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Take Two Language Learners: a Case Study of the Learning Strategies of Two Successful Learners of English as a Second Language with Instrumental Motivation

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Abstract
The analysis of student self-report and observation data on two successful language learners studying English as a second language on a pre-sessional intensive English language course (Language Centre, University of Newcastle upon Tyne) revealed that they were aware of the learning strategies they used and why they employed them. Further, their choice of strategies was influenced by a combination of certain personal and situational factors. The study addressed three important and interrelated questions:

- What are the learning strategies that two successful ESL learners with instrumental motivation employ both inside and outside the classroom?
- Do they confirm the kinds of strategies suggested in the 'good language learner' studies?
- Which different learner factors affect their strategy choice? Does motivational orientation affect strategy use?

It was found that the learners' strategy use did not seem to be affected by their particular motivational orientation but, rather, by motivational level, attitudes towards language learning, personal learning style, teaching method and certain personality characteristics. In general, the study was a lesson in individual differences, lending depth and an added dimension to previous GLL studies, and supported the case for integrated, rather than separate, strategy training.

Introduction

In the early 1970s with the arrival of individualizing instruction L2A and language teaching research shifted its focus away from different teaching methodologies and made the learner the centre of its attention (Reiss 1985). Since then researchers have examined students' personality characteristics, learning and cognitive styles, and the specific strategies employed by effective vs

ineffective learners.

Most of the early studies of language learning strategies focused on the general approach and specific actions/techniques that the 'good' language learner used to improve his progress in developing L2 skills (for example, Rubin 1975 and 1981; Stern 1975). Other studies have examined the interaction between the learning strategies and various learner characteristics (e.g. language aptitude, personality traits, learning style, cognitive style, attitudes and motivation) of groups of both good and poor language learners (for example, Hosenfeld 1976; Naiman et al. 1978; O'Malley and Chamot 1990). Using quantitative methods and statistical analyses this research has put forward generalisations about the learning process and compiled lists of strategies considered important for good language learning. Thus, the emphasis has principally been upon general laws of language learning and less attention has been given to the detailed study of the differences to be found between individual learners (cf Gillette's 1987 diary study for an exception to this general trend). Consequently, in the present study I chose to focus on the self-reports of just two successful language learners, using qualitative, rather than quantitative methods of investigation, to see what this might uncover. Further, despite the fact that motivation is considered by both language teachers and SLA researchers alike as the prime mover in L2 learning success (Ellis 1994), few studies have explored the influence of motivational orientation (reason for learning an L2) and motivation level on language learning strategy use (Oxford 1989). The aims of the current study were, then, to identify and diagnose the learning strategies the subjects employed; to see in what way motivational orientation affected strategy choice; and to map the results of this research against existing descriptions of the 'good language learner' (hereafter GLL) in L2 research literature.

1. Defining Learning Strategies

Taroue (1980b, in Ellis 1994) makes a distinction between three kinds of strategy: production, communication, and learning. Production strategies are attempts to facilitate language use through advance preparation or rehearsal, for example. Communication strategies (Oxford's (1990) 'Compensation strategies - B') are used to overcome problems in communication messages due to limitations in knowledge or working-memory overload during real-time communication. Examples include: switching to the mother tongue, using mime or gesture, and adjusting or approximating the message. Language learning strategies, on the other hand, consist of attempts to promote linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the L2. Examples from Chamot (1987, in Ellis 1994) are: 'repetition' (: practising a language model either out loud or silently); 'elaboration' (: relating new knowledge to information already stored in long-term memory); and 'inferencing' (: making informed guesses about unknown target language items). The focus of the present study is on this last category, that is, on language learning strategies. As the primary source of data was the subjects' own insights into the learning process the focus is on the actions that the learners consciously employ to facilitate learning, and, as Oxford (1989) also suggests, make it more enjoyable. These actions are both behavioural (and, therefore, directly observable) and mental (in which case they have to be accessed via student self-observation).

2. Classifying strategies

Much of the earlier work on strategies (for example, Rubin 1975; Stern 1975; Naiman et al. 1978) was focused on isolating and listing the learning strategies shared by successful language learners. Basing her remarks on classroom observation, informal discussions with GLLs and L2 teachers and what she had observed of herself as a language learner Rubin (1975) suggested that the GLL:

i. guesses willingly and accurately;
ii. is eager to communicate and to learn from communication;
iii. takes risks and views errors as a useful tool for learning;
iv. focuses on both form and meaning;
v. seizes every opportunity to practise;

vi. monitors his own speech and that of others.

In addition to these strategies Stern (1975) observes that the GLL benefits from an awareness of his own learning style and preferred learning strategies, takes responsibility for his own learning, and tries to think in the target language. While Naiman et al.'s (1978) interview study of a group of highly proficient learners generally lent support to the Rubin-Stern inventories researchers found it was necessary to condense and re-order Stern's list according to the statements of the interviewees. This process created five key strategies. The GLL:

1) has an active task approach;
2) develops a sense of language as a system;
3) develops a sense of language as a means of communication;
4) copes with the affective demands of language learning;
5) monitors his L2 performance.

Later research tried to systemize findings by grouping the strategies that had been identified into broad classes. In order to establish a more comprehensive strategy system Oxford (1990) synthesised earlier work on learning strategies producing a new, multi-levelled taxonomy. This goes beyond the parameters of the present research, however, since it includes strategies that are used to overcome problems of communication, such as using gesture or paraphrase (these have been defined here as communication, not learning strategies). For the purposes of this study I used O'Malley and Chamot's (in O'Malley & Chamot 1990) system, which differentiates between three major types of strategy: metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective.

2.1. Metacognitive strategies

These actions have an executive function and involve planning for, monitoring and evaluating the success of a learning task. Examples include: 'self-management' (: being aware of the conditions that promote learning and trying to create those conditions); 'self-monitoring' (- this involves checking or correcting one's comprehension or production); 'self-evaluation' (:assessing one's linguistic and communicative competence).

2.2. Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategies involve the direct analysis and manipulation of language input. Frequently reported strategies belonging to this category are: 'repetition' (: imitating a language model aloud or silently); 'key word' (: remembering a target item by choosing an L1 word which is acoustically similar to the new word and making mental images linking it with the new word); 'inferencing' (: using all available sources of information to guess the meaning of unknown items and fill in missing parts).

2.3. Social/affective strategies

This group of strategies concern interaction with other learners and native speakers and management of the affective demands made by language learning. Examples given by O'Malley and Chamot are: 'co-operation' (- working with fellow learners to compare notes, solve a language problem or get feedback on a task); 'questioning for clarification' (: asking the teacher or a native speaker for repetition, explanation and/or examples); 'self-talk' (- encouraging or reassuring oneself about one's ability to perform a task by making positive statements).

3. Factors Affecting Strategy Choice

Language learning strategy use, both type and number, has been shown to be influenced by a myriad of different factors, both personal and situational. In a synthesis of strategy research findings Oxford (1989) lists the following possible influences on strategy choice: the target language; course level and number of years of study; metacognitive skill; age; sex; attitudes; motivational orientation and language learning goals; motivation level; personality; learning style; cognitive style; aptitude; career/academic specialization; nationality; teaching method; and nature of learning task. Differences have also been found between strategies used by FL learners as opposed to those used by students studying English in the L2 country itself. Chamot et al (1987, in O'Malley & Chamot 1990), for example, found that FL students used some strategies not reported by O'Malley et al.'s (1985a) ESL students (for example, rehearsal, translation, note-taking, and contextualisation). Thus, learning setting: formal or informal, SL or FL, may also influence strategy use.

Oxford and Nyikos (1989, in Oxford 1989) in a study of university FL students found that of all the variables examined motivational level had the strongest effect on reported use of learning strategies. Highly motivated learners used four types of strategies (: formal, functional, general study and input elicitation strategies) significantly more often than less motivated learners. Further, formal practice strategies were much more popular than functional practice strategies. Researchers attributed this last finding to the instrumental orientation (Gardner 1973) of the students whose aim was to fulfil course requirements and obtain good results in a traditional rule-based exam. In a different context, however, instrumental motivation might produce different findings. Ehrman (1990, in Ellis 1994), for example, found that a group of students learning languages for career reasons principally used communication-oriented strategies. Motivational level and orientation, reflected in language learning goals, have, thus, previously been shown to have certain effects on number and type of strategies used.

It was considered important for the purposes of my case study to control as many of these learner variables as possible. Thus I sought ESL students of the same age group, sex, national origin and level of proficiency, and with the same immediate language learning goals. Though the original purpose of the study was to examine the effect of the students' instrumental motivation on their strategy use, it became evident early on in the initial student interview that there were a number of other powerful influences that seemed to take precedence.

4. The Learners

The selection of the subjects for the case study was 'purposive' in that I sought volunteers whose native language I knew so that the investigation could be conducted in either their L1 or L2 and level of proficiency would not be a mitigating factor in accurate data collection. Thus, no attempt was made to select participants randomly from a given population and testing for the students' level of proficiency did not form part of the procedure. Instead I asked course teachers to comment on the subjects' L2 competence and looked over their pre-course test papers.

Both interviewees were male, Italian, belonged to the 26 - 35 age group, had university degrees and were attending the pre-sessional intensive English course so that they might fulfil the language requirement for a higher degree course at the university. I have described the subjects as 'successful' language learners and this term needs to be defined in the context of the present study. There are a number of possible criteria for choosing subjects for 'Good Language Learner' research. Reiss (1985) based her selection of 'good' language learners on teacher evaluation. Naiman et al.'s (1978) subjects had been recommended to the investigators as 'highly proficient': most had learnt between three to five languages and reached a 'working knowledge' or better in one or two.

Number of languages learnt was not the criterion for selecting the subjects for this study. Although A. was bilingual in Italian and Spanish, had a working knowledge of English and 'survival' French, V.'s only foreign language was English. It was the course teachers that rated the learners as successful. They were not, however, 'straight A students'. Vincenzo (hereafter V.) had obtained a combined score of 54 (List. 49, Writ. 58) for the Language Centre writing and listening tests. This meant there was 'a risk of degree course failure' and three months on the pre-sessional intensive

English course were recommended to bring his English up to the required standard. V. had also decided to sit the Trinity College London Examination for Spoken English a month prior to the course in order to get an external evaluation of his level of proficiency. He obtained a Pass with Merit for Grade Seven (Intermediate). Andres (hereafter A.) had obtained a combined mark of 45 (List. 53, Writ. 38) for the Language Centre assessment tests. This meant there was a 'high risk of degree course failure'. Again, three months' pre-sessional course were recommended. One teacher said of A. that he managed to communicate but was "very inaccurate". Another teacher said of V.: "He is a very keen student. However, he needs some practice in grammar". More positively, one teacher described V. as "one of the two most committed students in the class" and had no doubts about his ability to do well in the final exam. Additional comments included: "He works hard and contributes well"; "a competent listener"; "a very confident speaker". Furthermore, he himself felt satisfied with the progress he had made in the first month and confident about his ability to cope with the language task at hand. Among the comments made about A. were: "He's always alert"; "responsive"; "curious"; "He puts himself forward and motivates others to speak"; "He seems to be in tune with what the teacher is looking for". It is this keenness and confidence with which both A. and V. approach the learning task as well as their above-average achievement that makes them 'good' language learners.

5. Techniques of investigation

5.1 Unstructured vs structured instruments

Frequently used techniques, particularly in the initial stages of research on strategy use, include oral interviews with open-ended questions and learner diaries (see, for example, Naiman et al. 1978; O'Malley & Chamot 1990). These were in fact the first elicitation formats to be used in the present study. It was thought that using more focused stimuli, such as three- or five-point surveys might risk contaminating the data by influencing the subject's thoughts, i.e. 'putting ideas into their heads'.

5.2 Delayed vs immediate retrospection

Interviewing technique is not the only consideration to be made, of course, when dealing with retrospective descriptions of learning strategies. I was aware that there were a number of other problems associated with this type of data. A retrospective account might gloss over the details of a strategy; or rearrange the order in which specific thought steps occur. More importantly, the description might not be a true reflection of what the student actually does (Hosenfeld 1976). In spite of its advantages it was decided not to ask the students to introspect during class in the present study for two reasons: I did not want to risk a) interfering with the normal running of a class and b) changing the subject's typical classroom behaviour by making my presence felt. The students were asked, however, to try to make a note of any learning techniques they noticed during class so that they did not forget to enter them in their diaries. Rubin (1981) reports having a diary keeper use the same method. Her subject found it easy to note her strategies and, more significantly, that thinking about her strategies helped her learning.
The present study was undertaken in three stages: the first stage took the form of an interview questionnaire; the second involved guided diary-writing and classroom observation; and in the final phase the subjects completed a personality test and a structured five-point survey, which was followed by a discussion of the results. Informal discussions also took place prior to and throughout the three-week data collection period. For the purposes of the current paper I would like to focus on the initial questionnaire and later, more structured survey.

6. Phase 1: Interview Study

6.1. Introduction

In this part of the study the aim was to interview the subjects in detail in order to gain vital information on various personal factors that have been shown to have an influence on mode of learning and learning strategy choice. These were the subject's age, linguistic, educational and cultural background, beliefs about language learning, motivational orientation, language learning

goals, affective state, and general study techniques with regard to seven English learning tasks: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, speaking, reading and writing. It was hoped that analysis of the results of this study would serve two purposes: firstly, to arm the investigator with the fuller, truer learner portraits necessary for effectively guiding the remainder of the investigation; secondly, to reaffirm, qualify or confute existing evidence about typical GLL attributes reported in the GLL literature, and thirdly, to assess the relative importance of motivational orientation.

6.2. Description of the instrument and procedure

As a basis for the interview I adapted a published interview questionnaire: Naiman et al.'s (1978) 'Questionnaire for Interviews with Adult L2 Learners'. In order to obtain more detail I decided to supplement this more general questionnaire with one that asked questions about specific learning tasks or situations. The 'Student Interview Guide' (O'Malley et al. 1985) presents specific English learning tasks and the interviewee is asked to describe any special tricks or techniques he uses to help him in performing such tasks. For instance, students are asked to imagine that their teacher has told them to learn a list of ten English words and to describe any special ways they have to help them retain the new items. Certain modifications were made to the format to adapt it to the individual case. Further, not all the questions were asked systematically during the interview, as the interviewer let the interviewee's previous responses direct the sequence of questioning to a certain extent. Prior to the interviews interviewees were told: they could respond in whichever language they preferred, L1 or L2; no testing would be involved; the results of the study would not affect their course grades; and their participation would help them get to know more about themselves as learners and enable them to consider how their learning might be made more effective. Each interview lasted for about an hour and was audiotaped with the interviewee's permission, so that the interviewer's attention was free to concentrate on the elicitation process and not distracted by detailed note-taking.

7. Results

7.1. Part One of the interview

I began by asking V. and A. about their past language learning experiences. It was discovered that they had very different linguistic backgrounds. While V. had a monolingual family background, A. had a bilingual background. He had been born in Argentina and lived there for the first few years of his life. He described his Spanish as "very good" and said he code-switched with his relatives between Italian and Spanish. Further, whereas English was V.'s only foreign language, A. had also picked up 'survival' French naturalistically while travelling.

Since course level and number of years of study may influence strategy choice subjects were asked how long they had studied English for and teachers were asked to describe their level. Both subjects were judged by their teachers to be of "intermediate" level, they were, however, assigned to different classes, V. to the 'top' class and A. to a lower level class. This difference in level could partly be explained by the fact that V. had studied English formally for nine years whereas A. had only done three years of English at school. However, A. could be described as a more experienced language learner having acquired other languages besides English. There is evidence to suggest that more experienced learners can be more effective in their language learning. Nation and McLaughlin (1986, in Ellis 1994) for example, found that in a group of mono-, bi- and multilingual learners who were taught an artificial language the multilingual subjects did best of all on an implicit learning task.

These first three interview responses demonstrate the complexity of each language learning career and the difficulty of linking learner performance or behaviour to single details of personal history.

Subjects were then asked about the circumstances under which they learnt English in their country of origin. While at school both V. and A. were taught using the grammar translation method and,

consequently, had little functional speaking practice and spent the majority of their time doing grammar exercises (manipulating uncontextualised sentences), translating from English to Italian and writing essays on topical themes. Learning English for V. was "like learning other subjects: the aim was to pass the exam, not to learn the language". As I discovered later in the second part of the interview this teaching method did not accord with V.'s own views about what language learning involves. Accordingly, when asked if they rated their English training before coming to Newcastle as successful and satisfying the subjects' answers were as follows:

> V.: "No. At school it was very boring, like the other subjects."
>
> A.: "There's a substantial difference between that which you learn of a language in another country and that which you learn in the country in which it is spoken; there's an abyss!"
> "The goal is to manage to pass a test not to cope with real-life experience. If you do it only to sit an exam, it's useless!"

Contrasting his unsatisfying English training at school with a satisfying first week at the Language Centre, V. said:

> "I am very happy to be learning English on this course because they use a variety of techniques - it's a completely different method - we listen to audiocassettes, watch videos on T.V., do writing, speaking, reading - it's stimulating".

When asked if the activities on the present course were motivating because of the variety or the content V. attributed his positive affective state to the teaching methods, not the topics of study. This suggests that teaching method can also have a significant indirect effect on the number of strategies used as it can feed the student's motivation.

7.2. Part Two of the Interview

A. Beliefs about language learning

Instead of asking interviewees to put themselves in a hypothetical learning situation, as Naiman et al. had done in their interview study, I inquired about their current language learning situation, views on language learning and preferred ways of learning.

I first asked what they thought was the best way to learn a language in their view. Both V. and A. considered a combination of formal and informal learning to be most effective. This is the response that the vast majority of Naiman et al.'s GLLs also gave. The present learning environment thus represents their ideal: a formal setting within an immersion situation, i.e. a course in the target language country.

While almost all Naiman et al.'s GLLs saw their learning as essentially 'conscious and systematic', interestingly, both V. and A. viewed language learning as comprising both conscious and unconscious elements. A. also qualified his answer by making a distinction between the areas of grammar and vocabulary:

> "Grammar study is important but so is immersing yourself in the (target language) context to learn vocabulary".

Naiman et al. suggest that it could be significant that their two 'unsuccessful' learners viewed

language learning as an exclusively unconscious process.

B. Motivational orientation

When asked about his reasons for learning English. V. responded:

> "I must do it or I can't continue
> my studies".

His original decision to learn English at school was also motivated by practical considerations. V. chose English "because it's the language spoken throughout the world . . It's the official language so it's more useful than French or German...Not for the culture, not because I liked Manchester United when I was a child!" A.'s response was similar:

> "English is the language of communication
> for everybody".

He, too, chose English for career reasons. When asked if he was interested in British culture he said that for the moment his overriding goal was that of learning the language for the purposes of his immediate future studies.

These answers confirmed the subjects' motivation type to be purely instrumental, at this stage at least.

7.3. Strategies

An analysis was undertaken of the interviews for evidence of learning strategies that had been identified in previous GLL studies. Some of the strategies identified describe a general approach to learning while others refer to specific behaviours.

A. 'An active task approach'

The most striking characteristics shared by both learners were their active involvement in the learning process and the fact that they benefited from an awareness of their own learning style and preferred learning strategies. Both subjects had decided to supplement their regular classes with a variety of other formal and informal language learning activities that were appropriate to their individual beliefs about language learning, preferred learning style and language learning goals.

A. made regular use of the Language Centre's Self-Access Centre for at least an hour after classes to do grammar exercises. When asked what he considered to be the most important language area to be understood and to communicate in English he answered accordingly:

> "Grammar forms the basis, then pronunciation, and then vocabulary. Vocabulary is something you acquire over time but for communication, to make yourself understood, grammar and pronunciation are the most important".

He also finds watching the T.V. very helpful. He particularly recommends watching documentaries:

> "You shouldn't watch a film, you should watch a documentary where someone is presenting something so that your attention is on that one subject, not a film - a film is a little confusing".

V. also visits the Self-Access Centre on a regular basis to improve his listening and expand his vocabulary so that he might converse more easily:

> "I need time to listen to words in a relaxed way, to write them down - it's the best way for me to remember words and their meanings".

In addition to this V. has his own vocabulary book which he has divided into three sections ('grouping'): 'Rules", 'Vocabulary', and 'Adjectives and Adverbs':

> "When I find a word I write it down and when I get home I look it up in the dictionary and write it down in my vocabulary book". ('note-taking'; 'resourcing')

He generally tries to write the meanings in English only translating into his L1 when it is more economical to do so, when he learnt 'parts of the body', for example. He also uses translation when he speaks but sees it as a hindrance to his learning rather than an aid: he would like to learn to think in the second language. Indeed Stern (1975) notes that it is only the poor language learner who is unwilling to let go of his own language as a reference system.

V. and A. have thus assessed their L2 competence independently identifying their weak points ('self-evaluation'), drawn up a personalised action plan to target these areas and carried it out ('self-management').

B. 'Realisation of language as a means of interaction and communication'

Besides attending to the formal properties of the language V. and A. create plenty of functional practice opportunities for themselves. When V. was still in Italy he arranged to have 'homestay' accommodation in Newcastle (i.e., to live with a host family), "so I can learn about the culture and language in a full-time 'immersion' situation. I thought it would be the best way of being involved at every moment in listening and speaking English". When asked about his choice of accommodation A. said he had chosen a University hall of residence since "you have contact with other students - that's important". V. and A. continually seek out situations in which they can interact with members of the target language or fellow course members. V. also acknowledged a concern for the sociocultural meaning of words and appropriacy in language use:

> "I don't understand the way that you have to behave in social situations and it's important for me to understand these characteristics of the language in order to live well".

When asked about their typical classroom behaviour both subjects expressed a preference for being actively involved in the proceedings. After minimal functional speaking practice at high school V. was appreciating the opportunities for active involvement in lessons. A. had also been given little chance to use functional practice strategies at school and yet preferred to participate in class. Further, this personal preference accorded with his beliefs about language learning:

> "I believe that a certain participation is an important part of learning".

The subjects' increase in social strategies was not only a result of the L2 learning environment but also a product of their beliefs about language learning, preferred learning style, and the particular instructional method. Neither student was afraid of asking questions or making mistakes in front of others. When asked what they did when they did not understand something in a lecture they both unhesitatingly replied that they made a note of the item and waited for the next opportune moment to ask ('question for clarification'). Other observers (eg, Rubin 1975; Stern 1975) have also noted lack of inhibition to be a common characteristic of GLLs (though not a necessary one: cf Reiss

1985).

C. 'Copes with the affective demands of language learning' & 'monitors his L2 performance'

Other strategies noted for V. were: positive self-talk, self-monitoring, repetition, and selective attention. V. copes with the stress of the immediate language learning situation by making positive statements to himself:

> V.: "I say: I'm studying, I'm doing my work and I'm trying to do my best, and I don't think about the exam . . If I've done my best I can't do more so if I don't pass the exam, O.K.!"

Secondly, he repeatedly asks to be corrected. When he makes a pronunciation error and is corrected he repeats the model out loud. He uses these strategies both inside and outside the classroom to memorise new vocabulary items, for example. However, he adds:

> "In fact I think I have to change this way of learning because it's not very useful".

His self-evaluation, therefore, involves examination not only of his L2 competence but also of the effectiveness of his strategy use.

Additional strategies that featured in A's interview were: inferencing, resourcing, structured reviewing, associating/elaboration and advance preparation. When asked if he liked to take the language apart and analyse it, A stated:

> "The essential thing is to be able to grasp the general gist of a text . . Maybe one part's clearer and another's less clear, but if you manage to link the gaps with what you've understood…at the end you have a result".

This suggests that A. does not worry too much about missing details and is happy to 'get the big picture'. He also uses all information available to infer the meaning of unknown target language items. Such tolerance of ambiguity has been noted as a typical characteristic of the GLL by a number of researchers, for example, Rubin (1975); Stern (1975); Gillette (1987). It is taken as a sign of a 'field-independent' (Witkin et al. 1971, in Ellis 1994) cognitive style, in which the learner is able to identify particular items in a field (in this case, language input) and not be distracted by other non-essential items in the content. For example:

> I.: "If you asked a native speaker for directions, what means would you use to help you understand the reply?"
> A.: "Apart from the words the gestures are also important . . the totality - you try to take in as much as possible . . every element is positive for comprehension".

In the same way, if given a list of new vocabulary items to memorise, he would first try to guess the meanings before checking them in a dictionary. To aid memorisation he believes it is important to then make some personal associations with the words involving "objects, colours, names" ('associating/elaboration'). Perhaps significantly, when I asked V. to describe his particular tricks for memorising new items he was unable to:

> "I have never thought about this, my personal way of remembering things . . I don't know . . sometimes I am able to speak without thinking because the words link somehow in my brain and I surprise myself".

It may be that V. has simply never 'watched' his memory strategies. On the other hand, he might not have any particularly positive strategies for memorising vocabulary. In fact he later stated that he did not have a good memory and one of his biggest problems was remembering words. His priority at that moment, however, was to improve his store of vocabulary and, after discussing a range of possible strategies in this study, he began to consider new, more effective ones. This awareness-raising, then, proved useful to strategy use.

'Advance preparation' is another strategy reported by A. but not typical of V.'s learning behaviour. Before making an important telephone call, for example, A. would look up any relevant words or phrases. Similarly, in preparation for an oral presentation he would create a network of ideas and look up any useful vocabulary. V. is a 'classic risk-taker' (Gillette 1987), on the other hand. When asked whether he would do any preparation before opening a bank account in England, for example, he replied:

> "No, I don't prepare myself: I go and try".

Significantly, he adds that in his opinion strategy choice is linked to personality characteristics:

> "I think that these different strategies depend on your personal behaviour".

V. is not the type of person who would look at a pamphlet before joining a bank in England or a bank at home in Italy. In this instance, personality characteristics seem to surface as the most influential factor in strategy choice.

8. Phase Three: Self-Report Survey

8.1. Introduction

The third and final phase of data collection involved administering a self-report survey and discussing the results with the informants. A number of researchers have used these methods to assess students' learning strategies (for example, Politzer & McGroarty 1985; Chamot et al. 1987, in Oxford 1990). The purpose of the survey was to reinforce some of the information gathered in phases one and two of the investigation. The advantage of complementing open surveys with such a structured instrument is that all the information obtained is relevant and can be objectively scored and analysed. It is then possible to make comparisons of group results or to detect gaps in an individual student's strategy repertoire that can be targeted for strategy training (Oxford 1990).

8.2. Instrument

The structured survey used in this study was the 'Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Version 7.0' (Oxford 1990), which is the version specifically aimed at students of English as a second or foreign language. It contains fifty items about language learning behaviour and students have to respond in terms of how true the statement is of what they typically do when learning a language.

8.3. Procedure

Like the initial questionnaire the survey was administered individually so that there would be no risk of one subject's self-report influencing another's, and the investigator could effectively relate responses to information already obtained on that particular subject. Data were collected informally outside the classroom setting. Questionnaires and tape recordings were later analysed for reaffirmation of previously mentioned strategies.

Students were told to read each statement about language learning and to indicate on a separate worksheet how true it was of what they did. They were told there were no 'right' and 'wrong' answers

and it was of the utmost importance that they answer honestly; again, the results would let them know more about themselves as language learners and help them focus on new ways of improving their learning.

On completion of the survey the subjects calculated their own averages: an overall average and one for each part of the SILL which represented a different group of learning behaviours. They then filled out a profile of their results which showed them how often they used strategies for learning English and which types they used the most or the least. The option was also given of graphing averages to facilitate comparisons of frequencies of strategy types.

Once the student had completed his profile of results the investigator asked him: firstly, to describe the strategies he found most/least effective and to give reasons for his choices; secondly, to pick out some strategies which he had not considered using before but which he might like to try out in the next few weeks; and lastly, if he thought his particular motivation for learning English had affected his strategy choice in any way.

8.4. Results

In sum, as expected, A. came out as having a broad range of strategies that he used frequently. His overall average for the SILL was 3.7 (out of a possible 5.0), which is classed in the SILL key as 'high' and meant that he usually used the strategies listed in the inventory for learning English. His highest score was 4.5 for the category of strategies labelled 'Learning with others'. This result accords well with his sociable, outgoing behaviour and appreciation for naturalistic learning, as a result of past language learning experience. His lowest score was 3.2 for the group 'Managing your emotions'. This score is rated as 'medium' in the key and means that he only sometimes uses the strategies in this category. During the informal discussion that followed the survey A. admitted that he sometimes felt nervous using the L2 when he wanted to make a good impression but felt that being relaxed was an essential part of the learning process. This was the first time such feelings had surfaced during data collection, and belied the relaxed, self-confident image that had been projected up to that point. Their reporting may be due to a combination of factors: the subject was probably feeling more relaxed with the investigator at this stage; also, maybe he had never thought of relaxation as a strategy, as Oxford (1992) has suggested. This was an unexpected discovery and highlights the potential limitations of using a single investigation technique and the importance of building up a relationship of trust with a subject over time.

V.'s overall average for the SILL was similar to A.'s at 3.6. This is also classed as a high score and meant V. usually used the strategies listed. His highest score was again for category F: 'Learning with others'. The particular learning environment (i.e., the fact that he is studying in the target language country and living with an English family), his sociability, beliefs about language learning and communicative teaching methods all played a part in producing this high result. Not surprisingly, in view of his comments on the ineffectiveness of his memory strategies (see 7.4.3.), his lowest score: 2.1 was for the category 'Remembering more effectively'. This score is classed as 'low' and means that this group of strategies is generally not used. During discussion of the results he expressed a wish to increase his use of elaboration and contextualisation. He rejected the ideas of using rhymes, flashcards and physical actions to remember new words as he did not see the sense in them, they did not suit his preferred learning style. Perhaps in this way a learner's preferred learning style might limit his strategy use and adversely affect learning. His next lowest score was for 'Managing your emotions'. In his view he scored low here not because he did not think to relax when he felt afraid of using English but because he never felt frightened of speaking in English. This may well explain why he did not make use of 'Advance Preparation' either. He did feel tense sometimes when asked a question unexpectedly but believed that "a little anxiety is a good thing". Bailey (1983, in Oxford 1989) also reports on a relationship between anxiety and language learning behaviour. In her diary study she found that strong competitiveness and anxiety make some learners give up and spur others on to do better. V. might, therefore, belong to the latter group.

Notably, in answer to my asking him what effect he thought his particular type of motivation had had

on his strategy use he replied that it had had no effect whatsoever; he was using the same strategies for learning English as he used for other academic subjects; further, he realised that they were not all effective but did not have the knowledge or time due to the intensity of the course to explore new methods independently. He responded very positively to the idea of an integrated strategy training programme, which would take the time constraint into consideration and make the application of a particular technique clear.

9. Discussion

Generally, the self-report data obtained in the course of this three-week study constituted a lesson in individual differences, emphasising the difficulty of extricating different learner factors and attributing learner behaviour to one aspect of personal background or situation. It was discovered that, even after controlling a number of variables, these two students had quite distinct linguistic backgrounds and learning behaviours. For example: one made effective use of affective strategies, the other, though aware of their benefit, was unsuccessful in using them; one instinctively used a range of vocabulary learning strategies, the other's repertoire was limited and had proved ineffective; one used advance preparation, the other tended not to, and attributed this to a general personality characteristic. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a number of commonalities between the two learners that largely confirmed the findings of GLL research.

The more general common attributes of V. and A. are:

* They have a strong sense of personal responsibility for their own learning, continually evaluating and planning for their learning independently
* They are aware of and prepared to confront what the learning process involves, i.e. that it takes time and persistent effort; and, unlike almost all Naiman et al's GLLs, that it comprises both conscious and unconscious elements
* They are also conscious of themselves as individuals in relation to the learning task and exploit this knowledge: they have explicit beliefs about how to learn a second language; know their preferred learning style and adapt the learning situation to their own purposes
* They focus on both form and meaning, creating frequent formal and functional practice opportunities
* They have a strong desire to communicate and consequently become 'high-input generators'

Further, it was possible to subsume the more specific actions under the three headings distinguished in O'Malley and Chamot's framework: metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective. The students both have a large and varied repertoire of learning strategies, which they orchestrate according to the particular learning task. The contents of their individual strategy banks are the product of several personal and situational factors. Among those highlighted in the present research were: views on how to learn a second language, motivational level, personality traits, past language learning experience, learning style, teaching methods and the nature of the task. While motivation type did not seem to affect strategy use, the subjects' particular learning situation, in the target language environment, and strong motivation, fuelled by both the time constraint and teaching method, resulted in an increase in the number of strategies used. For example, A., who had had significant success at learning languages naturalistically, had adopted a more intensive, studial approach to learning by doing grammar exercises each day and reading dissertations on his own academic subject to build up a store of terms; V., who had a more studial style of learning, had got into the habit of using more social strategies, like working with fellow students, and outside the classroom he made the most of functional practice opportunities. In fact an increase in use of social strategies was reported for both learners and found to be the result not only of setting but also of a learner-

centred teaching approach that emphasised cooperation and class participation.

As different kinds of data collection procedures had previously been found to influence the type of strategies identified (O'Malley & Chamot 1990) it was decided to use multiple data collection techniques. The strategies reported in both the interviews and diaries, and perhaps, therefore, particularly significant, are as follows:

Metacognitive strategies:- Directed attention, self-management, self-monitoring and self-evaluation. Delayed production did not seem to be one of the subjects' learning strategies. This may be because they already have a working knowledge of English along with a strong drive to communicate.

Cognitive strategies:- Repetition, resourcing, deduction and inferencing. The most frequently mentioned strategy of all in this category was inferencing. This finding lends support to Rubin's (1981) hunch that inferencing, both inductive and deductive, is crucial to successful language learning.

Social/affective strategies:- Asking the teacher or other native speaker for clarification; controlling your emotions. A further notable characteristic of both learners was their sense of humour. Naiman et al. (1978) also report this as a technique GLLs use to manage the affective demands of language learning.

Another interesting finding for this category of strategies was V.'s positive use of anxiety to encourage him in his learning. 'Using anxiety' can, therefore, be considered as an additional positive strategy to increase a learner's motivation level and, thus, potentially, his rate of learning.

From the discussions that followed the final survey, it was clear that the study had given both learners the knowledge and confidence to reassess and make considered improvements to their individual strategy banks.

10. Conclusion

This study generally confirmed the types of strategies identified in the Rubin-Stern inventories and the O'Malley and Chamot - Oxford classification schemes. However, at the same time it served to highlight the individual learner differences and complexity of each language learning situation so often obscured in quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Various learner and situational variables were controlled (age, sex, national origin, motivational orientation and level, the language being learnt, learning environment and task requirements) and yet qualitative analysis of the data indicated that significant differences still existed, each subject had his own distinct way of going about the language learning task. These individual approaches and choices of strategies were the result of the interaction of specific personal and situational factors. Further, they had produced different outcomes: in the initial assessment V. scored more highly for writing and A. did better on listening.

In spite of the fact that I had set about to examine the effect of instrumental motivation on strategy use, consideration of the individual case-histories and learners' own views on the issue suggested that type of motivation did not have a significant influence on strategy use. Key influential factors included: beliefs about language learning, certain personality traits (sociability, personal determination, flexibility and open-mindedness), preferred learning style and setting, including location, teaching method and length of course.

From the point of view of methodology it was found that while, over time and with the establishment of trust, delayed retrospection produced a great deal of valuable information on the language learning process, this technique generally failed to uncover the detailed sequence of thought steps that occur during learning. It, therefore, seems important to complement this type of research with self-reports involving immediate retrospection and think-aloud procedures. A further suggestion for

future research would be to carry out a longitudinal study to investigate any developmental trends in strategy use, it would be interesting to see if the students' strategy choice changed as the semesters progressed and their time in the L2 environment increased.

Rubin (1981) notes that identifying successful student strategies is only the first step, however. The next task for researchers is to combine these mentalistic approaches with empirical investigations in order to discover which strategies are most productive for which learners with which tasks and in which settings. The most practical and perhaps most effective way for a teacher to approach this challenge is to begin by raising student awareness of the mental baggage all students bring with them to the learning experience and the variety of ways there are to deal with the task successfully. A student will then be in a better position to choose ways of learning which acknowledge and speak to their own psyche.

Implications for teaching

What this study shows is that although the task involves careful thought and planning it is indeed possible, without the need for sophisticated instruments or highly specialised researcher skills, to obtain a wealth of useful information on the individual student: his beliefs about language learning, language learning goals, preferred ways of learning and existing strategy repertoire. A teacher can then use this data in the planning and execution of an integrated strategy training programme that: a) lets students discover more about themselves as language learners; b) encourages them to evaluate their learning and strategy use; and c) gives them the opportunity to explore new learning approaches/techniques and make any personal improvements to their existing learning behaviour, with the contents of an existing programme providing a real context (cf Nunan, in Benson & Voller 1997; and Scharle & Szabo 2000). By developing their metacognitive skills in this way we are helping learners take greater control of their own learning and encouraging the kind of active involvement and personal investment that has proved crucial to successful L2 acquisition.

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