



TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AT THE TODOR KABLESHKOV UNIVERSITY OF TRANSPORT

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***Abstract:** The paper treats the essence of language learning strategies and the relevance of their implementation in ELT. Various types of learning strategies are examined. It is argued that students must receive explicit training in strategies to be better equipped in their endeavours aimed at the enhancement of their communicative competence in English. The topic is considered in connection with the analysis of the results of a conducted English language learning motivation survey among our University students.*

1. Introduction

Teaching language learning strategies (LLS) within any FL course, at any level and with any type of learners, taking into account their interests, ideas, personalities, motivation and learning styles, as well as LLS introduction into the curriculum, is really crucial. It has become evident that the conscious presentation of various LLS depending on parameters, such as the characteristics of taught material, examined categories, overall students' linguistic background, already acquired native (NL) and foreign language (FL) knowledge, does contribute to general communicative competence enhancement, and, in particular, to its components. We have set the objective to consider, on the one hand, LLS characteristics and types, and, on the other, to provide information as to some beneficially implemented English language learning approaches in our ELT at the Todor Kableshkov University of Transport.

2. Paper layout

The article conforms to the following layout. To start with, it will focus on LLS definitions and a corollary as to the absolute necessity of explicitness in their teaching. Secondly, the parameters of a motivation survey analysis carried out with our university students will be commented on. In the third position, attention will be drawn to LLS types. Next, instances of LLS implementation in our ELT will be advanced. Finally, conclusions will be reached regarding LLS teaching efficiency.

3. Definitions

This paper section is devoted to several LLS definitions in the purpose of better revealing examined concept essence. Thus, to Weinstein & Mayer [1] LLS are treated as

“behaviours and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning” supposed to affect “the learner’s encoding process. To Mayer [2] LLS are “intended to influence how the learner processes information”. According to Tarone [3] LLS must be incorporated “into one’s interlanguage competence”; in compliance with Rubin [4], LLS “contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs”. In O’Maley & Chamot’s [5] view, LLS represent “the special thoughts and behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information”. Oxford [6]¹ qualifies LLS as “specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language. Strategies are tools for the self-directed involvement necessary for developing communicative ability”. LLS function as “a useful toolkit for active, conscious, and purposeful self-regulation of learning” [8].

Summarizing definitions referred to, we can state that they all testify to LLS cognitive parameters, stemming from the studied concept involvement with mutually influencing encoding / decoding processes, as well as with language awareness (LA) enhancement outcomes². This is so, due to the fact that linguistic message reception (performed through decoding) is “a multilevel process, involving numerous checking procedures performed by means of feedback, prior knowledge comparison, fitting and analysis of various language level characteristics so that overall information may be coherent, adjustment of various functions and meanings of used categories to general context, in its most comprehensive interpretation” [9]. Consequently, message reception turns out to be closely involved with production or generation (performed through encoding) and vice-versa, message generation, with reception [9] or as Chandler [10] states, “meaning is not “extracted”, but constructed”. LLS should consequently be aimed at promoting all language levels of “*message componential analysis*” [9] to facilitate encoding / decoding processes and, accordingly, better communicative competence achievement. Above-mentioned *componential analysis* is quite obviously impossible without overall LA improvement. Moreover, processes of linguistic information retrieval and storage are directly dependant on LA boosting, which follows from [9]. Quite logically, many authors put a stress in LLS teaching on encouraging “learner reflection” [7], “guided reflection” ([11], *ibid.*) related to learner self-evaluation of success, failure, errors, difficulties, interests, etc., in language acquisition process. Therefore, LLS must definitely, in our view, be targeted at the better awareness of form, functions and use of specific teaching / learning context language categories.

4. English language studying motivation and LLS teaching

We subscribe to Lessard-Clouston’s [7] view regarding the relevance of studying the teaching circumstances, such as, learners’ motivation, interests, learning styles, etc., while working on LLS. Teaching LLS is accordingly supposed to comply with specific context. This article section offers a concise analysis of a carried out English language learning motivation (ELLM) survey among part-time and full-time students at our university. Assessment is performed by the evaluation of three main groups of indices: general motivation (tables 1, 2), contrastive studying skills (comparing various level categories with analogous NL/FL1 ones, by form and/or meaning) and awareness of the plurilingual need of mastering at a working level of two foreign languages, at least (table 3). Survey items³ are quoted below along with corresponding assessment figures:

¹ [1], [2], [3], [4], [5] as well as [6] were quoted by Lessard-Clouston [7].

² Ref. to [9] revealing the tight connectedness between LA components and linguistic communication process, which encompasses mutually complementing encoding and decoding

³ Some survey items were inspired by [12].

Table 1 General detailed motivation of all respondents (part-time and full-time students)

English language studying (ELS) is/will be important to me for:	YES %	NEUTRAL%	NO%
1. Communication	94, 45%	5, 56%	0%
2. Establishing social contacts	68, 34%	16, 11%	15, 56%
3. Getting acquainted with English speaking countries culture	73, 89%	26, 11%	0%
4. Reading specialized literature	60%	16, 11%	23, 89%
5. Strengthening my position in society and to promotion	65%	11, 11%	23, 89%
6. Working with the Internet	94, 45%	2, 78%	2, 78%
7. Getting informed by media about events around the world	78, 34%	8, 34%	13, 34%
8. Having sense of success (coping with tasks)	52, 78%	31, 67%	15, 56%
9. Making me happy	53, 75%	26, 88%	19, 38%
10. I am interested in several aspects of ELS (specify which ones)	strong interest (3-4 language skills) – 55, 30%	neutral interest (1-2 language skills) – 44, 71%	no interest 0%

Table 2 Summational general motivation figures

HIGH ELLM DEGREE	NEUTRAL ELLM DEGREE	LOW ELLM DEGREE
69, 63%	18, 64 %	11, 73%

Table 3 Evaluation of more specific survey items. Summational figures

	YES	NEUTRAL	NO
While studying English, I establish comparisons between English grammar and lexis with NL / FL1 grammar and lexis.	high ELLM degree ⁴ – 53, 57%	neutral ELLM degree – 12, 15%	low ELLM degree – 34, 29%
I am studying English with the awareness of the need of mastering two foreign languages at least, at a working level.	high ELLM degree ⁵ – 87, 86%	neutral ELLM degree - 0%	low ELLM degree – 12, 15%

4.1. ELLM survey analysis

The figures advanced (detailed and summational) attest to a relatively high ELLM degree revealed through the interest in ELS in the purpose of communication, Internet use, working with specialized literature, improving all types of language skills (including grammar, vocabulary, speaking, reading, writing, listening), achieving a good position on the labour market, etc. These figures also evidence the presence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation preconditioning LLS teaching success.

5. Types of applied LLS in ELT and teaching procedures

LLS underlying features revealed through the above suggested definitions and stemming from the ensuing comment on their cognitive parameters evidently predetermine some of the teaching procedures implemented in our work. LLS are deliberately used tools promoting learners' mastering of taught categories and skills on the basis of their enhanced understanding. Hence, in line with many researchers' views, we believe LLS teaching should compulsorily focus on LA boosting techniques (ref. to some approaches in [9] and [15]).

This article section draws the attention to a LLS classification which makes no claim to be exhaustive, being though widely applicable in LLS research.

⁴ Ref. [13] focusing on the tight connection between Contrastive teaching approach and language learning motivation

⁵ There is a close bond between the implementation of contrastive and comparative FL studying approaches and plurilingualism building. Hence, this survey item also measures ELLM.

5.1. LLS types

Basically, LLS are classified into the following groups: cognitive, metacognitive, memory-related, compensatory, affective and social [8]. Here below we shall proceed by LLS concise subtype presentation.

Cognitive strategies include, among others: analysis, note-taking, summarizing, outlining, reorganizing information, developing knowledge schemes, practicing structures [8], comprehension strategies, such as, making predictions as to the use of specific categories, patterns or vocabulary, determining specific purposes prior a task, drawing on prior knowledge to make inferences, meaning inferring through key words, word-formation, discourse markers, charts, illustrations, skimming text sections and referring to some more informative ones⁶, EL ↔ NL/FL1 translation of words or structures, contrasting EL/NL/FL1 categories in terms of form, semantics and function (our ideas), etc.

Metacognitive strategies are related to: identifying one's own learning needs, task planning, organizing materials, evaluating one's task achievement, assessing any LLS individual success [8], getting aware of one's knowledge about the topic in the process of learning, attention focusing on tasks, dividing a task into subtasks, identifying hardships and asking for assistance, setting learning goals (ref. [14]), etc.

Memory-related strategies enable learners to memorize information by means of acronyms, rhymes, mental representations, flashcards, keywords [8], vocabulary / structure repetition, keeping personal records of vocabulary and structures, associating new categories with similar / equivalent categories in terms of form and / or semantics in NL/FL1, practicing, reusing acquired material (ref. [14]), etc.

Compensatory strategies encompass guessing from the context, "talking around" a missing form [8], rephrasing, circumlocution (ref. [14]), etc.

Affective strategies comprise identifying one's mood and anxiety [8], trying to reduce anxiety level and to positively motivate oneself for tasks.

Social strategies incorporate asking for clarification, verification [8], being interested in sociolinguistic conventions and experimenting with them, collaborating with others on tasks and problem solution (ref. [14]), etc.

5.2. Instances of LLS teaching in ELT

Before commenting on the implementation of most frequently used LLS (types and subtypes) in our EL teaching, we shall state that all LLS are mutually complementary. We cannot categorically draw a demarcation line between their subdivisions, which, depending on the teaching / learning circumstances, may perform various functions. Notwithstanding LLS complexity, for clarity, we shall advance instances adhering to the above essential classification. LLS teaching approach we apply is "woven into regular, everyday L2 teaching", as recommended by Oxford [8], but also carried out separately as instruction on the appropriate to a learning objective LLS types and the necessity of their conscious application.

5.2.1. LLS in the passive voice essence understanding, passive periphrasis formation and use

Due to the need of succinctness, this section material will be confined to the presentation of the underlying LLS we apply when teaching the passive (PV), on the basis of the active voice (AV) in English.

Cognitive LLS: jointly and separately analyzing active and passive structures in terms of form and semantics; analyzing "switches" of arguments in terms of sentential functions; underlining, highlighting specifically identical functions and/or meanings; schematically

⁶ Some strategy ideas were borrowed from [14]; some of them were inspired by the same source, which, though focusing on French learning strategies, we consider really applicable in ELT.

presenting active / passive dependences; deducing the passive voice formula (ref. [15]); performing active ↔ passive transformations; making inferences as to componential meaning drawn on prior knowledge [15] (form / meaning similarity between past participles, -ed adjectives and the perfect periphrasis, and, namely, passiveness and acquisition of result); NL translation and comparisons with NL corresponding structures

Metacognitive LLS: thinking about difficulties related to the studied periphrasis formation; getting aware of the reasons predetermining these hardships; consciously performing the active ↔ passive transformation steps⁷:

- Determining the semantic object of an AV sentence;
- Placing it at the leading position of a passive grammar subject;
- Considering temporal, aspectual and modal features of the verb phrase;
- Preserving the same characteristics in the copula verb “be”;
- Analyzing the utterance in terms of sentence types (declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory, positive, negative);
- Preserving the corresponding features in the PV sentence;
- Focusing attention on the AV sentence verb and thinking about its passive participle;
- “Assembling” obtained PV periphrasis components;
- Examining the semantic AV sentence subject;
- Incorporating it as an instrumental object if needed;
- Reexamining the coherence of the utterance obtained and its consistency with the original AV message

Memory-related LLS: PV structure repetitions; graphically and mentally representing structures

Compensatory LLS: rephrasing an AV or a PV utterance in case of missing vocabulary

Affective LLS: motivating oneself into AV/PV material learning by getting aware of AV/PV features and use, this way reducing anxiety

Social LLS: collaborating with others; dialoging using the studied category

6. Conclusion

Suggested LLS we implement in the process of the English passive periphrasis teaching have turned out to be beneficial to learners’ achievement for the following reasons:

- the strategies applied are conform to the above analyzed ELLM, a prerequisite for LLS explanation and its “weaving” into the regularly practiced set of various teaching procedures;
- LLS teaching, logically determined by LLS essence and types, stresses on LA enhancement, on componential analysis, crucial to encoding / decoding communication procedures, and hence, on PV periphrasis understanding in terms of form, meaning and use.

To sum up, LLS teaching has proved to be relevant to overall communicativeness competence enhancement, the underlying objective not only of ELT, but of any FLT.

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ПРЕПОДАВАНЕ НА СТРАТЕГИИТЕ ЗА ИЗУЧАВАНЕ НА АНГЛИЙСКИ ЕЗИК ВЪВ ВТУ „ТОДОР КАБЛЕШКОВ”

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Ключови думи: стратегии за чуждоезиково изучаване, преподаване на СЧИ (английски), мотивация, езикова осъзнатост

Резюме: Статията третира същността на стратегиите за изучаване на чужд език и значимостта на приложението им при преподаването на английския език. Разгледани са разнообразни видове стратегии. Поддържа се позицията за необходимостта от експлицитното преподаване на стратегиите с цел по-добрата подготовка на студентите в стремежа им към повишаване на комуникативната компетентност по английски език. Тематиката се разработва във връзка с анализа на резултатите от проведено проучване относно мотивацията за изучаване на английския език сред наши студенти.