

The Expert Language Learner:
A Review of Good Language Learner Studies and Learner Strategies*
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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a current model of the learning processes of successful language learners. It incorporates the major theoretical categories described over more than thirty year of research¹. After describing the model, we trace the history of the definition of the Good or Expert Language Learner (GLL), much of which involves defining the learning strategies he/she uses. Following this, we discuss the research methodology used to define the GLL and to isolate learning strategies, and finally, outline some current issues that need to be researched to extend our understanding of the model of the GLL.

II. MODEL OF THE EXPERT LEARNER

The model of the expert language learner presented here, called Learner Self-Management (LSM), is an interactive one in which there is continual interaction between the learner's control mechanism (here termed **procedures**, but often called metacognitive strategies) and the learner's knowledge and beliefs.

LSM² refers to the ability to deploy *procedures* and to access *knowledge and beliefs* in order to accomplish learning goals in a dynamically changing environment (Butler, 1997).

PROCEDURES

Within LSM, there are five procedures: planning, monitoring, evaluating, problem-identification/solving, and implementing.³

¹ Two of the earliest papers on the Good Language Learner are Rubin, 1975, and Stern, 1975.

² In the educational psychology literature (Butler, 1997; Pintrich & Garcia, 1992; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990; Pressley, 1995; and Zimmerman & Schunk, 1989) LSM is referred to as "self-regulation." In her 1991 volume, Wenden used the term to refer only to metacognitive strategies (here called "procedures").

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³ Within language learning, a tripartite division of metacognitive strategies (planning, monitoring, evaluating) was proposed by O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; and Wenden, 1991. More recently, Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, and Robbins, 1999, included the strategy of problem-solving. The LSM model has also incorporated the strategy of

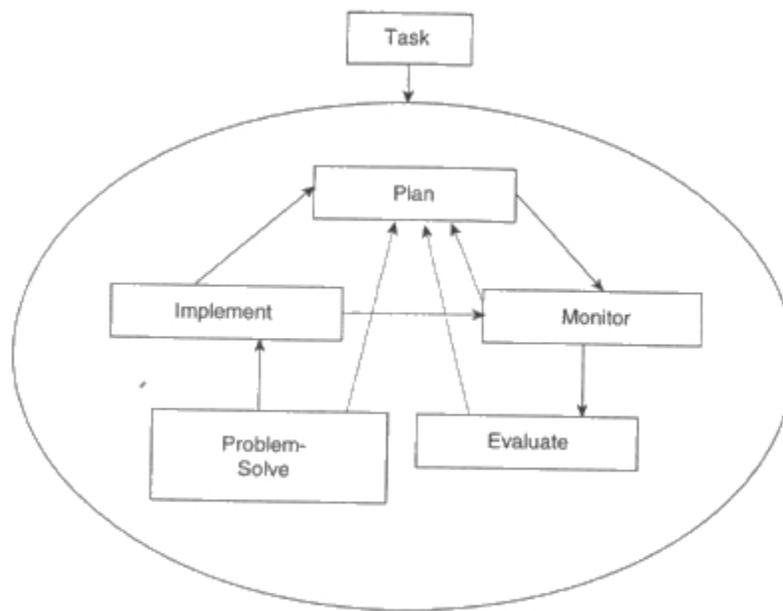


Figure 2.1 Procedures for self management.

Planning

In Planning, there are four steps: defining/selecting goals; setting criteria to measure goal achievement; task analysis; and setting a time line. Goal setting consists of learners determining what they want to accomplish within a stated time period. There can be both long-term and short-term goals⁴. Expert learners are able to set realistic goals for themselves within a realistic time frame. For example, if a learner is a beginner and has only six weeks to study a language, the expert learner will not set a goal of speaking like a native. As well, if expert learners recognize that they do not have sufficient knowledge of a subject or the language, they may set their goals a little lower. Expert learners can adjust their goals to match the time available, their knowledge (of the language, the subject matter) and their perception of what they need to focus on next.

implementation from the four way division (noting, evaluating, adjustment, and implementation) developed by Neustupny, 1995, for all language management.

⁴ There are a number of examples of long term goals. These include the ACTFL proficiency guidelines for the four skills (Rubin and Thompson, 1994, give a brief description of these); the United States Foreign Service Institute time line for achieving levels of proficiency considering the level of difficulty each language presents for speakers of English, and a description of ability levels set by the Council of Europe (2001).

In setting criteria to assess goal achievement, expert learners establish measures to recognize accomplishment of their goals. Learners may ask themselves questions, such as: How will know that I have accomplished my goal? What concrete behaviors can I use to measure my accomplishment? These criteria are used to evaluate their progress. Expert learners are skilled at setting observable useful criteria.

Task analysis⁵ according to Wenden, 1995 includes a number of components: task purpose, task classification, and task demands. These three components enable the expert to establish an action plan to begin working on a task. While the goal is a subset of the task and defines in specific terms what the learner hopes to learn, the task purpose defines why the learner is doing the task. Both the goal and the task purpose help define the task classification, and task classification provides direct input into task demands.

In order to value a task, learners identify why they are performing a task, i.e. the task purpose. The purpose is often pedagogical (for example, to get a good grade or to practice using specific forms) or it can be related to some real life objectives (such as filling in a job application, making a doctor's appointment, or having enough language to make friends).

In task classification, the learner identifies the nature of the task in order to know how to proceed and to help determine what the demands of the task may be. In classifying a task the expert learner bears the goal and the purpose in mind while considering which characteristics of the task will require attention. Imagine the following scenario: the task is to watch a program on T.V., the goal is to listen to an interview, and the task purpose is to talk to friends about the person being interviewed. If this is the case, the expert learner may consider several characteristics including: the nature of listening: that there are no word boundaries, that intonation plays an important role in defining information: the genre of an interview: that it consists of questions and answers, that there are few visuals to interpret the talk, and that it can contain opinions

⁵ Task analysis is an area that Wenden, 1991 and Wenden, 1995 described for language learning. It has been further elaborated in a forthcoming book by Rubin and McCoy.

and narrative; and the nature of speaking (when the learner discusses the interview with friends): that his/her grammar must be intelligible, that his/her vocabulary should be appropriate for the topic and for casual conversation; and that he/she selects all the appropriate facts to support a narrative or persuasive discourse.

In task demands, learners consider what they need to do to accomplish a task based on the task characteristics. Learners may consider: the knowledge and skills needed to complete the task, any background knowledge they might need to accomplish the task and whether they have that knowledge, strategies that might be effective to perform the task and whether they need to find or create new ones, the level of task difficulty. Once learners know how difficult the task is they consider how long the task might take to accomplish and how much research they need to do. Finally, learners consider how they will break up the task and in what order they should do the task. By considering task demands based on purpose and classification, expert learners prepare themselves to be successful by a thorough analysis of the task. In this way, they allocate their knowledge and resources in a more effective way and are then able to put together an appropriate and flexible plan.

Expert learners always establish a realistic time line within which they expect to accomplish their goals. The time line serves to help the learner assess and reassess their understanding of the task demands and assess how realistic their goals were. Along with criteria, it is another evaluation measure.

Monitoring.

In monitoring, learners notice any problems they might have. These might include: lack of attention focus, emotional malaise, problems in understanding or expression, or ineffective application of one or more cognitive or socio-affective strategies. Expert learners are continually monitoring their production and understanding to note the source of problems and the extent of their progress.

Evaluation

In evaluation, learners determine whether they have made appropriate progress. They do this by applying the criteria established (during planning) to determine whether they have met some or all of their goals. Learners then consider whether they are satisfied with their performance or need to problem-solve to attain their goals.

Problem-Identification and Problem-Solution

Once expert learners have determined that they haven't met their goals, they begin to consider what else they could do to reach them. Expert learners will identify some possible causes for their lack of success. These could include identifying: use of an inappropriate set of strategies; insufficient knowledge about the language, the topic, the culture; lack of attention focus; unrealistic goals for the time period allocated; or insufficient task analysis. After determining what the problem might be, expert learners consider some possible solutions including: using/creating a more effective set of strategies; acquiring the necessary knowledge; finding ways to improve their attention focus; reformulating their goals or the time period; or improving their task analysis. According to Ertmer, 1996 (cited in: <http://coe.sdsu.edu/eet/Articles/metacognition/start>), expert learners are "more aware than novices of the need to check for errors when they fail to comprehend and how they need to redirect their efforts."

Implementation of Problem-Solution

Expert learners try out their solutions by implementing them to determine if they will yield a better outcome. This may cause them to redo several procedures: monitor, evaluate, change their planning (i.e. criteria, time line, goals, task analysis) in order to accomplish the task.

KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS

Knowledge and beliefs consists of five components⁶: task knowledge, self knowledge, beliefs, background knowledge, and strategy knowledge.

⁶ In several articles, Wenden, 1986, 1991, and 1995, has drawn attention to the important role that learner knowledge plays in promoting success. Drawing on the work of Flavell, 1979, Wenden includes 3 kinds of knowledge: task,

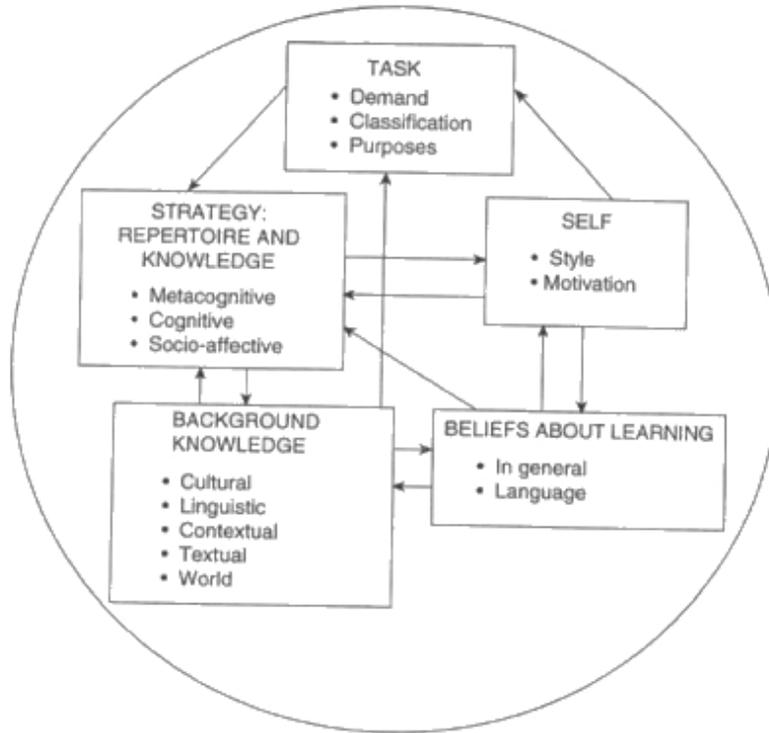


Figure 2.2 Knowledge and beliefs.

Task Knowledge is very important because learners need to have sufficient comprehension of what is needed to achieve results (cf. study by Victori, 1996). According to Wenden, 1991, and Wenden, 1995, expert learners draw on three kinds of knowledge: (1) knowledge about possible task purposes, (2) knowledge about possible task classifications, and (3) knowledge about task demands. Having a set of task knowledge to refer to enables the expert learner to be more proficient at the procedure of task analysis. Chamot, 2001, found that "good language learners demonstrated adeptness at matching strategies to the task they were working on, while the less successful language learners seemed to lack the **metacognitive knowledge about task requirements** needed to select appropriate strategies⁷" (p. 32). (bolding by author).

strategy, and self. Wenden, 1999, however, has also drawn attention to the importance of beliefs in effective language learning.

⁷ Chamot, 1999, p. 166, also noted "This trend (i.e. to have task knowledge--author) was apparent with children in foreign language immersion classrooms, high school ESL and foreign language students, and adult language learners."

Task purposes. When expert learners look over a task, they refer to their knowledge of possible pedagogical or real life goals. For instance, given a task, the learner can immediately relate it either to their own particular linguistic need(s) or to language areas that need improvement or relate it to some possible real-life communication plans.

Task Classification. When expert learners look over a task, they compare this to some classes of tasks they already know about. For example, GLLs might know that it is useful to classify a task by whether it is analytic, synthetic, descriptive, or comparative. In language learning, a GLL may think about whether the task is productive or receptive. Further, they know something about what this kind of classification implies for learning. Nation, 2002, p. 27, shows us how complicated just the task of "learning a word" can be. He provides a variety of productive and receptive tasks around form, meaning, and use of a word. Having knowledge about the kinds of classifications permits the learner to be more effective in doing task analysis. Another kind of task classification knowledge may relate directly to the nature of language. Rubin and Thompson, 1994, describe three characteristics: creativity, systematicity, and similarity. Expert learners use their knowledge of these characteristics to select appropriate strategies. Expert learners may also use their knowledge of how language learning may differ from learning other subjects to be more effective in task analysis.

Task Demands. According to Wenden, 1991, expert learners have a sense of what is entailed in completing a task. Here the learner draws on resources, knowledge, and strategies in order to complete the task. Learners recognize which of these three elements they have and which they need to acquire more of. Task demands include having criteria to judge the difficulty of a task and knowledge of some ways to organize and order a task and break it up most effectively.

Self-knowledge. This has increasingly been recognized as important for the expert learner. Self-knowledge includes: knowledge of one's own learning styles and

multiple intelligences; and motivation. Knowledge of learning styles enable expert learners to use their style strengths when possible and to compensate when unable to do so.

Motivation has been recognized as playing a critical role in self-directed learners (Costa, L. and B. Kallick, 2004). Motivation, according to Pintrich, 1989, includes three components: (1) expectancy component (self-efficacy)--judgment about and confidence in one's ability to perform a task, (2) a value component-- beliefs about the importance and value of a task and (3) an affective component-- feelings about themselves and emotional reactions to the task. Expert learners choose to engage in a task based on how important a task is to them. Expert learners recognize when they may lack the knowledge to accomplish a task and will do what is necessary to gain the knowledge and skill to do so. According to Victori, 1996, self knowledge is important because it can affect a person's ability to learn. Those learners who experience frequent failure can develop negative feelings and may approach their learning passively. Halbach, n.d., alludes to the important role of effective procedures in enhancing motivation.

Beliefs

More and more, beliefs are being recognized as an important component in the expert learner⁸. There are two major types of beliefs held by expert learners: general beliefs about learning and more specific beliefs about language learning. A student's beliefs about the learning process can be significant because they may promote or seriously inhibit the learner's desire to acquire new knowledge or enhance their skills. For example, learners who believe that the responsibility for learning lies with the teacher may be quite passive and unable to assume control of their own learning. Beliefs about the nature of language learning can be critical as well. Examples include: beliefs that making mistakes is harmful in language learning or that boys are not very good at learning a foreign language. Beliefs of this kind can inhibit learning.

⁸ Wenden, 1999; Mori, 1997; Horwitz, 1999.

Background knowledge

Expert learners use their background knowledge effectively while employing procedures. When planning, they draw on this knowledge to define their goals and their strategies; monitor and evaluate their progress; and especially to do effective problem-solving. There are several kinds of background knowledge including: domain, cultural, linguistic, contextual, textual, and world⁹ Pressley, 1994; pg. 268, suggests that "Many strategies cannot operate (or at least do not do so very effectively) unless the thinker has extensive non-strategy knowledge." For example, in order to guess effectively, make valid inferences, or elaborate, learners must use their background knowledge. The more background knowledge learners have, the greater their chance of making good guesses¹⁰.

Strategy Knowledge.

Expert learners have stored information about three major types of strategies: cognitive, socio-affective, and metacognitive/procedures. Currently, the definition of a cognitive strategy varies considerably. Two fairly common ones are: "the techniques or procedures that facilitate a learning task" (Chamot, 2001, pg 25) or "the steps or operations that are used in learning or problem-solving that require direct analysis, transformation, or synthesis of learning materials" (Rubin, 1987, pg. 23). Socio-affective strategies are those which help the learner control their emotions (i.e. affective) and those that enable the learner to engage in social activities that then engage the learner in communication (socio). Metacognitive strategies/procedures are those described above. While both expert and novice learners may use the same cognitive and socio-affective strategies; research consistently shows that difference in success depends on effective procedures (Chamot, 2001, p. 32). In addition, expert learners use strategies alone and in combination in an effective and appropriate manner. Chamot and Rubin, 1994) pg 773, note that "strategies are most useful when used effectively together so that success

⁹ See Rubin, 2001, for an elaboration of kinds of background knowledge.

¹⁰ Even though guessing has its limits, expert learners are better at recognizing when their guessing has been ineffective.

depends not on the use of an individual one but on the effective *management* of a repertoire of strategies." (italics: author)

INTERACTIVE CHARACTERISTIC OF LSM

The LSM model is characterized by a regular interaction within the procedures, within the learner's knowledge and beliefs¹¹, and between procedures and knowledge and beliefs. Chart 3 "Self-Management Process" represents this multi-interactive relationship.

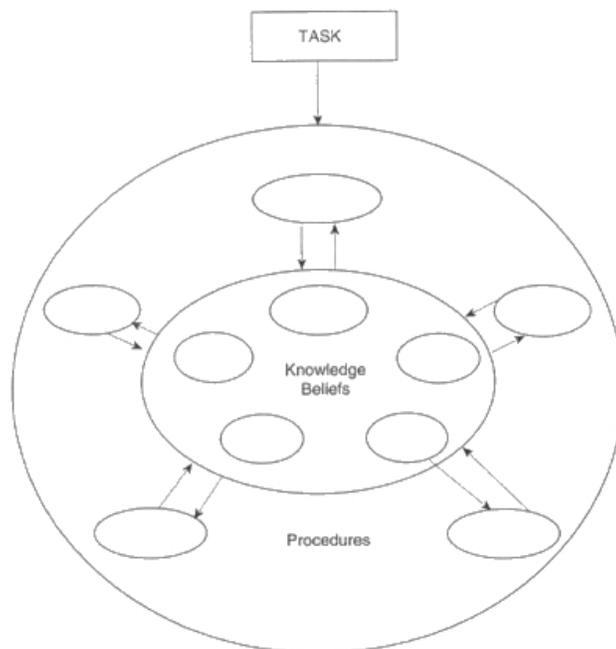


Figure 2.3 Self-management process.

The outer circle refers to procedures and the inner circle refers to knowledge and beliefs. When expert learners begin to work, they use procedures and base their choices on multiple aspects of their knowledge and beliefs. Following is an illustration of this interaction:

A student is learning to make a doctor's appointment by telephone. He/she may access feeling about using the phone (self-knowledge) and may decide to give him/herself a pep

¹¹ Anderson, 1991, provides a succinct example of the interaction between cognitive strategies and prior knowledge: "Beginning level language learners may know what strategies to use but because of a lack of vocabulary, or other schema related information, they may not have a strong enough language foundation to build on." (p. 469).

talk (using affective strategy knowledge). The student may then decide how to accomplish the task (planning, a procedure) by considering what he/she knows about telephone calls--that they usually consist of two persons, that there is often a question and answer sequence (task classification, a procedure, using background knowledge). The student may then consider other prior knowledge such as what questions are normally asked in this kind of interaction and what the responses might be (task demands using background knowledge). The learner may then try to make the doctor's appointment. While so doing the learner may falter and note that he/she is unable to continue (monitoring, a procedure). The student may decide more information is needed (problem-solution, a procedure). The learner may then ask his/her teacher what are the kinds of questions that are asked when making a doctor's appointment (implementation, a procedure using resourcing, which he/she has stored as cognitive strategy knowledge).

This example shows that when learners manage their own learning as they work through procedures, they may trigger access and utilization of their knowledge. As they do so, their knowledge may change. In the same way, knowledge can trigger changes in procedures. Hence, LSM involves a constant interaction within and between procedures and knowledge.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF EXPERT LEARNERS

Given the LSM model, it is helpful to describe some of the characteristics of Expert Learners.

Well developed procedures.

Expert self-managed learners can assess the requirements of the task at hand, can identify and deploy appropriate learning strategies, can make appropriate attributions for success and failure and readily accept responsibility for their own learning (Strage, 1998). Expert learners are able to monitor their own progress, to shift strategies upon encountering problems, and move on as sub-goals are attained.

Depth of Knowledge and Facilitating Beliefs

Expert learners possess appropriate, productive beliefs about themselves as learners and about the learning process, a well-developed repertoire of cognitive and socio-affective strategies, adequate knowledge about the nature of tasks, and sufficient background knowledge. An example of a productive belief is a strong sense of self-efficacy, that is, confidence in one's ability to succeed and the recognition that success often comes after some frustration (Brown and Pressley, 1994). According to Donovan, Bransford, and Pelligrino, 2000 "Experts have acquired extensive knowledge that affects what they notice and how they organize, represent, and interpret information in their environment."

Productive Interaction between Procedures and Knowledge

Expert learners are able to access their knowledge and beliefs in order to orchestrate their use of procedures. Further, while carrying out procedures, they may add to or modify their knowledge.

Flexible

Self-managed learners are distinguished by their awareness of and ability to use their knowledge, beliefs, motivation, and cognitive processing in a flexible manner (Butler and Winne, 1995; Pressley, Borkowski, and Schneider, 1987). Stern, 1975, noted that GLLs used a methodical but flexible approach, developing the new language into an ordered system and constantly revising this system.

Adaptive

Expert learners are also adaptive, that is, they are able to cope with a range of tasks and with a range of problems. When expert learners encounter a lack of success, they are able to effectively identify problems and come up with alternative solutions that they try out. Uhrig, 2004, reports on two highly successful foreign students who were able to adapt their learning strategies to the task.¹²

Contextualized

¹² The two students used strategies specific to the subject matter, one was a law student and the other was enrolled in a business administration program.

The knowledge that expert learners bring to bear on a task is highly contextualized, rather than an isolated set of strategies, beliefs, or other knowledge. According to Donovan, Bransford, and Pelligrino, 2000, their knowledge represents "contexts of applicability" in which the learner knows when and how to use their knowledge.

IV. HISTORY OF THE DEFINITION OF GOOD LANGUAGE/EXPERT LEARNERS

A review of the development of the current model shows that the earliest descriptions of the Good Language Learner (GLL) foreshadowed much of what later research teased apart to develop the current model. Early descriptions of the GLL focused largely on the knowledge side of the model, particularly on cognitive and socio-affective strategies as well as on background knowledge. Following this, researchers refined and detailed a host of cognitive and socio-affective strategies as well as documenting different kinds of background knowledge. Shortly after, the focus was on understanding the role of procedures (called metacognitive strategies at that time) and their interaction. Finally, the role of knowledge was given more attention as aspects of task, self, and belief knowledge were elaborated.

RECOGNITION OF THE CONCEPT OF "THE GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNER"

In the early 1970's, several researchers (Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; and Naiman, Frohlich and Stern, 1975) isolated and defined the concept of the Good Language Learner (GLL). Soon thereafter, Wesche, 1975; Wong-Fillmore, 1976; Tarone, 1977 and 1981; and Hosenfeld, 1977 and 1978 added to our understanding of the cognitive processes of GLLs. Although these citations mostly provided details on the knowledge side of the current model, there is incipient reference to procedures or metacognitive strategies. Comparing the strategies listed by these scholars to the LSM model, we can make the following observations.

Knowledge

Cognitive Strategies

Following the LSM model, here is what our analysis found. Several cognitive strategies are described. Research on cognitive strategies dates back to 1966 when Aaron Carton recognized that learners vary in their propensity to make valid, rational, and reasonable inferences. Building on Carton and focusing on the GLL, Rubin listed the following cognitive strategies: guessing, use of cognates, practicing, analyzing, categorizing, synthesizing. Cohen and Apeh, 1980 and 1981, identified eleven categories of association used for memorization. Rubin, 1981, identified the following cognitive strategies: clarification/verification, guessing/inductive inferencing, deductive reasoning, practice, and memorization

In addition, there is a beginning recognition of the importance of the development of a strategy repertoire in GLLs. Rubin, 1975, notes that in order to be efficient the GLL is able to stratify their strategies for maximum efficiency. Wesche, 1979, foreshadows an aspect of strategy repertoire we are just beginning to investigate, namely, "it may be complexes of them (i.e. behaviors) rather than specific ones which characterize different kinds of learners (pg. 419). Wesche, 1979, also observed that there was a greater variety and quantity of learning behaviors pursued by those who improved most rapidly¹³

Social strategies

Also referenced are social strategies: "seeks out opportunities to use the language by looking for native speakers, going to the movies or to cultural events" (Rubin, 1975). Wong-Fillmore, 1976, found that the most successful young learners were those that used an important social strategy, namely, using a few well chosen formulas which allowed learners to continue to participate in activities which provided contexts for new learning. Wesche, 1979, pg. 425, reported that voluntary out-of-class exposure to French characterized the highly successful student.

Affective strategies

¹³ Further research has shown that both expert and novice learners may use the same strategies but it is their ability to control them that makes for success (Chamot, 2001).

Naiman et al, 1975, p. 54, identified two affective strategies: "You've got to be able to laugh at your own mistakes" and "You've got to have a sense of humor."

Background knowledge

Many examples of the use of background knowledge as the basis for these strategies were listed (for example, use of knowledge of lexicon and grammar, general knowledge of society, of similarities to native language, rules of speaking, knowledge of a second or third language).

Beliefs

Hosenfeld, 1978, hints at what is becoming an important area for research, namely, the role of beliefs about language and language learning. She notes that some learners have a "mini-theory of second language." Rubin, 1975, described some psychological characteristics of the GLL which may relate to his/her beliefs about the nature of language learning "comfortable with uncertainty," "willing to make mistakes," "willing to try out guesses" and "willing to live with a certain amount of vagueness."

Self-knowledge

Although not so labeled, Stern, 1975, and Naiman et al., 1975; identify "a personal learning style" (pg. 20), noting that self-knowledge is critical for GLLs. Their first strategy (pg. 50) is "The GLL finds a style of learning appropriate to him by initially conforming to the learning situation or effectively adapting it to his personal needs in the process of language learning he learns to identify personal preferences regarding the way he would like to learn a language and selects learning situations according."

Rubin, 1975, noted that "He is willing to appear foolish in order to communicate and get his message across." Presumably, GLLs have a strong sense of self-efficacy that allows them to appear foolish and live with uncertainty, though the term self-efficacy was not used at that time.

Procedures

In addition, there were incipient examples of procedures. Rubin, 1975 provided an example of problem solving: "A wrong guess does not disturb him, but is quickly corrected from the subsequent context" showing the ability of the GLL to be flexible. Stern, 1975, also noticed the problem-solving skill of GLLs saying they have an ability to identify their own unique problems. Naiman et al, 1975, pg. 51, also cited the problem-solving ability of GLL: "By identifying individual problems connected with language learning and actively dealing with them." (underlining mine). Hosenfeld, 1978, observed GLLs evaluating the appropriateness of the logic of a guess, a form of problem-identification and problem-solution.

Rubin, op.cit. and Stern, 1975 both noticed that GLLs are self-monitoring. Stern, 1975, also alluded to the fact that GLLs have good procedures i.e. they have "technical know-how about how to tackle a language." The above-mentioned "ability to identify their own unique problems" could result in an ability to clearly state their own learning goals.

Rubin, 1975 also included evaluation though she did not differentiate it from monitoring. She noted that the GLL considers "whether his performance meets the standards he has learned." At this time, there was no discussion of learners' ability to establish their own criteria to meet their own goals.

At the same time that these pioneering studies of the GLL were being conducted, Holec, 1981, focusing on self-directed learning, greatly elaborated many aspects of procedures. These included: "fixing objectives," "defining the contents and the progression," and "selecting methods and techniques to be used," all part of what is now called planning. Holec also included monitoring and evaluation as part of the ability of a self-directed learner (pg. 9).

FOCUS ON COGNITIVE AND SOCIO-AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

Identification of the strategies used by the GLL

Following the initial identification of the GLL and detailing of their knowledge and some of their procedures, other studies provided greater specification of cognitive and socio-affective strategies. Hosenfeld, 1977, reporting on the reading strategies of both GLLs and more novice learners, found that GLLs used some form of contextual guessing. Cohen and Apeh, 1980 elaborated the many kinds of memory strategies used to learn vocabulary.

Much of the early work of Chamot and O'Malley (see especially O'Malley et al, 1983 and Chamot, 1987) greatly added to the delineation of cognitive and social strategies. Oxford, 1986, building on the work of Rubin and Chamot and O'Malley and their colleagues, created a strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) which elaborated many more cognitive and affective strategies.

In her 1987 article, Chamot included socio-affective strategies. Oxford, 1990, greatly enhanced our understanding of affective strategies, dividing them into three types: ones that allow the learners "lower their anxiety," "encourage themselves," and "take their emotional temperature." Dornyei, 2001, elaborated on Oxford's "encourage yourself" strategy by outlining a number of self-motivating strategies. With the exception of Dornyei's work, this important area, has not received much elaboration since Oxford first isolated it.

Comparison of Good versus Poor Learners

Several studies have especially considered how use of cognitive strategies differ between Good versus Poor Learners. Abraham and Vann, 1987, reported on two learners judging their success by how well they passed the TOEFL¹⁴ and "being able to function adequately in a university environment" (p. 85). One of the major differences between the two learners was their flexibility in using strategies and their skill in matching choice of strategy to the demands of the task. In other words, Abraham and Vann reinforce the view that cognitive strategies are in the service of procedures (especially taking into

¹⁴ TOEFL = Test of English as a Foreign Language

account both goals and task analysis) and not just "good" or "bad" on their own. Even more important, the authors note that the GLL clearly understood how to do effective Task Analysis, "spending a great deal of it (author: i.e. his time) on aspects of the tasks where he thought it was important, but cutting short a lengthy explanation...that he felt to be unnecessary" (p. 95). The Poor LL did not seem to do much Task Analysis as he "seemed to organize all tasks in the same way" (p. 95).

In their 1990 study, Vann and Abraham, offer further evidence of the importance of Task Analysis in prompting success. This study found that the Poor LLs used inappropriate strategies (for example, using strategies effective for oral communication for carrying out a written task) based on poor task analysis.¹⁵

More recently, in a study of Chinese learners of English, Gan et al., 2004, p. 239, also noted "striking differences in terms of self-management in language learning between the successful and unsuccessful students..." The authors note that the majority of GLLs "appeared to be able to determine their own goals, to locate a learning problem and its causes, and then to take corresponding measures to overcome the problem" (p. 240).

Differences by Skill Type

A number of studies have identified use of cognitive strategies by skill. In studies focusing on listening, Vandergrift, 1992 and 1997; noted differences in strategy use by proficiency level (1992), and found that use of metacognitive strategies (i.e. procedures) "appeared to be a significant factor distinguishing the successful from the less successful learner" (1992)¹⁶ Studies investigating learner's listening strategies have been conducted with high school and university students and with several languages including (French--Vandergrift, 1992 and 1997), (Italian--Laviosa, 1991), and (English--O'Malley, 1987).

¹⁵ Chamot and Kupper, 1989, p. 17 also noted that more successful students use strategies "more often, more appropriately and in ways that help them complete the task more successfully.

¹⁶ Rost and Ross, 1991, also found that learners varied in their use of strategies by proficiency level.

Studies of strategies specific to speaking usually reference communication strategies (see for example, Tarone, 1980). Tarone, 1981, was the first to provide a list of such strategies: approximation, word coinage, circumlocution, literal translation, language switch, mime, appeal for assistance, and avoidance¹⁷.

Several researchers working in reading (Kern, 1997; Anderson, 1991, Carrell, 1998) have observed that successful second language reading comprehension is "not simply a matter of knowing what strategy to use, but the reader must also know how to use it successfully and know how to orchestrate its use with other strategies. It is not sufficient to know about strategies, but a reader must be able to apply them strategically" Anderson, 1991, p. 19, quoted in Carrell, 1998). Further, when working on reading, learners often need to focus on vocabulary. Gu, 2003a, argues "that the choice, use, and effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies depend on the task, the learner, and the learning context" (abstract). Thus far, there has been limited work identifying the cognitive strategies used for reading languages using different script systems¹⁸ (such as Japanese, Russian, Chinese, Arabic or Hebrew). The National Capital Language Resource Center, Washington, D.C. is currently conducting a major study to investigate strategies used to learn less commonly taught languages.¹⁹

Individual Differences

There are number of studies considering how use of strategies can vary individually (Laviosa, 1991; Gu, 2003b), or by age (Harley, 2000), gender (Oxford and Ehrman, 1989; and Oxford and Njikos, 1989, Kaylani, 1996), learning style (Ehrman and Oxford, 1989), general personality type (Ehrman and Oxford, 1989) or culture (Politzer and McGroarty, 1985; Macaro, 2001)²⁰

¹⁷In her definition, Tarone, 1981 makes a point of separating learning strategies from communication strategies (subsequently called "language use" strategies by Cohen, 1998; and "compensatory strategies" by Oxford, 1990).

¹⁸ Exceptions are Kato, 2000; Okita, 1995 and 1996; Takagi, 1995; Takahashi, 1993; and Van Aacken, 2003 (for Japanese Characters) and DeCourcy and Birch, 1993 for Chinese characters.

¹⁹ Personal communication, Anna Chamot, Co-Director, August 19, 2004.

²⁰ For a review of the literature and these differences, see Oxford, 1989; Oxford, 1996, Skehan, 1989.

However, what is striking is that while there is some variation in the cognitive and socio-affective strategies when compared against these variables, there is little or no variation in the use of metacognitive strategies by GLLs. Huang, 1984, provided clear evidence that GLLs use metacognitive strategies even in cultures which use rote learning as the dominant classroom strategy. This study and that of Gan et al, 2004, and others further points toward the possibility that effective use of procedures is a universal in GLLs.

FOCUS ON METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES

Initially, the strategies of planning, monitoring, and evaluating were called "metacognitive strategies." Wenden, 1982, Wenden, 1986 (working with adults) and O'Malley et al, 1982, and Chamot, 1987 (working with high school students) provided the first clear contrast between cognitive and metacognitive strategies. These authors noted that metacognitive strategies refer to the control or regulatory process by which learners plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning. At a later date, Chamot et al, 1999, added "problem-solving" to the list of metacognitive strategies. O'Malley et al, 1983 provided an extended list of specific planning strategies. Rubin, 2001, added a new procedure "implementation of problem solution."

As noted above, there is accumulating evidence of the universality of metacognitive strategies (here called "procedures") in the work of Carrell, 1998, Gan et al, 2004, Huang, 1984, and Rubin & Henze, 1981. As well, there is continuing evidence that what really distinguishes GLLs from poor language learners are well-developed metacognitive strategies (O'Malley et al, 1989, Gillette, 1990). Gillette, 1990, suggests that "instead of establishing yet more extensive taxonomies of language learning strategies, SLA researchers should now focus on the way in which ELLs (author: ELL= Excellent Language Learners) deploy these strategies" (p. 192).

FOCUS ON METACOGNITIVE KNOWLEDGE

The clear delineation of metacognitive knowledge was due to the work of Wenden. In her 1986 article, she elaborated many types of knowledge a learner might have. These included: beliefs about language learning, background knowledge (about the target language), and knowledge about their strategies. In this article, Wenden, op.cit drew on the work of Flavell, 1979, and began to apply his tripartite scheme of knowledge: task, strategy, and self to analyze her findings. In a series of papers Wenden, 1991, 1995, and 1999, continued to draw attention to the importance of metacognitive knowledge in a learner's management of his/her language learning. Her work has provided an important dichotomy (i.e. Procedures, Knowledge) for the current model. Nonetheless, in Wenden's 2001, review article, she surveys papers that address metacognitive knowledge and notes that it is "the neglected variable."

Still, there are some important beginnings. Victori, 1996, provided clear evidence of the relationship between self knowledge and task knowledge. Hauck, in press, considers the role of metacognitive knowledge in the use of meta-cognitive strategies.

More recently, greater attention has been given to the role of beliefs about language and language learning and its impact on other kinds of knowledge (Mori, 1997/1999; Wenden, 1999)²¹. A great deal more work needs to be done to consider the interactions among the different kinds of knowledge.

With regard to self knowledge, Ehrman, 1996, has provided an extensive review and elaboration of the kinds of learning styles that language learners have. She considers the role of style in learning success and discusses the importance of learner ability to develop coping skills while working in other styles.

Another contribution to understanding self-knowledge is the study by Chamot et al., 1993. In this study, the authors found that among high school students of five

²¹ An earlier article by Horwitz, 1987, delineated a variety of learner beliefs and suggested that some of these beliefs may lead to less effective learning strategies (p. 126).

languages there was a high correlation between learners who reported greater strategy use and those who perceived themselves as more confident learners

In summary, we can see that while the early researchers of GLL pointed toward both procedural and knowledge, attention to these areas appears to have developed first, overwhelmingly, and in a continuing focus on cognitive strategies and how they are used in clusters, then with considerable and growing attention on metacognitive strategies, and more recently, on the development of knowledge and beliefs, though only to a limited extent.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Choice of Instruments

Two major reviews by Cohen, 1987, and Cohen and Scott, 1996, have outlined most of the kinds of research instruments used to study the GLL and learner strategies. In their review, Cohen and Scott, 1996, point out that most research methods have their limitations and the only way to minimize these disadvantages is to use a number of them together. Further, they suggest that given the state of the art of the study of the GLL and learner strategies, "The challenge is for researchers to choose an assessment method that will provide the desired information for the given study" (p. 104).

The list of instruments includes the following: think aloud, questionnaires, observation, diaries and dialogue journals, case studies, learner histories, interviews, and computer tracking. Given that questionnaires have been used so extensively to track the use of strategies, it is well to note that it is widely recognized that in order to understand how expert a learner is requires more than checking off a list and then correlating it with some other outcome. In order to fully characterize the learner's level of expertise, the respondent needs to be given a specific task and then queried on how he/she uses his/her knowledge (including strategies) to perform a task. With regard to diaries and dialogue journals, these appear to be most useful when the learner is given instructions about what

to focus on²². Case studies have been very successful in detailing ways in which learners vary in their approach to the learning process (see: Abraham and Vann, 1987; Laviosa, 1991; and Uhrig, 2004) and add greatly to our understanding of how procedures and knowledge interact.

Issues in Methodology

Definition of terms is a major issue in developing research design about the GLL and strategies. The most basic issue concerns what is the appropriate outcome to use to determine success. Is it: teacher's designation of "good learners," "self-designation," highest grades, marks on a competency exam, ability to accomplish a task related to their goals, or study of many languages? While the current model provides a characterization of what constitutes an expert learner and is consistent with research in educational psychology, researchers have not always agreed on the criteria used to select GLLs.

Another definitional issue is determining the appropriate categories that are to be included in procedures and those to be included in cognitive and socio-affective strategies. The literature provides many overlapping lists and new researchers may find this confusing (See for example, the strategies listed by Rubin, 1975, Rubin, 1981, and Rubin and Thompson, 1994; by Chamot, 1991 and 1999; and several versions of the SILL, by Oxford, 1990 as well as other versions in both English and foreign language.

VI. FUTURE RESEARCH

Given the current model outlined above, there is a great deal of research needed to clarify the interactions in the model. In particular, research is needed to delineate how each of the five kinds of knowledge interact with each other, e.g. how task knowledge affects strategic knowledge or how beliefs affect self knowledge, etc.

Further, it would be helpful to have a clearer picture of how both procedures and knowledge change as learners work on tasks. Also, it would be very useful to have a clearer picture of the ways in which procedures are sequenced.

²² See for example, Rubin, 2003.

Some other research issues include: detailed information about the cognitive strategies specific to writing especially for less commonly taught languages, detailed information about the cognitive strategies used to learn grammar, and how proficiency level impacts on knowledge.

VII. SUMMARY

Since the first studies of the GLLs, there has been an enormous growth in understanding the cognitive and affective processes that contribute to their expertise. There is now a model in place and greater understanding of how the parts work together. There is consistent evidence of the universality of procedures but clear evidence that use of cognitive and socio-affective strategies vary in a myriad of way according to language skill, task, and individual traits.

Still, the study of expert language learners has a long way to go. In particular, we need more information about the interactions within and between Procedures and Knowledge. We need to know a great deal more about grammar strategies. It would be helpful to know about how strategies cluster. And how all of this may be affected by the social setting.²³

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²³ Cf. Gillette, 1987, whose subjects "are in full control of their own learning process, adapt it to their own individual purposes and never look for language learning "recipes" developed by others". (p 278). On the other hand, Norton and Toohey, 2001, present a case for how good language learners arise from their social setting and the support they receive.

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