elements of the strategy could be labeled and used in other situations, thus extending the use of the strategy. For example, students could be asked to summarise taped conversations in the same way as they summarized their own. Familiarity with summarizing would allow this transfer relatively easily.
- Mastery of the strategy could be tested – for example, students could be asked to perform the (named) strategy and informally checked to see if they were doing so.

7.2.2. Predict, read, listen, question

This is a strategy that students can use with short reading passages in oral communication class, (rather than for longer passages such as those that they might meet in a reading class). It is designed to have students engage with the text at a deeper level before starting specific activities reflecting on the content of the course unit.

Before reading the text, students are asked to predict the content through clues given by the title or accompanying pictures. To increase the effectiveness and communicative value, rather than simply thinking about it, they are required to ask their partners what they think it was about.

Next, the students read the text aloud to each other; depending on the length of the text, they may do this by reading alternative sentences, alternative paragraphs, or the whole text to each other. While one student is reading, the other is listening. If possible, the student who is listening is not looking at the text.

Last, the students ask their partners, 'How good was your guess?' or some similar question.

Comments

As silent reading is very much the norm in class, it is difficult for students to use this strategy unless they are sure it is expected of them so it is unlikely to become part of their normal classroom repertoire except if specifically cued to do

so by the teacher. However, understanding the concept has the potential to extend students' appreciation of the potential of strategic learning.

Strategic improvements

- Once again, this strategy could benefit from being named and specifically designated as a strategy. Especially with a strategy that involves several parts, it is far easier to reference if it has a name, which is important if the teacher is to explain the reason for doing it.
- When initially introduced, the teacher could explain the purpose, possibly using think aloud protocols
- Scaffolded extension related to the initial procedure would help students become more aware of the strategic nature of what they were doing.
- Mastery could be tested, for both the use of the strategy and understanding of the concept behind it.

7.2.3. CALL Log

This is a comparatively simple strategy used in a CALL class to give students a greater awareness of their progress through the online module they were working on. It requires students to keep a log of each of their CALL sessions, recording the date, their target completion percentage for that session and their actual completion percentage. Originally, a sheet was printed out for them to fill in. It has proved to be remarkably effective in keeping students working at a rate that will allow them to secure a passing grade on the course. Although precise data were not collected, the improvement was readily apparent.

Comments

Unlike the two previous strategies, this strategy has been informally named – 'the Paper'. This makes it much easier to remind students to do it in the class. This strategy is easy for the students to carry out – bringing the paper and filling it in every week constitutes successful use, so there is no need to measure mastery. In this sense, it is more an example of strategic teaching, with the teacher compensating for the students' lack of effective means of tracking their own progress, rather than teaching a strategy per se.

Strategic improvements

- It would have been easier to have introduced the strategy with a name already chosen – one that is easy to say and easy for the students to remember, but which has more meaning outside the immediate context of the CALL class.

- As this strategy is used in low level classes, the issue of class size (potentially more than 70 in a class) and language restrictions, could make detailed verbal explanations problematic. However, if possible, something of the purpose should perhaps be explained when the strategy is introduced.

- Ideally, the strategy would be transferred to the point where the students were using progress tracking in a number of different contexts. Then it would have crossed the divide from strategic teaching to being a self-administered strategy. This should not be too difficult to do, but would require organisation on the part of the teacher to make sure there were suitable activities for the transfer.

- This strategy could be extended to require the students to fill in more demanding data. However, as the purpose of filling in this extra data would be something other than promoting an awareness of their progress through the module, there might be better ways to do this.

8. Conclusion

The approach outlined above addresses the questions that research into LLS leaves unresolved. Primarily, it makes the awareness of the nature of a task or a goal a vital component of learning, and views strategies as a skillful means of achieving that goal. For the students, this encourages thinking about learning above and beyond a general desire to 'improve my English', and makes it easier to envisage learning as being composed of different skill areas that can be practiced in different ways. This is the beginning of thinking strategically about a task. For the teacher, this brings us back to the area between language learning strategies and task completion strategies. In regarding tasks as reflective of strategic goals, it encourages a process of examination and

refinement which can only be of benefit to students. Furthermore, envisaging strategies as methods for approaching common classroom tasks is a simple model for the inclusion of strategy instruction in the classroom. Connecting strategies directly to the teacher's class goals makes them far more valuable and relevant, and also suggests ways to select the strategies to be taught.

In giving examples of three strategies that gave been used successfully in oral communication classes, I hope to have demonstrated both how relevant learning strategies are and how easily they can be incorporated into a class. The comments I have added show something of how a strategic perspective on learning can inform our use of tasks within the class in order to make them more effective. I have personally found such a perspective encourages an awareness of how tasks can be used to greater effect, how they can be built on and adapted to focus more sharply on desired outcomes and how refinement of instructional methods can have a substantial impact on classroom activities. For all these reasons, I feel LLS are worth a closer look.

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和文抄録

　1970年代後半以来、言語学習ストラテジーは外国語としての英語（EFL）の教師に一般的に教授されている。この分野での研究は広くなされているが、ストラテジーの使用法や教授法にはいまだ多くの疑問が残る。本研究は、ストラテジーの選択や教授法に関わる考察を含む言語学習ストラテジーの問題点を取り上げる。また、EFL外の研究から言語学習ストラテジーをより効果的に教授する方法を模索する。