Learning Strategies and Self-Regulation
—A Case Study of a 'Good Language Learner'—

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学習ストラテジーと自己制御
―「すぐれた言語学習者」に関するケーススタディ―

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Abstract

This study is based on a review of the literature concerning learning strategies and self-regulation and analysis of self-regulatory behaviours of a successful learner of English. Self-regulation implies the notion of being proactive in learning and where learners transform their mental abilities into task related academic skills (Dornyei, 2005). Students studying second or foreign languages typically employ culture and classroom specific strategies but are often unaware of inadequacies of these strategies in relation to themselves as unique individuals within their own contexts, motivations and learning styles. By directing students towards their specific interests, thus enabling them to seek avenues to acquire the language, learners using the perspective of self-regulation prove to be more far reaching than strategies alone. Due to the nature of understanding unobservable mental processes, verbal report data in the form of an interview was used to identify language learning strategies and self-regulatory behaviours. By identifying the extensive approaches employed by one particular learner, similar approaches can be identified, transferred and applied to other learners seeking to enhance their proficiency.

Key words：Self-Regulation, Learning Strategies, Learning Styles, Language Learning, Language Learner

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INTRODUCTION

Learning strategies have far reaching implications for successful language acquisition in the EFL context. According to Ellis (1994: 530), 'individual learner differences combined with a range of situational factors determine the learners' selection of strategy, which ultimately influences the rate of acquisition and the eventual level of achievement.'

Learner strategies are behaviours or actions regarded as 'conscious' by the individual learner. Learning strategies are termed as devices or procedures used by learners to develop their interlanguage and are one type of learner strategy (Ellis, 1994). Oxford (1990b) suggested that L2 learning strategies are specific actions, behaviours, steps or techniques students use, often consciously, to improve their progress in apprehending, internalising and using the L2. Early studies on learning strategies were instigated by Rubin in the mid 1970s and were referred to as 'what good L2 learners do' and were characterised by lists of strategies. The first publication regarding learning strategies was that by Naiman et al. (1978). 'The Good Language Learner' utilized semi-structured interviews with various successful language learners. Further, Naiman et al. (1978) investigated 'good language learner' (GLL) strategies in order to discover what the learners had in common. They categorized these into six broad strategies;

　(1) Find a learning style that suits you,
　(2) Involve yourself in the language learning process
　(3) Develop an awareness of language both as system and as communication
　(4) Pay constant attention to expanding your language knowledge
　(5) Develop the second language as a separate system
　(6) Take into account the demands that L2 learning imposes.

GLL strategies often require elaboration as responses can be based on what learners are 'aware' of, not necessarily what they employ. The L2 learner may incorporate a particularly effective construct in their L2 learning but be unaware of it (Cook, 2001).

One of the most comprehensive studies regarding learning strategies is that by O'Malley and Chamot (1990). Their investigation included broader reaching learner strategies with an overall model of L2 learning founded in cognitive psychology. These learning strategies include;

Metacognitive; planning learning, monitoring your own speech, self-evaluation, Social and Affective; working with fellow students or asking the teacher's help and Cognititve; note-taking, resourcing and elaboration.

Oxford (1994) proposed that numerous classification systems have lacked a coherent and well-accepted scheme for describing strategies, which often poses difficulties. These systems include;

1. Successful language learners (Rubin, 1975)
2. Psychological functions (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990)
3. Linguistic based, dealing with language monitoring, formal and functional practice (Bialystok, 1981)
4. Communication strategies such as paraphrasing (Tarone, 1983)
5. Separate language skills (Cohen, 1990)
6. Different styles and types of learner (Suffer, 1989)

There is also considerable merit in enabling students to become aware of different possibilities rather than to train them in any strategy (Cook, 2001; Bialystok 1990). Discovering the strategy that suits them best has greater implications for success. Learners are typically unaware of strategies used when undertaking various tasks. The awareness of strategies and their integration into the ongoing process of the language lesson is highly significant. When strategies have been integrated separately students fail to see the direct applicability. Nunan (1999) claims that it's more difficult for learners to see the relevance of the strategies in addition to the difficulty for learners to apply the strategies to language learning.

Additionally, various factors influence the choice of strategies used by students and include;

Motivation- More motivated students tend to use more strategies.

Gender- Females generally used more strategies than males.

Cultural background- Rote and other forms of memorization were used more widely by Asian students, compared to other cultural backgrounds.

Attitudes and beliefs- Negative attitudes and beliefs affected strategy choice.

Age and L2 stage- Different strategies are used by students of different ages and abilities.

Learning Styles- The individual learning style often reflected the choice of strategy.

Tolerance of ambiguity- Those students who tolerated ambiguity used different strategies than those who did not.

According to Ellis (1994), one of the most comprehensive classifications of learning strategies composed is that by Oxford (1985) which formed the basis for constructing a questionnaire on learning strategies. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Oxford (1986), focused on both primary and support strategies and is used extensively by scholars for research. Oxford (1990) listed some sixty-four. This was later revised to include a distinction between direct and indirect strategies and can be seen on table 1.

Table 1: Language Learning Strategy System (Oxford, 1990:17)

Direct Strategies	Indirect Strategies
1. Memory Strategies	4. Metacognitive Strategies
- creating mental links	- centering your learning
- applying images and sounds	- planning your learning
- employing action	- evaluating your learning
2. Cognitive Strategies	5. Affective Strategies
- practicing	- lowering your anxiety
- analysing and reasoning	- encouraging yourself
- creating structure	- taking your emotional temperature
3. Compensation Strategies	6. Social Strategies
- guessing intelligently	- asking questions
- overcoming limitations	-cooperating with others

The direct strategies consider the direct use of the target language to be learned while the indirect strategies enable the learner to acquire or remember a particular aspect of the language (Scovel 2001). There is a lack of clarity between strategies directed at learning the L2 and those directed at using it. In a comparative study of three classification systems conducted by Hsiao and Oxford (2002) the authors found that the six types, according to Table 1 proved to be superior when accounting for the array of strategies stated by language learners (Chamot, 2004). More recent strategy identification and classification have been data-driven using think-aloud protocol analysis (Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999; Chamot et al., 1996).

As summarized in Oxford (1999a, 1999b) L2 learning strategy use is highly related to L2 learning motivation, gender, age, culture, brain hemisphere dominance, career orientation, academic major, beliefs and the nature of the L2 task (Oxford, 2003).

THE JAPANESE CONTEXT

Language learning, being culturally contextualized is strongly bound within traditional strategies learned within the educational framework. It has been argued that learner strategies used by learners in an Asian context somewhat differed from their North American counterparts. Bedell and Oxford (1996) in their review of strategy use in various ethnolinguistic contexts surmised that learners often behave in particular culturally approved and socially encouraged ways during the learning process (Dornyei, 2005).

In Japan, Takeuchi (2003) conducted a three part EFL study considering; (1) learning biographies of 40 college level good learners (2) Strategies used by 18 highly advanced learners and (3) Strategy use reported in 69 books titled "How I have learned a Foreign language" In summation, the author concluded that various strategic characteristics were identified uniquely to the Japanese context and include; metacognitive strategies targeting maximizing input and the opportunities to use a foreign language, skill-specific strategies targeting conscious learning, memory strategies targeting internalisation of the linguistic system and cognitive strategies for practicing such as imitating shadowing and pattern practicing (Takeuchi, 2003).

Rote memorization of expressions, vocal repetition, pattern practicing, and reading aloud are generally specific to Japan but not highlighted in North American literature.

Self-regulation

According to Macaro (2001) cited in Dornyei (2005) 'across learning contexts those learners who are proactive in their pursuit of language learning appear to learn best'. More recent studies have focused more on the strategic learners' proactive approaches by considering self-regulatory processes. In essence, the crucial point regarding 'proactive strategic learners is not necessarily the exact nature of the strategies, tactics or techniques they apply but rather the fact that they do apply them' (Dornyei, 2005: 190). The creative effort geared towards learning and the capacity to do so is a key element.

Self-regulation encapsulates broader perspectives than focusing on learning strategies, which implies the use of cogni-

tive and behavioural processes. The attention has shifted from the *product* (strategies) to the *process* (self-regulation) where learners become active participants in their own learning by engaging in specific principles and processes. Self-regulation is often used synonymously with terms such as self-management, self-control, action control, volition, self-change, self-directed behaviour, coping behaviour, metacognition and problem-solving (Dornyei, 2005).

METHOD

Participant

The participant interviewed is a 37 year-old Japanese female who has completed high school and majored in English at a foreign language university in Japan. Upon completion of high school there was no motivation to continue English studies. This changed upon her return to Japan after travelling abroad where the informant engaged in various self-regulatory learning processes. She eventually enrolled in an English course at a foreign language university where she studied for three years.

Procedures

The semi-structured interview method has been employed in numerous studies in order to ascertain the learner's accounts of the strategies they employ (Ellis 1994: 534). The procedure selected was a one on one interview lasting thirty-one minutes incorporating both broad and specific questions. Attempts were made to enable the responses to be provided rather than imposed or influenced by the question type .The social nature and age of the respondent determined the type of interview as specific strategies in the past could have

likely been forgotten. The style of questioning employed minimal encouragers 'mirroring', repetition or paraphrasing of questions for clarity and to enable a longer response time and various "can you tell me about/ more about" questions. When selecting details within topics, 'funneling' was used in order to extrapolate more detailed responses. The questions were based on learning experiences, methods and strategies and recorded on mini-disc for analysis. The setting was based in a relaxed atmosphere and questions were geared for simplicity and explicitly for learning strategies both formal (university), informal (groups of friends) and personal self-study

Data Analysis

A summary of responses included the following; topical interests for courses of action; 'killing two birds with one stone' pen friends, foster parents plan volunteer work, reading books, listening to music, watching videos, singing lessons, singing in a band, belly dancing, drumming, Hollywood movie star interview CD for listening and general reading.

The respondent also had; language exchange partners, engaged in afternoon classes, conversation classes, and attained foreign language school university education. The data also indicated the motivational value travelling to English speaking countries and the passion for English and desire for learning casual English as opposed to 'square' textbook English.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During elementary school the respondent enjoyed English but then lost interest in

high school due to the 'square' and uninteresting nature of the learning process. Her interest returned again once she returned from a trip to the States. Based on the interview responses, many typical strategies both in formal and informal scenarios occurred. The most highly sought mechanisms were the numerous self-regulatory approaches selected. The respondent referred to seeking English enhancement via the conduit of personal interests as 'killing two birds with one stone'. For example, drumming, belly-dancing, and singing classes were sought and taught by English speakers in Japan, which is particularly pertinent in an EFL environment such as Japan where opportunities to use the L2 are limited. Additional activities such as singing in a band, having pen friends and doing volunteer work requiring English also enabled the learner to pursue personal interests whilst also enhancing motivation. This coincides with results conducted by Takeuchi (2003) which included metacognitive strategies for maximizing input and the opportunities to use a foreign language and, metacognitive strategies and 'good language learners' In addition Chamot (2004) argues that the choice and application of learning strategies is the learners metacognition. Furthmore, task-based learning strategies consider what you know, and to be able to use what you know, your organizational skills and a variety of resources. According to the respondent;

"*I didn't have time, that was problem so I had to use my brain…how to how to study English because my passion was still there*", which implied;

Cognitvive; creating structure,

Metacognitive; planning and evaluating learning Social; asking questions and cooperating with others such as band members and other foreigners, and Affective strategies; self-encouragement etc.

The respondent was aware of the need to employ particular strategies by inputting creative effort to improve her own learning despite the inadequacy of time due to work commitments. According to the interview responses Naiman et al. (1978) 'good language learner strategies were also employed the learner particularly finding a suitable learning style and developing an awareness of language both as system and communication and being involved in the learning process.

As mentioned previously, the informant proved to be highly proactive in the variety of interests that were pursued in English and highly self-regulatory. Other self-regulatory components included an extensive list (abbreviated here) according to Kuhl and Goschke (1994), Winne and Perry (2000), and Zeidner et al. (2000) in Dornyei (2005) and included effective time management, self-motivational beliefs such as intrinsic interest and self-efficacy, pride and satisfaction, action plans and strategic tactics which were discovered to be used by the informant. The respondent referred to textbook study as 'square' and that if you can follow your interests, then you can enjoy studying English more.

The informant also stated that;

"*I'm not perfect and it will be long way to be perfect umm…but I think it's OK as long as people understand what I am saying*" and then the question;

"What's your idea of English communication?" was answered with;

"*Umm...to make understand each other, it's just like a....just a tool of communication ahh, just like any other language*". A number of the responses were based on rewording of the question;

"What ideas or strategies about studying English in the past did you use?" The self-regulatory responses concerning the past, elicited the multitude of personal hobbies and interests and subsequent learning from English speakers.

According to Dornyei (2005) 'the notion of self-regulation of academic learning is a multidimensional construct which includes, cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, behavioural and environmental processes that learners can apply to enhance academic achievement' while the use of learning strategies is only one aspect of these. This enables a broader focus to be used rather than learning strategies alone. These constructs were identified from the informant responses at various stages of the learning process particularly with self-directed study. They include;

Cognitive; practicing in 'regular' learning situations, creating structures to learn and frame the learning,

Metacognitive; planning and evaluating learning tasks, such as the organization of language exchange partners and pen friends

Motivational; singing, travelling abroad, helping people within the Foster parents plan, communication with foreigners,

Behavioural; seeking opportunities to communicate with English speakers,

Environmental; communication in English speaking countries and with band members. The respondent found enjoyment in self-regulatory studies as they were directly associated with interests. The respondent was more willing to discuss 'strategies' of this nature as they were solidified as effective mechanisms for increasing proficiency in her experience.

CONCLUSION

Learning strategies are highly significant for learning and enable proficiency to develop. In the literature, the self-regulatory dimension has taken precedence when considering successful language learners. The dynamic variables and process-oriented approaches being analysed have provided valuable insights and future directions. According to the study, and depending on the individual's goal orientation, proactive learners are able to take greater control and effectiveness of their own learning. In this scenario the respondent sought numerous methods under various conditions to gain proficiency. By encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning, encourage learning through personal interests, providing greater understanding of strategies by successful students, learners have at their disposal potential frameworks for more effective learning. By becoming more 'self-regulated' the approaches and methods used by successful learners can be adapted to suit learners willing to be more proactive and adaptable to a changing learning style and by understanding that different combinations of strategies may suit different learners. Unfortunately the rigidity of educational systems and learning procedures across various cultures make self-regulatory approaches a tall order, particularly in Japan. Ultimately learning in life and language is 'our' responsibility.

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抜　　粋

　本研究は英語学習成功者の学習ストラテジー、自己制御、および自己制御行動分析に関する文献研究をベースとしている。自己制御とは先を見越して学習するという概念で、学習者は心的能力をタスクに関連した学術スキルに変えることができる（Dornyei、2005）。第二言語または外国語を学ぶ学生は、通常は文化や授業で特定されたストラテジーを使う。しかし、コンテキストや動機付け、学習スタイルのおける個性としての自分自身を考慮した場合、これらのストラテジーの不適切さに気づかないことが多い。学生ら自身の関心事項に向かわせて、言語獲得のための手段を自ら探すことを可能とすることで、自己制御のパースペクティブを使った学習者はストラテジーのみで学習した場合よりも達成度が高いことが判明している。観察不可能な心的過程を理解するために、インタビューという形式での口頭データを使って、言語学習ストラテジーおよび自己制御行動を確認した。ある学習者が用いた広範囲のアプローチを明らかにすることで、言語能力向上を考えている他の学習者にも同様のアプローチを確認、移転、適用が可能となる。

　キーワード：自己制御、学習ストラテジー、学習スタイル、言語学習、言語学習者