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Olga Trendak

Exploring the Role of Strategic Intervention in Form-focused Instruction

 Springer

Olga Trendak
Zakład Języka Angielskiego i Językoznawstwa
Stosowanego Wydział Filologiczny UŁ
University of Łódź
Łódź, Poland

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Preface

For many decades linguists and teachers were inclined to believe that providing foreign language students with numerous opportunities for output as well as with comprehensible input, correction and scaffolding would guarantee success in foreign language learning. What is usually expected of teachers is “to wait and hope that learners will notice the patterns and automatically activate their implicit learning mechanisms” (Gu 2010, p. 1). Although such actions may prove efficacious, there are other ways of helping students to take control over their language learning. One of them is the introduction of *language learning strategies* (LLS) into regular second/foreign language classes by means of *learning strategy instruction*. By showing students how to apply strategies when learning the target language, teachers can activate and encourage them to become more autonomous and responsible. Strategic intervention can make target language learners more active “in managing and controlling the learning process, thereby maximizing the outcomes of learning. Instruction in strategic learning can result in better learners” (Gu 2010, p. 1; as cited in Oxford 2011, p. 12).

The notion of *a language learning strategy* has attracted the attention of numerous scholars for many decades. Researchers have been trying to explore its value in the foreign language classroom with a view to facilitating the process of target language acquisition. Despite the considerable interest in LLS, it should be mentioned that there are numerous contentious issues such as, among others, providing a conclusive definition of a language learning strategy or deciding whether LLS should be perceived as behavioural or mental, general or specific.

Additionally, there are areas which still seem to be somewhat neglected, for instance grammar learning strategies (GLSs). Such a situation might result from the long-lasting controversy accompanying grammar and its introduction in the foreign language classroom over the years. For many decades grammar was dismissed as insignificant and irrelevant in the process of second language learning and stress was placed on communication. That is why it seems essential for researchers to extend the range of studies into LLS, particularly into grammar learning strategies.

There were a few factors that motivated the present author to focus on language learning strategies. One of them was her interest in the continuously expanding field

of LLS and their facilitative role in a foreign language classroom. Additionally, since the author has been working with advanced learners of English for the last 8 years, she wanted to investigate the strategies that learners presenting such a level of language advancement employ when they learn the grammar of the target language and, therefore, help them to become more proficient users of their L2. What is more, since grammar learning strategies have received considerably less interest from researchers than other language learning strategy types, the author wanted her research project to contribute to the existing body of research into LLS and provide guidelines for teachers wanting to help their learners become more autonomous.

The present volume comprises five chapters. The first four chapters are more theoretical in their form, while the last one overviews the results of the conducted study. The main concern of Chap. 1 is the concept of *grammar*, its different types and models and ways of implementing it in the foreign language classroom. The chapter is also devoted to the notion of *form-focused instruction* (FFI) which has received a great deal of attention in the last few decades. The author also evaluates the distinct types of FFI and discusses its relationship with second language acquisition.

Chapter 2 provides a theoretical introduction to *language learning strategies* (LLS). The author assesses the differing definitions of LLS put forward by scholars. Moreover, the chapter addresses the conceptual problems associated with language learning strategies and their nature. Emphasis is also placed on selected factors influencing the choice of strategy application, such as cognitive and affective factors, learners' background and situational and social variables. The final part of the chapter explores the place of strategies in a cognitive framework.

Chapter 3 starts with presenting the different language learning taxonomies. Further parts of the chapter provide information on the studies investigating the notion of grammar learning strategies (GLSs) and their efficacy in the foreign language classroom.

Chapter 4 aims to provide in-depth information about the notion of *learning strategy instruction*. In the chapter the author discusses the different aims of strategy-based instruction (SBI) and the necessary steps practitioners need to take in order to introduce the training in their L2 classes. Mention is also made of the contentious issues associated with the implementation and intensity of strategy training as well as with the language and strategy choice. The chapter is also devoted to the different models of strategy training. The chapter also explores the ways of investigating strategy training. Stress is placed on different types of interviews but also on self-report questionnaires, diaries and journals, observations and think-aloud protocols. The final parts of the chapter are devoted to types of strategy studies and the criticism levelled at learner strategy research.

Finally, the objective of Chap. 5 is to report on the results of the study conducted into the LLS applied by advanced learners of English in a Polish educational setting. Additionally, emphasis is placed on the grammar learning strategies that the learners find most efficacious when learning the target language. The research project also addresses the effectiveness of strategy training and its impact on the

acquisition of a grammatical feature. Apart from a comprehensive analysis of the obtained results, the chapter comprises tentative suggestions for future empirical explorations of strategy training in the foreign language classroom. The aim of the research project and suggested guidelines is to help practitioners learn more about the language strategies advanced learners of English employ and, consequently, use that knowledge in their everyday practice in order to make their learners more self-reliant and responsible for their L2 learning.

Łódź, Poland

Olga Trendak

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