LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR EFL STUDENTS IN DEVELOPING THEIR VOCABULARY MASTERY

Yusak Lestari Diyono
17 Agustus 1945 University Semarang

Abstract *: Learning strategies are the deliberate actions that learners select and control to achieve desired goals or academic objectives. In the area of vocabulary mastery, learning strategies can be defined as various ways of all language learners to learn new vocabulary items in accordance with the learners' needs and preferences. In learning a foreign language, choice of learning strategies is much influenced by or associated with a number of factors such as : language being learned, duration, degree of metacognitive awareness, age, sex, attitudes, personality characteristics, career orientation, language teaching methods, and task requirements. A more effective language learner is the one who uses better learning strategies and implements more appropriate strategies than do less effective learners in each of the main language skills.*
Key words *: Learning strategies, EFL students, vocabulary mastery, metacognitive awareness*

The quality of English learning outcomes is much influenced by learning process, and this learning process is influenced by the learner's internal characteristic and learning conditions (Stern, 1983). Thus, it indicates that if the learner learns a second/foreign language in non-native environmental conditions, the learner's effort is likely to be the major strength to get the benefits of the target language input. Compared to some other related factors, especially the function of teachers, for example, it seems reasonable to underline the nativists' claim that teachers minimize the role of input and explains that language development primarily placed on the learner's internal processing mechanism. Unfortunately, Sadtono (1995) states that most of language learners probably do not know how to learn a foreign language efficiently. He notes that learners do not realize that learning a foreign language requires perseverance, discipline, knowledge of techniques of assimilating new habits, self-evaluation, a great deal of practice and that the whole business takes a lot of time. In short, he underlines that they are certainly to be reminded of these things from time to time.

THE ROLE OF INTERNAL PROCESSING MECHANISM IN LEARNING

As written in the earlier part, the quality of English learning outcome is much influenced by language learning process, and this leaning process is

much influenced by learner characteristics and learning conditions (Stern, 1983). In terms of learning conditions, in the context of Indonesia where English is a foreign language, it is very difficult to find supportive environments.

Besides environmental factors, learners are primarily endowed with their internal processing mechanisms which enable them to acquire different kinds of behavior—skills, knowledge, attitude and values. In other words, an individual should be able to make use of his/her capacity rather than to wait for other's helps such as form a teacher (Sadtono, 1995).

They consciously try to make use of the stimulation from the environment and operate the cognitive processes in their mind. The mind accepts input through perception, stores it in memory, processes it in thought, and acts on it in making decisions or performing skill (Leahley and Harris, 1989). For this reason, Mayer offers a straightforward explanation on how this concept works. In his opinion, he claims that sensory memory functions to receive input from outside world, such as books or teachers' explanation. Since the information fades away quickly, the learner must pay attention to it in order to transfer that information to short-term memory (as cited in Djiwandono, 1994).

Further he also argues that each of the memory processes can be enhanced by the use of appropriate learning strategies. Some learning strategies assist the selection of the incoming input and strengthen the process of attention. Some other strategies influence how much and what kind of rehearsal takes place. Others affect either the speed and the quality of encoding, or determine the success in the retrieval of information from long term-memory. In short, learning within internal processing mechanism framework is performed in four-stage processes which involve three different memory stores in the mind such as sensory memory, short-term memory, and long-term memory and also involve four control processes such as attention, rehearsal, encoding, and retrieval. Each of the four stages is enhanced by the appropriate use of learning strategies by the learner.

LANGUAGE LEARNING AS A COGNITIVE SKILL

Language learning as a cognitive skill refers to the understanding of a complex cognitive skill that human knowledge falls into two main categories. The first category is declarative knowledge which consists of all things that human beings know about, while the second one is the procedural knowledge which refers to everything that human beings know how to do (Anderson, 1983).

In the context of learning a language, for example, cognitive theories of learning posit that using a language itself is really a skill. The fact which still remains to be clarified, then, is how a language learner proceeds from the declarative knowledge of target language rules to the more automatic proceduralized stage. There are three different consecutive stages in such transition: cognitive, associative, and autonomous stages. In the cognitive stage the learner is necessarily required to select the input and attend to it in

the sensory memory. When the input has been accepted into the short-term memory, then, it must be rehearsed and practiced in order that the new material to be associated with the learner's existing knowledge of language components. Followed by subsequent processes of bringing back the information from long-term memory to short-term memory, the learner engages the system into language in use. This means that by repeating regularly, these processes lead the learner to the autonomous stage. Therefore, it can be concluded that these stages of language skill are very closely related to the information processing system of human learning (Mayer, 1988).

Referring to a particular area of learning language components, this system of cognitive linkages reflects that a learner can acquire the knowledge about the meaning of familiar discrete vocabulary far more quickly than the ability in understanding a certain vocabulary item of English reading texts.

THE ROLE OF LEARNING STRATEGIES

To enable the learners to become autonomous, that is the ability to continue their learning without any teacher's assistance in learning a foreign language is one of the major objectives of teaching a foreign language. In addition, sooner or later they have to stand on their own feet. For this reason, one of the paramount factors which is instrumental in the process of self-direction is the learning strategies (Sadtono, 1996).

The Understanding of Learning Strategies

Learning strategies epistemologically originates from two main concepts. The first concept is learning, which means to gain knowledge or a set of cognitive processes that transforms the stimulation from the environment into the several phases of information processing required for acquiring a new capability. While the second concept is a strategy which can be broadly defined as the art of planning operations in war, especially of the movements of armies and navies into favorable positions for fighting.

Thus, "learning strategies" can be defined as the deliberate actions that learners select and control to achieve desired goals or academic objectives. This statement is really logical because it refers to some urgent concepts of any operations, steps, and plans employed by learners to facilitate the accession, storage, regaining, and use of information to reach the final learning goals. In more specific definition, learning strategies can be defined as special ways of processing information that enhance comprehension, learning, or retention of the information. Thus, learning strategies are useful to achieve successful language performance because they lead the students to assume more responsibility for their own learning and engage the students with the foreign language material at a deeper cognitive level.

Then in the area of vocabulary mastery, learning strategies can be defined as various ways of all language learners to learn new vocabulary items in accordance with the learners' needs and preferences. For example, words that lend themselves to a structural analysis can most appropriately be learned through the use of mnemonic keyword approach.

In addition, those definitions above imply that learning strategies can manifest either observable actions, such as underlining words, practicing patterns or unobservable mental processes inside in the learner, such as memorization, controlling emotion, imagining, and the like. Therefore, the interest in learning strategies grows as language educators who are aware of some aspects to succeed. It means that these successful learners can achieve high language proficiency due to the strategies they use, it must be possible to elicit and describe these strategies so that other learners can benefit from their confession. This implied that:

1. language researchers must conceptualize language learning strategies in a way that includes the social and affective sides of learning as well as the more intellectual side. Language learning, more than almost any other discipline, is an adventure of the whole person, not just a cognitive or metacognitive exercise.

2. through strategy assessment learners can be helped recognize the power of using language learning strategies for making learning quicker, easier, and more effective.

3. Based on the information from strategy assessment, teachers can weave learning strategy training into regular classroom events in a natural, comfortable, but explicit way, for example, by providing the students with declarative information (what learning strategies they learn), procedural information (how they should employ the learning strategies), and conditional information (in what context they should employ the learning strategies).

Strategies Classification

As mentioned above the learning strategies presented in this paper covered seven categories, namely: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, memory strategies, affective strategies, social strategies, mnemonic vocabulary-remembering strategies and semantic strategies. This is to reconfirm that essentially learning strategy is a sequence of activities, not a single event, and learners may have acquired some of the sequence.

In recent time, there are a number of learning strategies which have been discovered through various forms of elicitation. However, in the context of Indonesia, it should be noted that so far there has not been lists of learning strategies that emerge from the study of EFL learners studying in the EFL context. The following part reviews a number of strategy classifications which have been adopted from a number of experts' classifications.

Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategies are learning strategies which refer to learning words using cognitive skills. This learning activity is to master vocabulary by functioning the mental operations which operate directly on the incoming information. In a practical way, this refers to some activities such as reasoning, analyzing, summarizing (all reflective of deep processing), as well as general practicing (Parry, 1990).

Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies are learning strategies with higher order executive skills. These strategies consist of three dimensions of knowledge i.e. knowledge on cognition, monitoring of cognition, and self-regulation strategies. Knowledge on cognition involves recognizing patterns of structure and organization and using appropriate strategies to achieve direct comprehension breakdown. And, knowledge on self-regulation strategies covers planning ahead, testing self-comprehension, checking the effectiveness of the strategies being used, revising strategies being used, and the like (Parry, 1990).

Memory Strategies

Memory strategies refer to language strategies for learning words through memory which can be facilitated by means of entering information into long-term memory and retrieving information when needed for some activities. The activities which can be facilitated through words stockpiled in memorization are i.e. reading or other communicative activities. In short, learning words using memory can cover some activities such as grouping, imagery, rhyming and structures reviewing (Parry, 1990)

Affective Strategies

Affective Strategies are learning strategies which enable learners to control feeling, motivations, and attitude related to language learning. Practically these strategies include anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, and self-reward (Parry, 1990).

Social Strategies

Social strategies are learning strategies which underline the effectiveness of interaction with others, often in a discourse situation. These strategies, practically, cover some actions such as asking questions, cooperating with native speakers of the language, and having cultural awareness (Parry, 1990).

Mnemonic Vocabulary-Remembering Strategies

Mnemonic Strategies refer to learning strategies which are a mean of increasing the ability to remember, originally develop as an aid to foreign language vocabulary learning based on key word method. The key word method involves the construction of interactive visual images, so that the learner may generate an image by associating it with a key word, which is simply a familiar concrete word that resembles a salient part of the unfamiliar vocabulary word.

Semantic Strategies

Semantic strategies are truly psycholinguistic strategies which refer to learning words as a continuing process of getting acquainted with verbal forms in their

polygamous diversity within varying context. Vocabulary requires a contrived learning especially at the initial stages. Thus , how words are learned, organized and retrieved are investigated for finding ways for effective vocabulary learning. What is notably missing, according to Beheydt (1987) in the teaching of vocabulary, is a systematically elaborated strategy for vocabulary acquisition that is based on the findings of linguistics and learning psychology.

Actually, vocabulary learning is nothing more than the memorization of a series of wordform with fixed meanings. Learning word is a process of "semantization", 1.e. a continuing process of getting acquainted with verbal forms in their diversity within contexts. The study of semantization is a truly psycholinguistic matter. It concerns linguistic entities and therefore it has to take into account the linguistic features of vocabulary.

1. Learning words in list.

    Nation (1980) states that some ways of learning from lists are more efficient than others, so there are many useful tips that can be passed on to their learners and to give them practice in applying them.

    a. Learning is more efficient if the foreign word form is in association with a word in the mother tongue rather than a foreign synonym of definition.

    b. Each word form and its translation should be put on a small card with the foreign word form on one side and the translation on the other. This will help the learners :

        1) To look at the foreign word and make an effort to recall its translation without seeing the translation.

        2) To re-arrange the cards so that she/he is not using the sequence of the words in the list to help recall, and

        3) The learner can put the words which give him/her most difficulty at the beginning of his pile of cards so that/ she/he can give them extra attention.

    c. Much more important than number of repetitions or the amount of effort put into the learning are the particular types of association made between the foreign word and its translation. One of the strangest and yet moat effective techniques for associating a foreign word with its translation is the "keyword" technique.

    d. Guessing inferring meaning of words from context

        According to Brown (1980) guessing words from context is concerned with inferring the meaning of unknown word by means of the context clues. The context clues may be syntactic and semantic. The syntactic clues include patterns and function words, inflectional cues, and markers; while the semantic clues involve definition, experience, description, comparison-contrast, synonym, inference, and analysis.

        Suppose, learners know around two three thousand words. Based on these words they can use the reading skills they have developed to infer the meanings of unknown words that they meet. Some learners can do this without any particular training, but those who cannot do it

can easily be taught to guess most of the unknown words they meet. This strategy is basically simple. It begins by getting the learner to look closely at the unknown words, next to look at its immediate context, and then to take a much broader view of how the clause containing the word relates to other clauses, sentences or paragraphs. That strategy is just a means of acquiring the unconscious skill that an efficient learner already has.

Factors Affecting Strategies Choices
        In learning a foreign language, choice of learning strategies is much influenced by or associated with a number of factors, such as language being learned, duration, degree of metacognitive awareness, age, sex, attitudes, personality characteristics, career orientation, language teaching methods, and task requirements (Parry, 1990).

Language Being Learned
The foreign language being learned, in many cases, has an influence on the learning strategies choice. It is likely that a foreign language which is assumed to be a very difficult language, for example, Greek, Japanese or Chinese, for study primarily will be chosen by highly motivated, strategy-wise students, whereas a foreign language which is assumed to be easiest, for study primarily will be chosen by a broader range of students. This also indicates that learners might be learning different foreign languages for different purposes, which be reflected in choice of strategies.

Duration
Duration , here, refers to course level and number of years of language study and does not necessarily relate to the proficiency level. According to some researchers, as language learners progress to higher course levels, they use somewhat different learning strategies. Charmot and O'Malley (1990), for instance, found that cognitive strategies of use decreased and metacognitive strategies of use increased, but social-affective strategies of use remained very low across all course levels. This indicates that only the successful learners preserved to take higher level courses.

Degree of Metacognitive Awareness
Metacognitive awareness refers to learners' knowledge about themselves and about their own learning process which can affect their use of language learning strategies. The kinds of language used, proficiency level, the outcomes of learning, feelings, aptitude, character, and personal theory of language learning influence learning strategies choice.

Age
Age is also an important factor influencing the learning strategies choice. An adult language learner seems to use somewhat sophisticated language learning

strategies than does a younger language learner. Their differences in learning strategies choice are due to their experiences and individual motivation, especially in which they gain their language skills.

Sex
Sex differences in learning strategies choice show that in typical language learning situations women use more learning strategies than men and use those strategies more often. This is caused by a natural reality that women tend to have greater social orientation, stronger verbal skills, and greater conformity to norms, both linguistic and academic.

Attitudes
Attitudes strongly influence language learning in general and therefore are likely to influence the choice of learning strategies. Learners who have more positive attitudes, stronger motivation, and more communicative purposes or goals use more learning strategies.

Personality Characteristics
Personality characteristics, the intrinsic side of affectivity or factors that influence human behavior such as self-esteem, inhibition, risk taking, anxiety, empathy, extroversion/introversion, social skills, degree of competitiveness or degree of strong emotionality affect the kinds of strategies chosen. Some language learners tried harder and performed better under competitiveness and anxiety, but other learners faltered under the same pressure.

Career Orientation
Career orientation relates to choice of language learning strategies. It is likely to show that people's field of specialization or current career position tends to influence the use of different kinds of language learning strategies.

Language Teaching Methods
Language teaching methods often influence the choice of language learning strategies. Traditional teaching methods, for example, focus on learning discrete-items, encourage the use of analytic and formal strategies, but more innovative teaching methods encourage more communicative strategies.

Task Requirements
Students respond to different task requirements with different learning strategies. In many cases, some learning strategies are useful only for certain kinds of task. Thus, requirements of specific tasks influence the use of certain types of learning strategies.

Good Language Learners and Learning Strategies
Several experts argue that if practitioners of language teaching or other language learners know more about what successful language learners do, they might be able to teach or they might be able to use and share these learning

strategies to poorer language learners and thereby increase their chances of success.

A more effective language learner is the one who uses better learning strategies and implements more appropriate strategies than do less effective learners in each of the main language skills. They take advantage of potentially useful learning situations, if necessary create them. They develop learning strategies appropriate to their individual needs. In other words, those good language learners may employ various and useful strategies more often than do others.

Furthermore, in Rubin's words, a good language learner can be described as a learner who :
1. is a willing investigator and accurate guesser ;
2. has a strong persevering drive to communicate ;
3. is often uninhibited and willing to make mistakes in order to learn or communicate ;
4. focuses of form by looking for patterns ;
5. takes advantage of all practice on opportunities ;
6. monitors his or her own speech and that of others, and
7. pays attention on meaning (as cited in Parry, 1990)

A good language learner should cover six keys to success in learning which can be identified as follows:
1. finding a set of learning preferences appropriate to individual and selecting language situations that allow those preferences to be used ;
2. actively involving oneself in the language-learning process through language activity, identifying and dealing with one's own learning problems and generally seeking opportunities to use the language ;
3. developing or using an awareness of the language as both formal system of rules and a means of communication ;
4. constantly extending and revising one's own understanding of the second language system as new information becomes available ;
5. gradually developing the target language into a reference system separate from the native language and learning to think in it ;
6. effectively handling the emotional demands imposed by learning the language.

Ommagio (in Wenden, 1991) identified good language learners as:
1. successful language learners who have insight into their own language learning style and preferences as well as the nature of the task itself. They adopt a personal style or positive learning strategy that fits their needs and preferences ;
2. successful language learners who take an active approach to the learning task. They select learning objectives for themselves and deliberately involve themselves in the foreign language ;
3. successful language learners who are willing to take risks. These learners are willing to appear foolish sometimes in order to communicate, using any means at their disposal to convey meaning ;

4. successful language learners who are prepared to attend to form as well as to content. They constantly look for patterns, classifying schema, rule-governed relationships, and correction from informants ;
5. successful language learners who actively attempt to develop the target language into s separate reference system and try to think in the target language as soon as possible ;
6. successful language learners who generally have a tolerant and out going approach to the target language. They are able to put themselves in another person's place.
7. successful language learners who are good guessers. They use clues effectively and make legitimate inferences.

More over, there are some evidences found by some researchers on strategies that good language learners have a strong association with the strategy choice and self-perceived proficiency in a large university sample, with greater strategy use accompanying perceptions of higher proficiency in language skills (Oxford and Nyikos, 1989). Again this reflects a reality that good learners have appropriate capability to facilitate themselves in using learning strategies accurately. Thus, here, language learning strategies, which can be cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, mnemonic vocabulary-remembering strategies, social strategies, affective strategies and semantic strategies might be said to predict ultimate language skill or proficiency.

CONCLUSION

Using a category of learning strategies in combination and variation promotes better achievement than using learning strategies separately, and differences in achievement in learning a foreign language are often related to differences in learning strategies. The more learning strategies used improve the learning result and the limited learning strategies used limit learning result.

The system of cognitive linkages reflects that a learner can acquire the knowledge about the meaning of familiar discrete vocabulary far more quickly than the ability in understanding a certain vocabulary item of English reading texts.

Vocabulary learning is nothing more than the memorization of a series of word form with fixed meaning. Learning word is a process of "semantization", i.e a continuing process of getting acquainted with verbal forms in their diversity within contexts.

REFERENCES

Anderson, J. 1983. *The Architecture of Cognition*. Cambridge, Massachusetts : haverad University Press.

Beheydt, L. 1987. *The Semantization of Vocabulary in Foreign Language Learning*. System, Vol. 15, No. 1 pp. 55-67.

Brown, D.F. 1980. Eight Cs and a G. *In Guidelines for Vocabulary Teaching*. Singapore : SEAMO Regional Language Centre.

Djiwandono, P.I. 1994. EFL *Reading Strategies of Indonesian Learners*. Unpublished Thesis Malang : Jurusan Pend. Bahasa Inggris, PPS IKIP Malang.

O' Malley, J.M, A.U. Chamot. 1990. *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

Leahley, T.H, and R.J. Harris. 1989. *Human Learning*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey : Prentice Hall, Inc.

Mayer, R.E. 1988. *Learning Strategies : an Overview. In Weinstein, C.E. E.T Goetz, and PA. Alexander. (Eds) Learning and Study Strategies Issues in Assessment, Instruction, and Evaluation*. San Diego, California : Academic Press Inc.

Nation, P. 1980. *Strategies for Receptive Vocabulary Learning. In Guidelines for Vocabulary Teaching*. Singapore. SEAMO Regional Language Centre.

Parry, S.T, and Charles W.S. (Eds). 1990. *Language Aptitude Reconsidered: Language In Education*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Regents.

Oxford, R.L, and M. Nyikos. 1989. Variables affecting choice of language learning strategies by university students. Modern Language Journal 13, 2 : 291-300.

Sadtono, E. 1995. *Perspektif Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris di Indonesia*. Malang : Seksi Kajian Bahasa dan Seni FPBS IKIP Malang.

Sadtono, E. 1996. Wanted : *Good language Learners. Jurnal bahasa , Sastra, Seni dan Pengajarannya*, No. 2 Th. 24. p. 122-138.

Stern, H.H. 1983. *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.

Wenden, A. 1991. *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy*: *Planning and Implementing Learner Training for Language Learners*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.