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**Book review:**

**Andrew D. Cohen, Ernesto Macaro (Eds.),**  
***Language learner strategies: 30 years of research and practice.***  
**Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007, 336 pp.**

The book under review, *Language learner strategies*, edited by Andrew D. Cohen and Ernesto Macaro, contains a foreword, an introduction, and brings together the contributions of 26 distinguished researchers in 12 chapters, followed by endnotes, an extensive bibliography (882 references), and an author and subject index. The book is divided into two sections, the first of which deals with the theoretical aspect of research related to language learner strategies, and the second focuses on the operationalization of the field in factual research studies dealing with such important issues as the reliability and validity of the findings of the research studies. As can be seen from the title, this book is concerned with language learner strategies. In their general introduction, the editors present the sequential organization of the chapters and the focal points of the book. They highly appreciate 30 years of research and practice in the field and provide the readers with what they call “an introspective and highly self-critical account of three decades of research endeavor” (p. 1) with a focus on the areas and issues that require further research.

Chapter 1 looks at language learner strategies from a historical perspective. It gives us a full account of the historical development of this field and the impact of other disciplines, such as psychology, educational psychology, cognitive psychology, and sociology on the study of language learner strategies. Michael Grenfell and Ernesto Marco refer to the 1970s, during which there was great development in the field of psychology, the byproduct of which was behavioral psychology and its major impact on language learning. The proponents of this view held that language learning would take place as the result of “manipulating the psychology of the individual” (p. 9). The authors also elaborate on other theories that emerged throughout history, namely, Chomsky’s view dealing with “an ideal speaker and perfect (purely linguistic) competence” (p. 10), Dell Hyme’s view of language use, stemming from the 1960s, Canale and Swain’s communicative competence of language use in 1980, and Bachman’s strategic competence in 1990. They refer to the 1970s through the 1980s as periods in which there was a turning point in research of language learner strategies. One of the good advantages of this chapter is that the authors provide interested researchers with a justification to continue research endeavors in this area by bringing up pros and cons with respect to language learner strategies. With reference to the Chinese proverb: “Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach him how to fish; he eats for a lifetime”, they believe that learners could be helped to be lifetime learners managing their own learning themselves.

Since the beginning of research in the field of language learner strategy, there has been a construct problem with respect to the definition of the term “strategy”. A number of scholars, such as O’Mally et al. (1985) and Ellis (1994) use the terms “confusion”, no “consensus”, and “fuzzy” to indicate the point that the term “strategy” is still engulfed in considerable uncertainty. Chapter 2 goes through the procedures used by Andrew D. Cohen to provide a clear-cut definition of “strategy”. He used a questionnaire to seek the opinion of a number of respondents on the definition of the term “strategy”, given such dimensions as the level of consciousness, extent of attention, explicitness regarding action, degree of goal orientation, strategy size, amount of strategy clustering, and potential leading to learning. The questionnaire also included certain items aimed at showing the purposes of language learner strategies: (1) to enhance learning, (2) to perform specified tasks, (3) to solve specified problems, (4) to make learning easier, faster, and more enjoyable, (5) to compensate for a deficit in learning. Besides, certain items in the questionnaire questioned whether strategies can be used to reinforce autonomous language learning, self regulation, self-management, independent language learning, and individual language learning. The questionnaire revealed mixed results indicating both agreement and disagreement on the items.

Chapter 3 explores the relationship between psychological and sociological perspectives on language learner strategies. The difference, according to Rebecca L. Oxford and Karen Schramm (p. 47) “lies in the focus, individual versus group” respectively. With reference to (a) self regulation, (b) motivation and volition, and (c) aptitude, and (d) concepts related to activity and action, the authors discuss them in terms of both perspectives theoretically and offer certain strategies to enhance them in language learning contexts. The psychological perspective provides certain tools to measure aptitude in L2 (e.g., Modern Language Aptitude Test and Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery). On the other hand, the sociocultural view of aptitude discusses how a language learner could become competent in L2 given the social rules of the context. The authors believe that through communication between the two perspectives, insights can be gained and used to produce a comprehensive model of language learning based on strategies.

In chapter 4, based on the results of quantitative and qualitative research studies, Osamu Takeuchi, Carol Griffiths, and Do Coyle argue that strategy use is strongly correlated with such individual and group variables as age, gender, motivation, career orientation, personality types, nationality, ethnicity and culture, proficiency, and the learning situation. The research studies are mostly of correlation rather than causality nature. The implications obtained from the findings can prove beneficial in producing a strategic language learning and teaching model.

The general purpose of this book is to explore both the theoretical and empirical aspects of language learner strategies, while chapter 5, in particular, gives us a full account of the tools used in this field. These include oral interviews, questionnaires, observation, verbal reports, diaries, journals, and recollection studies. The authors

not only discuss the theoretical issues, but also elaborate on the limitations of these tools. They also report the findings of research studies in two emerging areas referred to as online language learning and the study of heritage and indigenous languages with a focus on the discovery of strategies. Action research is considered to be of value because the research question can be put to ongoing scrutiny.

Chapter 6 focuses on four distinct models of grammar instruction: two implicit: (1) Focus on meaning (FonM), (2) Focus on form (FonF); and two explicit: Focus on form- explicit-inductive mode (2), Focus on form (FonF) -explicit deductive mode. Rebecca L. Oxford and Kyoung Rangle Lee (p. 124) argue that “learning and instruction cannot be considered merely flip sides of each other” on the ground that learners come up with different goals, beliefs, cultural values, learning styles, and cognitive abilities. Therefore, they often act independently of the instructional modes used by the teacher in the classroom. Given this fact, the authors consider that learners should be guided, rather than dictated, to discover their own grammar strategies. Explicit and implicit are specified not only as modes of grammar instruction, but also in terms of the amount of consciousness that learners use to discover rules.

Chapter 7 deals with the nature of strategy based instruction (SBI) and the question of whether the instruction of strategies should be done separately or integrated in language learning courses. High level learners use strategies more successfully than low level ones. Therefore, low level learners should develop awareness towards using strategies through direct instruction. The authors also address the issues related to the teaching of strategies to both young and adult learners and argue that any model of strategy instruction should account for such variables as the learning context, the nature of the task, learning styles, goals, and background knowledge. In addition, they offer some ways to raise awareness within learners of strategies which can be used to enhance language learning: (1) think aloud, (2) questionnaire, (3) focus groups, (4) asking questions, (5) journals, (6) reading a topic. They emphasize the fact that to teach strategies, teachers should have good knowledge of strategies, and should be able to relate the strategies to specific goals to enhance motivation.

Chapter 8, related to part two of the book, focuses on the use of strategies in listening comprehension. The authors review thirty years of research in the area, taking a critical view of the findings and such relevant issues as reliability and validity of the findings obtained through the often-problematic research methodologies used by the researchers. They, in great detail, report the findings of the research studies that aim to discover the correlation of different variables affecting success in listening comprehension. These variables include general proficiency, gender, cultural background, learning preferences, awareness, and attitudes. The use of prior knowledge, considered to be effective in listening comprehension, is an unreliable strategy because it could be misleading. However, the results seem to be paradoxical with respect to the effects of prior knowledge in listening comprehension. Given

this fact, the authors conclude that prior knowledge can be used to enhance listening comprehension if “certain criteria” are met (p.179).

Chapter 9 basically follows the same method of presentation as the others. It has been clear from the very beginning that this work is mainly of interest to researchers involved in the areas of strategy use, applied linguistics, language teaching and learning, and others that might be related to language studies. First, the authors elaborate on the models of reading at theoretical level, and then the variables involved in reading processes are meticulously discussed within the framework of the research undertakings of distinguished researchers. The research studies at large target the possible relationship between strategy use and such linguistic factors as L1 orthography, syntax, bi-literacy, and translation, including non-linguistic factors such as motivation, gender, personality types, interest, and background knowledge. The authors also point to the results of studies aimed at showing the effect of strategy instruction on reading comprehension and conclude that strategy instruction could have a possible effect, but “casual link could not be shown” (p. 201). Yet, they question the validity, reliability, and generalization of the findings due to the adoption of faulty methodologies, and suggest triangulation as one way to improve the findings.

Chapter 10 theoretically delves into communication strategies in terms of a psycholinguistic view, with a focus on the lexical problems of learners in speaking skill, and an interactional view that deals with the negotiation of meaning. The authors provide a useful historical background of the development of communication strategies and relevant taxonomies, starting with Canale and Swain’s model (1980) of strategic competence as a sub-competence of communicative competence. Then, Tarone’s conceptual framework (1978) emerged, which was a great development in the area. At the empirical level, the authors report the results of a wide variety of research studies with respect to the relationship of proficiency and strategy use, strategy instruction and L2 development, emphasizing the need for further research to arrive at more definitive conclusions. In the meantime, they also point out the shortcomings of the research methodologies and tools used by researchers.

Chapter 11 treats strategy use in writing processes. Writing, considered to be an active process, entails both cognitive and socio-cognitive variables, the former defined as any actions deployed by the writer to write, and the latter as a process in which factors such as goals, demands of the community where they write, task types, and topic affect the writing process. In addition to methodological shortcomings of the research studies, the authors mention the following questions researchers dealt with: (1) the strategies deployed by L2 writers, (2) variables influencing the L2 writers’ selection and implementation of strategies, (3) the transfer of L1 to L2 situations, (4) the influence of instruction on strategy use (p. 239). The findings indicated that writers use a wide variety of strategies to write, that writing process, within the socio-cognitive perspective, is greatly influenced by learner-internal and learner-external variables, and that instruction can positively affect the use

of strategies. The authors emphasize that instruction serve to change the writer's mental model from mono-dimensional to a multi-dimensional one.

Chapter 12 treats strategy use in vocabulary learning with a focus on language proficiency and the learners' voice. In the past, learning vocabulary was thought to be a discrete-point activity occurring in meager contexts. However, today there has been a shift in the focus of studies to the learner's voice, taking into account the variables that learners may bring with them into the learning context. The learners' own devices, stemming from the shift of emphasis on the learner's voice would lead to the use of vocabulary learning strategies that indicate their own preferences for learning vocabulary. In spite of this, and according to the studies meticulously reported by the authors, the direct instruction of strategies to learn vocabulary can have positive effects, and it would be advisable to integrate it into the curriculum of vocabulary teaching, because it would enhance the learners' performance.

As mentioned above, the term "strategy" still remains fuzzy and the taxonomies provided are basically arbitrary (Stern, 1992). Moreover, within the wake of a large number of variables affecting strategy use, the question is how it would be possible to produce a model of language teaching and learning that could account for all of these variables. Undoubtedly, it would be an uphill task on the grounds that the teacher has to teach the strategies that really suit his/her students, given such factors as age, gender, personality types, learning styles, cultural background, majors, L1, and proficiency levels and many other factors research shows that they play a role in strategy use. It is clear that language learning is complicated, and one may wonder whether it would be a good idea to make it more cumbersome by adding the teaching of strategies to the curriculum. Another question that arises is that, according to Brown (1994), not all strategies (such as rule transference) lead to learning. Likewise, Ellis (1986) believes that, by using strategies, learners may obviate the need to learn. According to Griffiths (2004), strategies are not new to the area of language teaching. She refers to Grammar Translation Method, Audio Lingual method, Krashen's model of Acquisition and Learning, and communicative language learning as containing techniques similar to strategies, which could be used to enhance language learning. Of course, the strategies were not explicitly taught to the learners. By resorting to eclecticism, the teacher may incorporate learner strategies into the teaching process.

Overall, this well written edited volume is a significant contribution to the study of language learner strategies. Due to its scope and extensive bibliography on the topic, it is a useful resource for upper-level undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as researchers interested in undertakings in language learning/teaching, applied linguistics, and learner strategies. This work serves the readers quite well because it provides them with a framework within which there is considerable information on both the theoretical and empirical aspects of learner strategies, with a focus on avenues for further research.

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