

AWARENESS AND USE OF META-COGNITIVE STRATEGIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract:

Learning a foreign language is ever to be further improved given the complexity of language structures evolved time to time. No one can say that he or she is perfect in learning a foreign language. Teaching English is a real challenge for English teachers all over the world. With a variety of different skill levels in every classroom, teachers must employ effective strategies that allow each student to learn the material. Whether the class focuses on literature, grammar, or language skills, these teaching strategies will come in handy for many English teachers. The aim of this paper is to provide one such very effective Meta-cognitive strategy for learning English as a foreign language. Meta-cognition is the ability to be conscious of one's mental processes. This paper discusses about how students can be taught to apply meta-cognitive strategies to enhance their learning and it gives an overview of theories and practices in the field of meta-cognitive strategies and language learning.

Key Words: Cognitive strategies, Self-learning styles, Organizational planning, Monitoring and Self-assessment

Introduction

Since 1970s, learning strategies have been at the center of attention in second language learning. Learning strategies are defined as techniques for understanding, remembering, and using information that are intentionally used and consciously controlled by the learner (Pressley & McCormick, 1995). Language learning strategies can act as a key to active, conscious, and purposeful self-regulation learning. The goal of strategy training is self-diagnosis, awareness of how to learn target language most efficiently, developing problem solving skills, experimenting familiar and unfamiliar learning strategies, decision making about how to approach a task, monitoring and self-evaluation, transferring successful learning strategies to new learning context, and enabling students to become more independent, autonomous, and lifelong learners (Oxford, 2003).

Anderson (2003) classifies language learning strategies into seven major categories: cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, mnemonic or memory related strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies, social strategies, and self-motivating strategies. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) have differentiated the range of cognitive categories into two main types: meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies. Meta-cognitive strategies oversee, direct and regulate the learning process. These kinds of strategies involve thinking about learning process, planning, monitoring and evaluating learning. Meta-cognition designates the awareness, analysis and knowledge that a person has of his/ her cognitive (learning, thinking) processes.

The term 'meta-cognition' was coined by American developmental psychologist John Flavell (1979), who defined it as knowledge about cognition and control of cognition. Flavell said that meta-cognition is the knowledge you have of your own cognitive processes (your thinking). It is your ability to control your thinking processes through various strategies, such as organizing, monitoring, and adapting. Additionally, it is your ability to reflect upon the tasks or processes you undertake and to select and utilize

the appropriate strategies necessary in your intercultural interactions. Meta-cognition is considered as a critical component for successful learning. It involves self-regulation and self-reflection of strengths, weaknesses, and the types of strategies a learner create. It underlines how one think through a problem or situation and the strategies he creates to address the situation or problem.

Meta-cognition has been defined as a construct that refers to thinking about one's thinking or the human ability to be conscious of one's mental processes (Nelson, 1996). Research has shown that language learners can learn more effectively when teaching them some of the learning strategies that have been identified as one of the defining characteristics of a good language learner in the literature (Rubin, 1975) Meta-cognitive strategies play more significant role than other learning strategies in this process because once a learner understands how to regulate his/her own learning through the use of strategies, language acquisition should proceed at a faster rate (Anderson, 2003)

According to Flavell (1979) meta-cognitive knowledge is "one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them, e.g., the learning-relevant properties of information or data" (p. 232). Meta-cognition is a form of cognition and a high level thinking process that involves active control over cognitive processes. Wenden (1998) defines meta-cognition as knowledge about learning that is a part of a learner's store of acquired knowledge and consists of a system of related ideas, relatively stable, early developing and an abstraction of a learners' experience.

Birjandi, (2006) says that Meta-cognition is considered as the 'seventh sense' and one of the mental characteristics that successful learners use. Flavell (1979) states that Meta-cognitive knowledge as a kind of declarative knowledge can be classified according to whether it focuses on the learner, the learning task or the process of learning. These three categories are referred to as

- Person knowledge, i.e., the knowledge a person has about himself or herself and others as cognitive processors;
- Task knowledge, i.e., the knowledge a person has about the information and resources they need to undertake a task;
- Strategy knowledge. i.e., the knowledge regarding the strategies which are likely to be effective in achieving goals and undertaking tasks.

Brown et al. (1983), meta-cognitive knowledge and meta-cognitive strategies are two distinct components of the term meta-cognition. Meta-cognitive knowledge refers to information learners acquire about their learning, while meta-cognitive strategies are general skills through which learners manage, direct, regulate, and guide their learning.

Ridley et al., (1992) The basic meta-cognitive strategies include connecting new information to the old one; selecting deliberate thinking strategies; and planning, monitoring and evaluating thinking processes. They help learners regulate and oversee learning activities such as taking conscious control of learning, planning and selecting strategies, monitoring the process of learning, correcting errors, analyzing the effectiveness of learning strategies, and changing learning behaviors and strategies when necessary.

O'Malley & Chamot, (1990) Students without meta-cognitive approaches are essentially learners without direction or opportunity to plan their learning, monitor their progress, or review their accomplishments and future learning directions.

Meta-cognitive Skills

• Setting learning goals:

Learners must set proper learning goals for task processing. They should set goals related to working, parenting, and/or participating in their community. Learners must be able to differentiate between long-term and short-term goals. They involve strategies such as asking oneself questions on the requirements of the task, on comprehension, and on possible caveats, contradictions, and missing information that hinder understanding of the task and outline activities that will help them achieve their goals.

Lompscher,(1999) says that going forth and back while reading the instructions, the material, or the data in order to form a coherent representation, is also a strategy often used. Other strategies, which are technical in nature but are used to facilitate orientation, are those that aim at making the representation of the problem space clear. Learners must identify obstacles to meet their goals and identify community resources and sources of support for meeting their goals. They must identify and develop new strategies to achieve learning goals and explore additional educational opportunities. Learners should plan and prepare other necessary requirements also that involve drawing of diagrams, use of symbols, producing tables, underlying the main ideas, and figuring out possible interrelations. Thus, the paths leading from the initial to the end state of the problem space are actively established.

- **Setting own learning styles:**

Learners must analyze their previous learning experiences and express likes and dislikes about learning activities. They must realize their strengths and weaknesses in learning. They can discuss and share with their teachers about their own learning preferences and learning strategies. They should identify their learning styles in terms of preferred way to take in information and in terms of preferred way to process information.

- **Evaluating their own learning:**

Veenman & Elshout, (1999) states that Evaluation strategies involve appraisal of the outcome of the cognitive processing vis-à-vis previously established criteria or standards that pertain to the quality of it. They may also involve strategies for the evaluation of the quality of planning, regulation, and implementation of the strategies that were used to monitor task processing.

Schunck & Zimmerman, (1998) says that Strategies for recapitulation and self-regulation involve strategies for the appraisal of the whole endeavour with a task, of what happened from the beginning to the end of processing, the strengths and weaknesses, the causes of the outcomes, and what should be attended to in the future. Evaluating one's own learning includes expressing their feelings about their class in simple terms and describing their progress towards their goals and monitor and assess their progress. It also focuses on identifying achieved goals and determine next steps and to plan the activities and changes needed. Evaluation also includes seeking additional learning opportunities.

Meta-cognitive knowledge

Flavell (1979) says that a differentiated representation of cognitive processes takes place according to the functions they serve like language, memory, learning, attention and thinking. To have awareness of subjective mental states, observation of behavior and its outcomes, use of language and to communicate with others, this kind of knowledge is required and it is the part of the meta-cognitive knowledge which is declarative knowledge stored in memory.

Meta-cognitive knowledge involves three stages. The first of them is self-awareness. To know one's effective learning is to know his own learning style(visual, auditory or kinaesthetic) This involves how he learns by himself and his beliefs about his own learning and how he thinks others learning.

The second stage is the task of learning and how a learner process information. This stage of meta-cognition is related to think and plan more about how languages are acquired and what it takes to know information related to the language and how to use respective information. Planning includes how one can get information to start learning a language, to decide how long it will take to learn the language, what resources and information are available to learn the language, to plan about the time duration required to learn the language, what do one need to do to learn the language and to plan for active participation in the language classes, get involved and take part in every activity in order to be successful in one's language learning endeavor.

The third stage is to develop strategies for effective learning and use them properly. It is very important to set learning goals because it makes learners reach their objectives more easily if they have their objectives clearly stated. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) provide a list of general learning strategies,

highlighting the meta-cognitive processes involved in each of them:

1. **Setting goals:** developing/ planning personal objectives, identifying the purpose of the task; the meta-cognitive process of planning;
2. **Directing attention:** deciding in advance to focus on particular tasks and ignore distractions; the meta-cognitive processes of planning, monitoring, problem-solving and evaluating;
3. **Activating background knowledge:** thinking about and using what the student already knows that helps him do the task; the meta-cognitive processes of planning, monitoring, problem-solving and evaluating;
4. **Predicting:** anticipating information to prepare and give direction for the task; the meta-cognitive process of planning;
5. **Organizational planning:** planning the task and content sequence; outlining, brainstorming, making a priority list; the meta-cognitive process of planning;
6. **Self-management:** arranging for conditions that helps one learn; knowing yourself, planning how to study; the meta-cognitive process of planning;
7. **Asking if it makes sense:** checking understanding and production to keep track of progress and identify problems; monitoring comprehension and production, self-monitoring; the meta-cognitive process of monitoring;
8. **Attending selectively:** focusing on key words, phrases and ideas; scanning, finding specific information; the meta-cognitive processes of planning and monitoring;
9. **Deduction/ induction:** consciously applying learned or self-developed rules; using/ making a rule; the meta-cognitive process of monitoring.

Meta-cognitive experience

Arnold Bennett (1933) a British writer, said that one cannot have knowledge without having emotions. (General quote) In meta-cognition, there are feelings and emotions present that are related to the goals and tasks of learning. These components of meta-cognition speaks about meta-cognitive experience, which is a learner's internal response to learning. A learner's feelings and emotions serve as a feedback system to help her understand her progress and expectations, and her comprehension and connection of new information to the old, among other things.

Efklides. A (2001) says that Meta-cognitive experiences are manifestations of the online monitoring of cognition as the person comes across a task and processes the information related to it. They are the interface between the person and the task. They comprise meta-cognitive feelings, meta-cognitive judgments/estimates, and online tasks specific knowledge.

Koriat & Levy-Sadot, (1999) say that meta-cognitive feelings are non-analytic and products of non-conscious feedback and inferential, heuristic processes. Usually they are momentary, transient, and go unnoticed. But if they are strong and persist, then the person becomes aware of his/her feelings and this awareness gives rise to conscious analytic processes as to their source, their implications for cognitive processing, and the need for action and regulation of behavior. Examples of meta-cognitive feelings are: feeling of knowing and its related like the tip of the-tongue phenomenon, feeling of familiarity, feeling of difficulty, feeling of confidence, and feeling of satisfaction.

Efklides & Petkaki, (2005) say, if feeling of difficulty is very strong, then the cue is that the person cannot proceed with the task and the task should be abandoned. On the contrary, when the task is familiar and processing runs smoothly, then the person experiences pleasant affect and low or no feeling of difficulty. Examples of metacognitive judgments/estimates are: judgment of learning, estimate of effort expenditure, estimate of time needed or expended, estimate of solution correctness.

Meta-cognitive strategies

The metacognitive strategies synthesized by Clegg (2015, p. 5) fall into three main categories:

I. Planning, with the following components:

- a) Advance organization, characterized by previewing, skimming and reading for gist; previewing the main ideas and concepts of a text; identifying the organizing principle;
- b) Organizational planning, or planning what to do; planning how to accomplish the learning task; planning the parts and sequence of ideas to express;
- c) Selective attention: listening or reading selectively, scanning, finding specific information; attending to key words, phrases, ideas, linguistic markers, types of information;
- d) Self-management: planning when, where and how to study; seeking or arranging the conditions that help one learn.

II. Monitoring, with the following components:

- a) Monitoring comprehension: thinking while listening, thinking while reading; checking one's comprehension during listening or reading;
- b) Monitoring production: thinking while speaking, thinking while writing; checking one's oral or written production while it is taking place.

III. Evaluating

Evaluating, namely self-assessment: checking back, keeping a learning log, reflecting on what you learned; judging how well one has accomplished a learning task.

Students should be encouraged to decide for themselves how well they learned a certain content or how well they performed on a task, to become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, which may help them perform better the next time. Students also reflect on the efficiency of the learning strategies they used, as well as the changes they would apply to their learning process in relation to a prospective learning task.

Using meta-cognitive strategies in the classroom

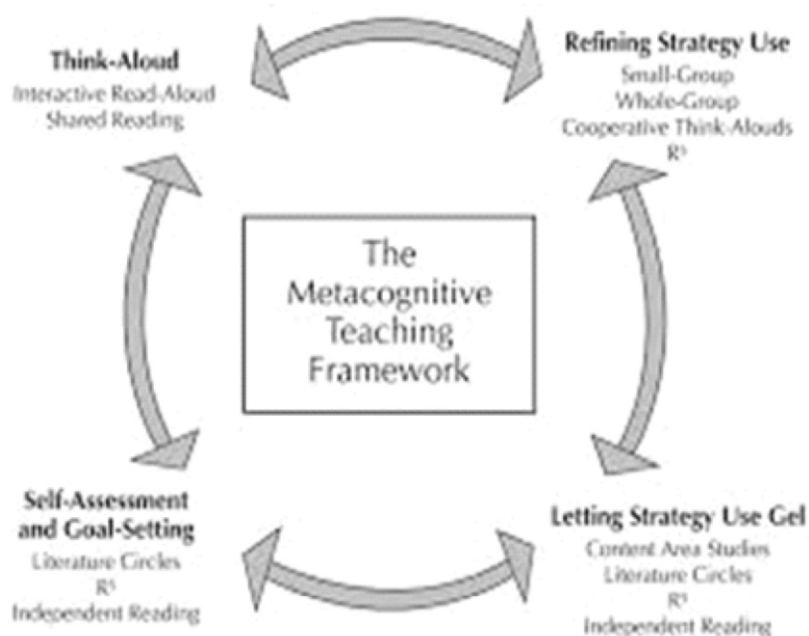
Table referred from the CALLA Handbook of Chamot, A. U. & O'Malley, J. M. 1994.

Meta-cognitive Strategies		
Strategy name	Strategy Description	Strategy Definition
Planning Stage		
Advance Organization	i) Preview ii) Skim iii) Gist	Previewing the main ideas and concepts of the text and identifying the organized principles
Organizational Planning	i) Plan what to do	Planning how to accomplish the learning task; planning the parts of the lesson and sequence of ideas to express.
Selective Attention	i) Listen or read selectively ii) Scan iii) Find specific information	Attending to key words, phrases, ideas, linguistic markers, types of information
Self-management	i) Plan when, where and how to study	Seeking or arranging the conditions that help one learn
Monitoring Stage		
Monitoring Comprehension	i) Think while listening ii) Think while reading	Checking one's comprehension while listening or reading

Monitoring Production	i) Think while speaking ii) Think while writing	Checking one's oral or written production while it is taking place.
Evaluating Stage		
Self-assessment	i) Check back ii) Keep a learning log iii) Reflect on what you learned	Judging how well one has accomplished a learning task

Meta-cognitive learning strategies in the English class

Figure: 1



Clegg.J. (2015) proposes a unique presentation of meta-cognitive, cognitive and social-affective learning strategies. I illustrate it here because, I strongly believe that they are all relevant for language learning.

- Resourcing: using reference materials such as dictionaries, encyclopedia and textbooks;
- Grouping: classifying words, terminology, quantities or concepts according to their attributes, constructing graphic organizers;
- Note-taking: writing down key words and concepts in abbreviated verbal, graphic or numerical form, taking notes on idea maps, making T-lists;
- Elaborating prior knowledge: relating new to known information and making personal associations; using what the student knows, using background knowledge, making analogies;
- Summarizing: making a mental, oral or written summary of information gained from listening or reading; saying or writing the main idea;
- Deduction/ induction: applying or figuring out rules to understand a concept or complete a learning task; using/making a rule;
- Imagery: using mental or real pictures to learn new information or solve a problem; visualizing, making a picture;
- Auditory representation: replaying mentally a word, phrase or piece of information; using one's mental

tape recorder, hearing the piece of information again;

- Making inferences: using information in the text to guess meanings of new items or predict upcoming information; using context clues; guessing from context; predicting.

Conclusion

Meta-cognitive strategies help build something more than an inclination towards cooperation, namely self-esteem and self-confidence given by the ability to choose and evaluate one's learning strategies, besides the value of the respective strategies and the autonomy and independence in learning that comes along with them. (Magaldi, 2010)

Using Meta-cognitive strategies in the English classrooms help achieve successful learning. Using these strategies, students make a plan of what they need to do and establish goals, organizing their thoughts and activities, in order to undertake the achievement of tasks. Teachers have a major role in using meta-cognitive strategies. Teachers should encourage students to reflect upon their own goals first of all by highlighting more clearly the learning goals for the whole class and then supporting students in setting their own objectives. Setting goals accurately helps students in measuring their own learning progress better.

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