An Experimental Study of Language Learning Strategies
: Particular Focus on the Patterns of Strategy Use
by Japanese University Learners of English

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Introduction

In recent years, the focus has shifted from the teacher to the learner in foreign/second language education. There are some learner's factors which affect second language learning, for example, intelligence, aptitude, personality, motivation, attitude, preferences, beliefs, age of acquisition, target language, task, environment and in particular, language learning strategies. As one of second language learners, I have been seeking for the better way since I started learning English in my junior high school. Then I knew the idea of “language learning strategies.” According to Oxford (1990), language learning strategies are actions taken by second and foreign language learners to control and improve their own learning” (p.ix). I wanted to know what kind of strategies other people were using. Is there the best strategy?

This study will focus on second language learning from the point of view of language learning strategies. The purposes of this paper are to establish the theory of language learning strategies, and to examine the relationship between strategies used by Japanese university English students and their proficiency in English. This paper is a part of my master's thesis in 2008.

This study begins with a chapter on introduction of what “language learning strategies” is. The chapter includes; the definition, features and classification of strategies. Language learning strategies have been researched since in 1980s, but there is not any overwhelming definition or classification yet. Therefore, we first have to establish more refined definition and classification in order to conduct the experiment. In chapter 2, we will show the experimental procedures such as purposes, participants and test materials. In chapter 3, we examine the relationship between Japanese university English students' strategy use and their proficiency in English. For this purpose, research findings are presented and discussed. That will make it possible to learn an important key for better second language learning. There is bibliography at the end of the paper. In this paper, the word “second language learning” indicates not only, so-called, second language learning (SLL) but also be extended to cover the notion of foreign language learning (FLL).

Finally, the experiment makes it clear that there are some patterns of language learning strategies use by Japanese university learners of English. It will lead to the future step for better second language learning.
1. Language Learning Strategies

Before it is possible to enter into a detailed discussion of language learning strategies, we must try to clarify our central conception of them.

1.1. Definition

The word “strategy” is defined in Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary as (1) A Plan that is intended to achieve a particular purpose, (2) The process of planning something or carrying out a plan in a skillful way, (3) The skills of planning the movements of armies in battle or war. This strategy concept has influenced education and is now used in second language learning. According to Ellis (1994), Stern (1975) was one of the first researchers to take a look at the “good” language learner. Stern said “In our view strategy is best reserved for general tendencies or overall characteristics of the approach employed by the language learner, leaving techniques as the term to refer to particular forms of observable learning behavior.” Since then, a lot of researchers have stated what language learning strategies are. The definitions by Rubin (1975) and Oxford (1990) are well-known now. Rubin defined strategies as “the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge.” Oxford wrote “learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations.” Ellis (1994) defined them as “mental or behavioral activity related to some specific stage in the overall process of language acquisition or language use.” Takeuchi (2003) added more specifically: “Learner’s conscious techniques or actions in learning foreign language which possibly make the task performance or language acquisition easier, more effective or more efficient when a single or some combined language learning strategies are used in appropriate stage for the particular activities.” In contrast, Muranoi (2006) defined them as “various actions or mental process for facilitating learner’s learning.” By for the simplest definition.

Ellis (1994) pointed out that there are four premises for the various definitions of language learning strategies. Language learning strategies are: (1) general approaches or particular techniques (2) behavioral (and, therefore, observable) or mental, or both (3) conscious and intentional or subconscious (4) direct or indirect on interlanguage development. To put the matter simply, each researcher have a different own definition depending on these premises he/she takes. However, the biggest difficulty in defining this term is, as O’Malley and Chamot (1990) mentioned, not the difference in their premises but the framework on which each researcher relied.

For example, Rubin, Oxford and Wenden treated learning strategies as a study of second language acquisition or language education. They are data-driven researchers who study individual differences by choosing to describe strategies that learners are actually using. O’Malley, Chamot, Weinsten and Mayer, on the other hand, look at learning strategies using cognitive psychology. They are concept-driven studies trying to explain theoretically a point of view of an information-processing model.

With these points in mind, this paper will adopt the former alternative which Rubin and Oxford took as their framework. In addition to that, the four premises for language learning strategies here are; (1) general approaches and particular techniques (2) both behavioral (and, therefore,
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observable) and mental conscious and intentional direct or indirect on interlanguage development.

Considering all these researchers' definitions, frameworks and the premises, the team “language learning strategies” can be defined as “behaviors or mental process which learners use consciously and that affect directly or indirectly for learning language” in this paper.

1.2. Features

Though language learning strategies were defined in the previous section, it would be almost impossible to show the various roles of the learning strategies for language acquisition or education in just one sentence. Many researchers are combining the features with the definitions.

Now this paper will also present the feature of language learning strategies. First, recall there are bases and frameworks that make a definition. Additionally, Takeuchi (2003) offered the following points to be put in the definition. For one thing, he suggested it was important that learning strategies themselves were not distinguished by being good or not and just had the possibility to help learning when they were used for specific tasks with a certain aim (Cohen 1998). As you can see that language learning study was started from “good learner” research. Only the techniques which seemed to contribute second/foreign language learning were called “language learning strategies” and the other techniques that did not contribute language learning were excluded heretofore. What is more, he proposed the relationship between learning stages (beginning, intermediate and advanced) and language learning strategies use. One final point is that language learning strategies are effective both when just one item is used and when some are used together (O’Malley and Chamot 1990). This paper does not take these points into definition just as Takeuchi (2003) insisted, but have them in the characteristics below.

The features of language learning strategies for this study are largely referred to as JACET (2005). They covered many problems that had been discussed in previous works, perhaps because the thesis published in 2005 was relatively new. Now, let us see the features of language learning strategies in this research.

A) Language learning strategies have a possibility to make language learning easier and contribute language acquisition (competence and performance).

B) Language learning strategies are what learners can use consciously according to need and then allow them to become more responsible and self-directed.

C) Some language learning strategies are behavioral (and, therefore, observable) while other are mental (and, therefore, not observable)

D) Some language learning strategies contribute directly while other contribute indirectly on interlanguage development

E) Language learning strategies are not distinguished by being good or not and just have effectual way and non-effectual way.

F) Language learning strategies allow students to properly use the strategies with appropriate guidance.

G) Language learning strategies use varies as a result of learner's internal factors (sex, age, belief, aptitude, motivation, personality, learning experience, proficiency, cognitive/learning style, learning purpose, learning stage, cultural background, intelligence, etc.) and external factors (target language, task, environment, etc.).
H) Language learning strategies are used single or in combination (interdependent).

1.3. Classification

There are many systems of language learning strategies. Earlier studies, definition and features were concerned to determine the classification. They are grounded on the strategy system by Oxford (1990) which bases on the same framework with this research. Her classification is very popular because it is considered the most inclusive system of language learning strategies at the present moment. In fact, it was picked up in the section of learning strategy in *A Guide to English Language Teaching Terminology* (Shirahata et al, 1999).

Language learning strategies are divided into two major classes: direct and indirect. These two classes are subdivided into a total of six groups (cognitive, memory, and compensation under the direct class; metacognitive, affective, and social under the indirect class) (See Figure 1.)

**Figure 1** Classification of Language Learning Strategies

- The two classes and six groups

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  Learning Strategies
    Direct Strategies  
      I. Cognitive Strategies  
      II. Memory Strategies  
      III. Compensation Strategies  
    Indirect Strategies  
      I. Metacognitive Strategies  
      II. Affective Strategies  
      III. Social Strategies
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Each of six groups shown above has some more concrete strategies, as shown in Figure 2.

Some language learning strategies which relate with learning directly are called direct strategies. All direct strategies require mental processing of the target language, but the three groups of direct strategies (cognitive, memory and compensation) do this processing differently and for different process (Oxford 1990). Cognitive strategies, such as practicing or analyzing, enable learners to understand and produce new language by many different means. Memory strategies, such as grouping or using imagery, have highly specific functions. They help students store and retrieve new information. Compensation strategies, like guessing or using synonyms, allow learners to use the language despite their often large gaps in knowledge.

Other language learning strategies are called indirect strategies because they support and manage language learning without, in many instances, directly involving the target language (Oxford 1990). Indirect strategies are divided into metacognitive, affective and social. Metacognitive strategies allow learners to control their own cognition; that is, learners can coordinate their own learning processes by using study habits such as centering, arranging, planning and evaluating. Affective strategies help to regulate emotions, motivations and attitudes. Social strategies help students to learn through interaction with others. Indirect strategies are useful in virtually all language learning situations and are applicable to all four language skills: listening, reading, speaking and
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Classification of Language Learning Strategies - All strategies for six groups

Direct strategies

A. Practicing
1. Repeating
2. Formally practicing with sounds system
3. Formally practicing with writing system
4. Recognizing and using formulas and patterns
5. Recombining

B. Receiving and sending messages
1. Getting the idea quickly
2. Using resources for receiving and sending messages

C. Analyzing and reasoning
1. Analyzing expressions
2. Analyzing contrastively (across languages)
3. Translating
4. Transferring

Cognitive strategies

D. Creating structure for input and output
1. Taking notes
2. Summarizing
3. Highlighting

Figure 2 Classification of language learning strategies - All strategies for six groups
A. Creating mental linkages
1. Grouping
2. Associating/elaborating
3. Placing new words into a context

B. Applying images and sounds
1. Using imagery
2. Semantic mapping
3. Using keywords
4. Representing sounds in memory

Memory strategies

C. Reviewing well
1. Structured reviewing

D. Employing action
1. Using physical response or sensation
2. Using mechanical technique

Compensation strategies

B. Overcoming fluencies in speaking and writing
1. Switching to the mother tongue
2. Using mime or gesture
3. Avoiding communication partially or totally
4. Selecting the topic
5. Adjusting or approximating the message
6. Coining words
7. Using a circumlocution or synonym
8. Using a transformation of sounds
9. Learning words
10. Adapting to the topic

A. Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing

Compensation strategies

A. Guessing intelligently
1. Reasoning deductively
2. Using linguistic clues
3. Using other clues

Classification of Language Learning Strategies – All strategies for six groups

Figure 2
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Classification of Language Learning Strategies - All strategies for six groups

Indirect Strategies

Figure 2: Classification of language learning strategies - All strategies for six groups
A. Lowering your anxiety
   1. Using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation
   2. Using music
   3. Using laughter

Affective strategies

B. Encouraging yourself
   1. Making positive statements
   2. Taking risks wisely
   3. Rewarding yourself

C. Taking your emotional temperature
   1. Listening to your body
   2. Using a checklist
   3. Discussing your feelings with someone else

D. Cooperating with others
   1. Cooperating with peers
   2. Cooperating with proficient users of the new language

Social strategies

A. Asking questions
   1. Asking for clarification
   2. Asking for verification
   3. Asking for correction

B. Organizing network
   1. Making friends with peers
   2. Making friends with proficient users of the new language

C. Cooperating with others
   1. Cooperating with peers
   2. Cooperating with proficient users of the new language

D. Empathizing with others
   1. Developing cultural understanding
   2. Developing awareness of others' thoughts

Figure 2: Classification of language learning strategies — All strategies for six groups
In this classification, the most important points are, position of cognitive strategies, the value of the strategy of "organizing network," and the differentiation between asking for clarification and asking for verification. Although three direct strategies appear equal, this study argues that cognitive strategies of greater importance than memory or compensation because cognitive function includes the works of remembering and covering. They are displayed in juxtaposition for forms sake. There is no particularly dominant one in three groups under the indirect strategies. Then let us look at a set "organizing networks" which is added in social strategies. As we have seen in Figure 2, social strategies are divided into four sets: asking questions, organizing networks, cooperating with others and developing cultural understanding. In the case of "organizing networks," students are making friends with peers and making friends with proficient users of the new language. Oxford's classification of language learning strategies does not include network making, which is the main reason why, according to Neustupny (1995), her concept for social strategies is restricted. This study therefore incorporates "organizing networks" in the list for more input. The strategies would encourage learners to understand the culture or society of the language being study.

"Asking questions" in social strategies is divided into two parts in Oxford's study (1990): asking for clarification and verification and asking for correction, however in this paper, there are three parts: asking for clarification, asking for verification and asking for correction. In our viewpoint, "clarification" and "verification" are totally different because the former means clarification request but the latter means confirmation check. Segmentalized classification will be useful to receive the actual use of strategies in the experiment.

2. Experiment

2.1. Purpose

The purpose of the experiments here is; to examine the relationship between language learning strategies used by Japanese university English students and their proficiency in English.

2.2. Participants

There were 148 participants in this study (87 male, 58 female and 3 unknown). The participants were Japanese students enrolled in liberal arts English classes in a university in Iwate, Japan. Participants were in their first year and from the faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences, Agriculture and Engineering. In this school, English class levels are divided into three based on the score of “Test of English as a Foreign Language Institutional Testing Program Level 2 test (TOEFL ITP)”, which are elementary, intermediate and advanced. I chose two classes from each level; one is for Humanities and Social Sciences major students (humanities class) and another is for Agriculture and Engineering students (science class).

The level of English classes are; elementary science students (N=18) scored between 313-377 out of 500 on TOEFL ITP, elementary humanities students (N=26) scored 350-387, intermediate science students (N=22) scored 393-403, intermediate humanities students (N=31) scored 413-437, advanced science students (N=26) scored 407-423, advanced humanities students (N=25) scored...
The age of participants was from 18 to 21 (M=18.3, SD=0.53). Most of them have been studying English since their first year in junior high school, although there are a few people who started studying English from eight to eleven years old. A person who had lived in an English speaking country over one year was removed. So the participants in this study were university students who used Japanese as both mother tongue and home language and have learned English in Japan mainly from classes at school and their own effort.

In this paper, let us call students whose proficiency is high in advanced class “advanced students” or “successful learners,” students in intermediate class “intermediate students,” and students whose proficiency is low in elementary class “elementary students” or “unsuccessful learners.” The term “good learner(s)” was shown in the previous studies by Rubin or Oxford and now it is popular in this area of study. However, this paper will not use the word because this term have not really explained or defined yet.

2.3. Material and Procedures

The instrument used for collecting data was the Likert scale questionnaire. Also, a background questionnaire was used to learn participants’ information such as gender, age, major, mother tongue, language spoken at home, English learning experiences and English learning environment. It was intended to find and remove students with above average levels of experience.

The Likert scale questionnaire was used to research which language learning strategies participants are using and how they are using them. It is a self-scoring, paper-and pencil survey and consists of 63 items. Participants are asked to respond on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never or almost never) to 5 (always or almost always) for statements like “I usually try to say or write new expressions repeatedly to practice them.” I made this questionnaire based on the classification of language learning strategies in this study using examples from Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford (1990). Now, even the pioneer, Oxford, encouraged the use of research learning strategies which suit the learner’s own situation or learning environment. She encouraged people to invent new strategy inventory because researchers in the field concerned that SILL came out of a particular kind of environment such as Defense Language Institute (DLI), Foreign Service Institute (FSI) or Peace Corps in North American area (Takeuchi 2003). This time, I made the question sentences more concrete and gave examples of the items which seemed difficult to understand.

For the advanced science class and intermediate humanities class, these materials were administered during the English classes. For the other four classes, they were distributed in the English classes and corrected in the next class, which means that learners responded at home as volunteers. The differences were due to whether or not the each teacher could spare time to let their students do the questionnaires. Both distributions and corrections for all classes were done in June 2007.

3. Results and Discussion

First of all, we will see Japanese university students’ general use of language learning strategies.
In 1.3., it was pointed out that language learning strategies were subdivided into a total of six groups: cognitive, memory, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social (See Figure 1.) The mean of all strategies was 2.62. Oxford (1990) defined that if the score is over 3.5, it can be said that the strategy is usually used. If the score is under 3.5, people need to be trained to use the strategy more frequently (In this paper, let us call these strategies “usually-used strategy(ies).”) It seems reasonable to suppose that the mean 2.62 is low if we consider Oxford’s number of 3.5.

Usage order and mean (number shown in parentheses) were as follows: cognitive strategies (2.86), compensation strategies (2.81), metacognitive strategies (2.74), social strategies (2.61), affective strategies (2.34), and memory strategies (2.29). The use of six strategy groups was roughly the same because the range of the data was only 0.57. From a bigger point of view, direct strategies held the first, second and last places, and indirect strategies held the third, fourth and fifth places. With all memory strategies as an exception, indirect strategies were not used by Japanese university English students compared with direct strategies.

Now, let us expose the relationship between language learning strategies used by Japanese university English students and their proficiency in English. As mentioned in 1.2., learner’s factor affects the use of learning strategies. Proficiency is one of the most important internal factors.

3.1. Strategy use and class level

To begin with, we will see in-depth data on the use of language learning strategies for each class level: elementary, intermediate and advanced.

1. Elementary class

The mean of whole language learning strategies used by elementary students was 2.42, which was 0.20 points lower than the mean of all participants. The highest score was 3.52 for the strategy of translating (cognitive). The lowest score was 1.50 for using check-list (affective). There was just one usually-used strategy: translating (3.52) (Numbers in parentheses means the score of the strategies.)

2. Intermediate class

The mean of whole language learning strategies used by intermediate students was 2.63, which was 0.10 points higher than the mean of all participants. The highest score was 3.83 for the strategy of asking for clarification (social). The lowest score was 1.53 for using check-list (affective). There
were six usually-used strategies: *asking for clarification* (3.83), using circumlocution or synonym (3.79), paying attention (3.62), *avoiding communication partially or totally* (3.60), using mime or gesture (3.55) and translating (3.53).

![Use of Strategies by Intermediate Students](Image)

**Advanced class**

The mean of whole language learning strategies used by advanced students was 2.76, which was 0.14 points higher than the mean of all participants. The highest score was 3.90 for the strategy of translating (cognitive). The lowest score was 1.63 for *using check-list* (affective). There were eight usually-used strategies: translating (3.90), taking notes (3.80), *asking for clarification* (3.78), *using circumlocution or synonym* (3.70), using mime or gesture (3.61), paying attention (3.57), *avoiding communication partially or totally* (3.53) and highlighting (3.51).

![Use of Strategies by Advanced Students](Image)

The shapes of the three graphs look similar: there are three mountains in each, which means that three classes have a similarity in their used strategies type and frequency. However, if you look at the data closer, the bar chart height of advanced and intermediate classes is higher than that of the elementary class. In other words, depending on proficiency, the used strategies type is same but the frequency is different.

We would like to focus attention on the usually-used strategies whose scores are over 3.5. There was one among elementary students, six among intermediate students and eight among advanced students. If the class level is higher, the number of usually-used strategies increases. The choice of language learning strategies used by the three different levels of students was the same. This means advanced students usually use eight strategies: translating, taking notes, highlighting,
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using mime or gesture, avoiding communication partially or totally, using circumlocution or synonym, paying attention and asking for clarification. Intermediate students usually use six of them and elementary students use one of them.

To ignore the fact that, in six common, usually-used strategies for intermediate and advanced students, the means of the intermediate class were higher than those of the advanced class for four strategies here (See Table 1.) is to miss an important point: teachability of language learning strategies. Against the positive correlation between frequency of strategy use and proficiency which has been shown in this paper, why was the counterexample caused? The possible answer could be the effect of tasks in class, which is one of a learner’s external factors (See 1.2.) I found that students in intermediate science class were doing some tasks in which strategies were used from an interview with the teacher. The lesson contents were sight translation, retention, shadowing, taking notes and re-creating a listened story in own words. This means that the students were using strategies such as avoiding communication partially or totally, using circumlocution or synonym, paying attention and asking for clarification. This shows that appropriate guidance through tasks facilitates students to use language learning strategies.

It should be concluded, from the mean of each class, however, that advanced students use strategies more than intermediate students in general. The mean of the advanced class for eight strategies in Table 1 below was 3.68, which was the highest score of the three classes. The mean of intermediate class was 3.54 and elementary class was 3.22. The frequency of language learning strategies use goes up as proficiency levels becomes high.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies (Strategy group)</th>
<th>Mean of all students</th>
<th>Mean of elementary class</th>
<th>Mean of intermediate class</th>
<th>Mean of advanced class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 Translating (Cognitive)</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Taking notes (Cognitive)</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Highlighting (Cognitive)</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Using mime or gesture (Compensation)</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Avoiding communication partially or totally (Compensation)</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 Using circumlocution or synonym (Compensation)</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 Paying attention (Metacognitive)</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 Asking for clarification (Social)</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above nine strategies</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Numbers in bold print are over 3.5. * The encircled numbers are the highest mean of the strategies.

It follows from what has been shown that Japanese university English students use the same kinds of language learning strategies regardless of their English proficiency. However, the frequency
of strategies use is related to proficiency. Advanced students used strategies more than intermediate students. The intermediate students used strategies more than elementary students.

As for the effect of tasks on strategy use, Takeuchi (2003) said that “the study of language learning strategies in the field of foreign language education is significant only after we can teach the common ways or actions usually selected by good learners to ordinal learners and then their learning is facilitated.” (Takeuchi, 2003, p35). This study does not discuss the teaching method, but the teachability of language learning strategies is verified.

3.2. Six strategy groups use and class level

The mean of entire language learning strategies was 2.26. In view of proficiency, the mean of the elementary class was 2.42, that of the intermediate class was 2.63, and that of the advanced class was 2.76. It is clear that there is more frequent use of language learning strategies as the class level goes up, which means that there is a certain relationship between strategy use and proficiency (See Table 2.)

Usage order was as follows: first; cognitive strategies in all classes, second; compensation strategies in elementary and intermediate classes and metacognitive strategies in the advanced class, third; metacognitive strategies in elementary and intermediate classes and compensation strategies in the advanced class, fourth; social strategies in all classes, fifth; affective strategies in intermediate and advanced classes and memory strategies in the elementary class and finally; memory strategies in intermediate and advanced classes and affective strategies in the elementary class. The kind of language learning strategy group preferred was almost the same in all classes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>All students (Mean)</th>
<th>Elementary class (Mean)</th>
<th>Intermediate class (Mean)</th>
<th>Advanced Class (Mean)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cognitive (2.86)</td>
<td>Cognitive (2.66)</td>
<td>Cognitive (2.89)</td>
<td>Cognitive (3.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Compensation (2.81)</td>
<td>Compensation (2.62)</td>
<td>Compensation (2.89)</td>
<td>Metacognitive (2.904)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Metacognitive (2.74)</td>
<td>Metacognitive (2.51)</td>
<td>Metacognitive (2.77)</td>
<td>Compensation (2.895)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Social (2.61)</td>
<td>Social (2.38)</td>
<td>Social (2.57)</td>
<td>Social (2.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Affective (2.34)</td>
<td>Memory (2.17)</td>
<td>Affective (2.33)</td>
<td>Affective (2.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Memory (2.29)</td>
<td>Affective (2.14)</td>
<td>Memory (2.30)</td>
<td>Memory (2.37)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The usage pattern of the six strategy groups is almost the same in the three different classes, but when we look at each strategy group, the mean goes up in order of elementary, intermediate and advanced class. Advanced students use language learning strategies more frequently than elementary students do. But the kinds of strategies used by Japanese university English students are similar in spite of their English proficiency.

3.3. Differences of strategy use between class levels

Here is a figure which shows the highest and lowest point of each question item between the three different proficiency classes. The trends of both lines fluctuate similarly and the graph agrees with the analysis above. Yet, what is important here is that some strategies have large gaps between the highest score and lowest score and others do not. Thus, the type of used strategies is almost the same, but the use frequency is different depending on class.

Figure 7 indicates the degree of difference between the highest and lowest score. While the ranges of most strategies are around 0.2 to 0.6, item number 53, taking risks wisely is outstanding. Also, strategies number 57, 52 and 30 scored over 0.8, which means their ranges are large. On the other hand, the range of strategies numbered 50, 29, 24 and 20 are less than or equal to 0.10.

Based on the data in Figure 7 above, let us take a closer look at the language learning strategies that have the largest ranges depending on class level (See Table 3.) Although several observations in the last few sections have shown a positive relationship between the frequency in use of language
learning strategies by Japanese university English students and their proficiency in English, we
could not see the relationship between the kind of strategy used and proficiency. However, now it
will be made clear which strategy relates to higher proficiency.

Among the ten highest scoring language learning strategies, the mean of the advanced class
accounted for eight of them. Among the lowest scoring ten, the mean of the elementary class
accounted for all. That is to say these strategies were used a lot by successful students but not
used by unsuccessful students. This shows not only the correlation between language learning
strategies use and proficiency but also the possibility that strategies make language learning easier
and contribute to language acquisition.

Ranking the ranges from largest to smallest put taking risks wisely (1.19) in first, making positive
statements and asking for correction (0.86) were second, selecting the topic (0.81) was forth and
Cooperating with peers (0.72) was fifth. In fact, six of ten strategies in Table 3 were not preferred
by all proficiency level learners, only particularly advanced students were using them. In a viewpoint
of six strategy groups, there was one cognitive strategy, three compensation strategies, two affective
strategies and two social strategies, which means combined there were four direct strategies and
six indirect strategies here. From this data, we would like to lay special emphasis on the importance
of indirect strategies.

It has already been stated that the mean of the advanced class resulted in most of the highest
scores among the strategies. With exceptions, getting the idea quickly and adjusting or approximating
the message, their highest scores were from the intermediate class. The intermediate students
here used these strategies better than advanced students supposedly result in their course content
that included some tasks in which many strategies were used (See 3.1.)
An Experimental Study of Language Learning Strategies

Opposed to the Table 3 above, the Table 4 shows 12 language learning strategies used similarly in all classes. The highest means were from advanced or intermediate classes and the lowest means were from elementary, intermediate or advanced classes. The ranges were from 0.05 to 0.18, which was small (See Table 4.) From this view point one may say that there are some strategies which are almost unrelated to the user’s target language proficiency.

Ranking the ranges from smallest to greatest gave us: using music (0.07) first, avoiding communication partially or totally (0.08) second, semantic mapping and using physical response or sensation (0.10) forth. Surveying the six strategy groups gave us one cognitive strategy, five memory strategies, two compensation strategies, one metacognitive strategies and three affective strategies, which means combined, there were eight direct strategies and four indirect strategies.

These common strategies were divided into two types: highly used strategies and sparsely used strategies. Some strategies were used better in all classes than the overall mean, 2.62. For example, rewarding yourself (2.84/2.66), overviewing and linking with already material (2.73/2.62) (The number to the right is the highest value and the one to the left is the lowest value.) Regardless of their English proficiency, Japanese university English students usually used them. Other strategies were used less than the average number, for example, using a check-list (1.63/1.50), semantic mapping (1.90/1.80), switching to the mother tongue (2.04/1.88), using mechanical techniques (1.82/1.64), using physical response or sensation (2.08/1.98), avoiding communication partially or

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>QN</th>
<th>Strategies (Strategies group)</th>
<th>Differences</th>
<th>Highest mean (class)</th>
<th>Lowest mean (class)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Taking risks wisely (Affective)</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>3.35 (Advanced)</td>
<td>2.16 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Making positive statements</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>3.22 (Advanced)</td>
<td>2.36 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Asking for correction (Social)</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>3.16 (Advanced)</td>
<td>2.30 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Selecting the topic (Compensation)</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>3.08 (Advanced)</td>
<td>2.27 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Cooperating with peers</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>3.06 (Advanced)</td>
<td>2.34 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Getting the idea quickly</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>3.40 (Intermediate)</td>
<td>2.70 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Adjusting or approximating the message (Compensation)</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>3.60 (Intermediate)</td>
<td>2.91 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Planning, Planning for a language task (Metacognitive)</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>2.76 (Advanced)</td>
<td>2.09 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Self-monitoring (Metacognitive)</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>3.41 (Advanced)</td>
<td>2.75 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Using mime or gesture (Compensation)</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>3.61 (Advanced)</td>
<td>3.00 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*QN=Question number  *Differences= Differences between the two extreme values
totally (2.15/2.07), placing new words into a context (2.37/2.20), and using imagery (2.45/2.27).
These were the strategies which almost no people used regardless of their proficiency.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>QN</th>
<th>Strategies (Strategies group)</th>
<th>Differences</th>
<th>Highest mean (class)</th>
<th>Lowest mean (class)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Using music (Affective)</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>2.57 (Intermediate)</td>
<td>2.50 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Avoiding communication partially or totally (Compensation)</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>2.15 (Intermediate)</td>
<td>2.07 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Semantic mapping (Memory)</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>1.90 (Advanced)</td>
<td>1.80 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Using physical response or sensation (Memory)</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>2.08 (Advanced)</td>
<td>1.98 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Overviewing and linking with already material (Metacognitive)</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>2.73 (Advanced)</td>
<td>2.62 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Using a check-list (Affective)</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>1.63 (Advanced)</td>
<td>1.50 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Switching to the mother tongue (Compensation)</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>2.04 (Intermediate)</td>
<td>1.88 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Placing new words into a context (Memory)</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>2.37 (Intermediate)</td>
<td>2.20 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Analyzing contrastively (across languages) (Cognitive)</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>2.65 (Advanced)</td>
<td>2.47 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Using imagery (Memory)</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>2.45 (Advanced)</td>
<td>2.27 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Using mechanical techniques (Memory)</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>1.82 (Advanced)</td>
<td>1.64 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Rewarding yourself (Affective)</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>2.84 (Advanced)</td>
<td>2.66 (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*QN=Question number  *Differences= Differences between the two extreme values

According to the data in this section, the type of language learning strategies can fall into one of two categories: some strategies are used differently depending on the proficiency of the used, and other strategies are used similarly regardless of the user’s proficiency.

Some strategies shown in Table 3 fall into the former category. The gap between the frequency of use of the advanced students and the elementary students is big. The results in 3.1. and 3.2. seem reasonable enough to conclude that there is a relationship between the frequency of language learning strategies and proficiency. The examples from this section make clear the relationship between specific kinds of strategies and higher proficiency.

Also, even though the use of indirect strategies is lower in general, advanced students prefer to use indirect strategies. Indirect strategies are important from communication theory viewpoint, too. Communicating message depends on not only the code (linguistic system) but also the context (including the situation) (Hashiuch 1999). Indirect strategies can allow learners to enhance the
comprehension of the context. Generally speaking, Japan is in a high-context culture. For Japanese university English students, even the target language is English, it seems reasonable to suppose that the use of indirect strategies helps their English learning.

Common strategies in all class levels in Table 4 contain both strategies used frequently and strategies not used frequently. The former strategies are used by Japanese university English students at any proficiency level. It can be said that the language learning strategies used frequently will be a good first step for someone who starting use new strategies. At the same time, to know and understand the strategies which are not usually used will expand the repertoire of second language learners.

Conclusion

In this study, we have seen the patterns of language learning strategy use by Japanese university learners of English. I hope that this paper has provided you valuable information and better understanding of language learning strategies. I hope, in addition, that you consider the findings from this study on language learning strategies as important implications for better second language learning.

As a beginning, this study established the theoretical aspects of strategies; the definition, features and classification. The term “language learning strategies” was defined as “behaviors or mental process which learners use consciously and that affect directly or indirectly for learning language.” The definition includes some key factors to characterize strategies. In chapter 2, the methodology of experiment was presented.

The research results and discussions were shown in chapter 3. Paying our attention to the relationship between strategies use and proficiency from both viewpoints of strategy groups and each strategy, the frequency of language learning strategies use went up as proficiency levels became high. If the class level was higher, the number of “usually-used strategies” whose scores were over 3.5 increased, too. The used strategy type seemed same regardless of proficiency. The important point to note here was that, as exceptions, the examples from the section 3.3. made clear the relationship between specific kinds of strategies and higher proficiency. Advanced students preferred to use these strategies, for example, taking risks wisely (affective) and making positive statements (affective). This means that the strategies have the possibility to make language learning easier and contribute to second language acquisition. On the other hand, there were strategies used similarly regardless of the user’s proficiency, for example, avoiding communication partially or totally (compensation) and using music (affective).

The topic about strategy training remained still untouched in this study. For that, strategies used highly frequently by successful students must be effective. There is room for the further investigation.

Ellis (1994) described as interinfluence about the relationship between “learner’s choice of learning strategies-quantity and type-”and “learner’s level of L2 proficiency.” This paper will take a similar view, but still, it would be expected that language learning strategies much more contribute to proficiency. Although it may be difficult to generalize the analysis or suggestion since the data have not had statistical process in this study, there is much truth of language learning use by
Japanese university English students, and furthermore, for better second language learning.

Bibliography


An Experimental Study of Language Learning Strategies

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