

Strategies in Learning and Using a Second Language

Second Edition

Andrew D. Cohen



Longman Applied Linguistics

Strategies in Learning and Using a Second Language

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SECOND EDITION

Andrew D. Cohen

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Foreword

When Andrew Cohen invited me to write a foreword for the second edition of this book, I was delighted to accept his invitation. It is likely that I am more emotionally attached to this book and more familiar with it than many other colleagues around the world. Given that I was the first person in mainland China to conduct a systematic study of language learner strategies in the early 1990s, I was asked to write a foreword in Chinese to the first edition of this book when it was issued by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press of Beijing in 2000. In order to do justice to the author whom I did not know then, I read the whole book very carefully. My foreword turned out to be a comprehensive review of the book and served to facilitate Chinese readers' understanding of the book.

Being impressed by his book, I invited Cohen to co-teach with me and Peter Yongqi Gu at a summer institute on styles- and strategies-based instruction (SSBI) at Nanjing University in the summer of 2003. To our surprise, the course attracted more than 300 participants from at least 100 universities throughout the country. As lead instructor, Cohen played a key role in this seven-day institute, which was very well received by the participants. The first edition of this book has become well known among the English-language teachers in mainland China. Looking back, I can now say that both the book and the course have had a tremendous impact on language-learner strategy research and SSBI in China.

Since language learning is an endeavor which requires skillful use of a repertoire of strategies over a lifetime, it behooves language teachers to help enhance their students' strategy repertoire. Consequently, it is essential that language educators have adequate knowledge to pass on to teachers and to learners directly as to just what these strategies might consist of and how to use them most effectively. More and concerted efforts are needed in doing research in this area in order to build our knowledge base. This substantially revised second edition of the book is certainly great news for researchers, teachers, and graduate students who are interested in this area. I am sure

this new edition will clarify where there is confusion, dispel misunderstandings, rekindle our enthusiasm, and promote more rigorous research in this field.

Wen Qiufang

Director of the National Research Center for Foreign Language Education
Beijing Foreign Studies University

Acknowledgments

I would once again like to acknowledge Chris Candlin, for encouraging me to revise this book, just as he had encouraged me to put it together in the first place in 1998. The revision has taken me many months, as I rewrote extensively in order to update the book. A lot has happened in the field in the more than 12 years since the first edition appeared. And since the original book went in so many directions, the possibilities for revision were almost endless. I had to set some limits, and also to make some judgment calls as to what to keep in this version and what to remove. Candlin's support was crucial in this process.

Let me also acknowledge those who collaborated with me on the work that contributed to this revision. Among them were Angela Pinilla-Herrera for her fine work with me on the Spanish Grammar Strategies website at the University of Minnesota over a two-year period (2007–2009). It was through this new work that I gained a much greater appreciation for what strategies might actually consist of at the operational level. It is one thing to talk about strategies; it is an entirely different matter to go out into the field and find noteworthy ones in use in a given skill area, such as that of grammar.

Let me also acknowledge Julie Sykes for her contributions to my thinking about the possibilities of teaching about pragmatics through the use of internet technologies, and for her contribution to the section "User Tracking" in [Chapter 3](#). Warm thanks also go to my career-long colleague and friend Rebecca Oxford, for her contribution to the section "Recollective Studies" in [Chapter 3](#). Susan Weaver contributed enormously to my thinking about strategy instruction and how to deliver it, and also assisted me in conducting the speaking-strategy study reported on in [Chapter 5](#). I also wish to acknowledge my long-time friend and colleague Elite Olshtain, who has been a steadfast companion and fellow researcher in the area of pragmatics. She is also co-author of a study appearing in [Chapter 7](#).

Others whose work inspired what appears in this volume include Merrill Swain, Jim Lantolf, Anna Chamot, Ernesto Macaro, Peter Gu, Rick Kern, Elana Shohamy, Lyle Bachman, Dick Schmidt, Dick Tucker, Zoltán Dörnyei,

Claire Kramsch, and my colleague at the University of Minnesota for many years, Elaine Tarone.

A special acknowledgment goes to Julie Berlin for her artwork appearing in [Chapters 2, 3, 5, and 6](#). Not only is she a skilled artist, but also did a degree in ESL teaching and applied linguistics. So the apple did not fall far from the tree in enlisting her support in doing illustrations for this book.

My being in phased retirement meant that I had the spring semester of 2010 off from the University of Minnesota, so that my wife Sabina and I could spend it in balmy southern Florida, rather than in the tundras of Minneapolis as we had done the previous 18 years. I want to acknowledge Sabina for her solid support of my academic work during what turned out to be a bumpy spring, with family events – both happy and sad – intervening to slow down my progress on this book revision.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

When I first started writing about language learner strategies in the late 1970s, the audience was small and the topic received a relatively indifferent response. When the first edition of this book appeared in 1998, the field was gaining momentum and the response was much more positive, though skepticism still abounded. Now, as this second edition of *Strategies in Learning and using a second language* appears, the field of language learner strategy research and practice has assumed international and multilingual appeal. Language researchers the world over are now engaged in research on strategies for learning and using a second or foreign language (L2). That is not to say that the field is without its naysayers. There are those, in fact, who feel that the emphasis on learner strategies has outworn its welcome and that the term deserves to be retired in favor of “self-regulation.” I will address this issue in [Chapter 2](#).

This book is intended for multiple audiences, just as the previous edition was. While it is intended to have appeal to those doing research on L2 learning, it is also meant to be of interest to both faculty in teacher development programs, language teachers, and administrators of language programs. A keen concern of mine is that language teachers take an active role in enhancing the language learning and language use experiences of their students. In addition, both teachers and researchers may find the discussions of multilingual behavior and test-taking strategies helpful to them in their endeavors to understand better their students’ language learning experiences. Researchers and prospective researchers may find the discussions of terminology and research methods of benefit to them as they determine the topics that they wish to investigate and choose their means of investigation.

The book aims to bring together under one cover a series of different themes which nonetheless are tied together by their focus on L2 learners

and their strategies. This edition revisits this work, updating the material where relevant, at times replacing it with more current material and at times adding new material, such as examples of language learner strategies supplied by actual learners for very specific purposes – with most of the examples being drawn from a website with strategies for learning Spanish grammar. The major challenge in putting this book together initially and now in revising it a dozen years later has been in creating a framework which enables the various themes to come together in a meaningful whole. The book deals primarily with a particular set of L2 issues, namely those concerning language learning and language use strategies. The main focus is on the adult learner, with one exception, [Chapter 6](#), which includes a study dealing with immersion pupils in the elementary grades, ages 8 through 11. This work was included because it relates well to the theme of multilingual thinking. It is fair to say that the volume at times resembles more a mixed salad with its highly identifiable ingredients than a blended vegetable soup where the individual vegetables are no longer recognizable. This salad-bowl approach to the topic is intended to demonstrate just how diverse the themes related to language learner strategies can be.

Underlying the work presented in this book is a concern that I have had for many years, namely, what it takes for an adult learner to achieve long-term success at, say, three or more nonnative languages, where the onset of L2 learning does not occur in the very early years, but rather in high school or later. Success in this case would mean being able to use the language as the vehicle of communication in a university course, being able to write academic papers in the language, and having control of L2 pragmatics, pronunciation, and grammar. I am concerned with the issue of what it takes to be good enough in a series of especially unrelated languages to be able to:

- have people think your L2 pronunciation is native or nearly so
- get the L2 pragmatics right in numerous speaking situations
- have only negligible grammar errors in your oral language
- have the L2 vocabulary trip off your tongue relatively effortlessly
- take an active part in an academic meeting conducted entirely through the L2
- read and critique academic work in your field of interest in the L2
- express yourself in written language at a professional level in the L2 (perhaps with some editing)

Dabbling in a variety of languages may not be all that difficult. You say a few words or phrases, and the L2-speaking addressee perhaps acknowledges you warmly for the effort. But then you would be hard-pressed to do anything more substantive with the language, so you quickly switch back to your first language (L1) or another language (L₀) with which you are more comfortable. In addition, it would appear to me that the U.S. can be characterized as a nation of language attriters, where little remains of what there once was when we were high school students or college students fulfilling our L2 requirement.

But what about getting really good in an L2 so that the skills remain for a lifetime – being good enough, for example, to successfully teach a university-level course through that language? There are factors related to the languages themselves (e.g., the nature of the alphabet, the complexity of the morphology, the similarity of the languages to each other, and so forth). There are undoubtedly factors dependent on genetics, such as having better innate ability (e.g., a brain that allows you to pick up a language later in life and retain the material). Then there are factors that can be developed.¹ One factor is a robust repertoire of language learner strategies, which would include:

- strategies for ensuring the learning, practicing, and use of a new language in an already busy life
- strategies for monitoring language learning and use
- strategies for remembering vocabulary deemed relevant and valuable

Another factor is a self-identity as a language learner with motivation to persevere in times when it may even seem futile. In addition, there are contextual factors such as:

- the family you are born into
- your language exposures
- your immediate context for language learning
- the social and material rewards that you gain from using those languages
- your current need for the language in actuality

As we all know too well, if you do not make use of the various language skills, you may well lose them:

- listening to a radio show in the L2
- speaking in the L2 about politics with a friend from the given speech community
- reading online feature articles in a major L2 newspaper
- writing a family update to sent out in an email message in the L2
- fine-tuning your mental lexicon in the L2 by checking on how certain concepts are translated
- actively exercising your grammatical knowledge of complex verb tenses

This book focuses on factors that can be developed, and in particular on the language learner strategies that can play a significant role in assisting language learners at numerous crucial moments in the process. The first issue of concern in the book is that of sorting out terms, which is the aim of [Chapter 2](#). This completely rewritten chapter revisits the distinction between language learning and language use strategies and further distinguishes them. While experts in the field may not agree on the nomenclature, it is at least helpful to be clear as to the phenomena that are being described, regardless of whether they are referred to by means of the same labels. Hence, the chapter provides a discussion of terminology. The purpose of these definitions and the ensuing discussion is to facilitate empirical investigation of strategy use in the day-to-day world of L2 learners, rather than to fine-tune theoretical distinctions between different models for analyzing types of strategies viewed as abstractions. I would like to distance myself, for example, from discussions of behaviors labeled as strategies, such as “I use a dictionary,” since I would view using a dictionary as a skill with perhaps 10–20 likely strategies being called upon – from the moment that learners start looking up the word to when they determine that they either have obtained from the dictionary the knowledge that they need or they have not.

The next issue of concern is that of research methods since the accuracy of strategy descriptions depends on the rigor of both the data collection instruments, the methods for data collection, and the procedures for data analysis. [Chapter 3](#) presents a review of types of measures currently available for assessing L2 strategies, followed by a detailed discussion of how verbal report can be utilized so as to maximize its benefits. Verbal report is singled out for special attention as a research approach since verbal report measures in one of their numerous forms can provide valuable “behind-the-scenes” insights into the workings of the mind with regard to language learning and

use strategies. [Chapter 4](#) then takes up the theme of strategy instruction, looking at various ways to increase learners' awareness as to the benefits of systematically using strategies. The intention is to have this chapter be a resource for teacher developers and teachers in their efforts to enhance their L2 learners' experience. [Chapter 5](#) both reports on the results of current strategy instruction research and also includes one of the early studies from the late 1990s, primarily because it had design features that can still inform current work and its findings are suggestive of the kinds of information such research methods can produce. The study was conducted in order to determine the effects of strategy instruction on learners engaged in university-level L2 instruction at the University of Minnesota. The motivation for this study was to provide evidence regarding the impact of specific language learning or language use strategies on achievement in speaking an L2 (in this case, in intermediate-level French and Norwegian).

The next issue that the volume considers is a relatively neglected one, namely, the differential use by bilinguals and multilinguals of the various languages available to them for the purposes of cognitive processing – whether it be the sorting out of the logic behind some grammar rule, the search for a solution to a word problem in math, or the development of an argument in an expository essay. After examining the language of thought issue in general, [Chapter 6](#) focuses on two specific themes – mental translation into the L1 by adult learners during L2 reading and the language used by elementary-school pupils for performing cognitive operations during content courses in a full language-immersion program, in this case, Spanish immersion.

The final issue addressed is that of the strategies used by respondents in language assessment situations. [Chapter 7](#) starts by defining test-taking strategies, and then discusses research on test-taking strategies over the years, with its initial focus almost exclusively on the format of the test, and its more recent focus on the processes that learners go through in responding to myriad language assessment measures. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to the presentation of an empirical study dealing with strategies for producing oral speech acts in simulated task situations. The chapter ends by underscoring the point that the construction of valid tests can benefit greatly from feedback by test takers as to the strategies that they use in responding to assessment instruments.

Hopefully, readers of this revised volume will appreciate the updating effort that went into producing this second volume. It was not simply a matter of adding supplementary material to what already existed. Instead, every chapter has been reworked and updated, with an eye to flagging what

is new and useful, while also showcasing earlier work which has stood the test of time.

Note

- 1 My thanks to Loraine Obler of the CUNY Graduate School, Boston University School of Medicine, and Boston VA Medical Center, as well as to Michael Erard, who is a journalist and author of the forthcoming book, *Babble no more* (Free Press/Simon & Schuster), a narrative of his journey to find the most extraordinary language learners on earth, hyperpolyglots who push past the normal limits of language learning and human memory in order to illuminate the intellectual potential in everyone. Obler and Erard assisted me in identifying factors contributing to an ability to function effectively at an advanced level in three or more languages, as part of a colloquium presentation on the good language learner at the IATEFL Conference in Harrogate, England, April 11, 2010 (Cohen 2010).

CHAPTER 2

Coming to terms with second language learning and language use strategies¹

This chapter takes an unhurried look at language learner strategies. It starts with basic definitions and then considers how these strategies are used. A major source of insights for this chapter was a survey that I conducted of language strategy experts from around the world.

2.1 A working definition of language learner strategies

It would be an understatement to say that *language learner strategies* have been defined in numerous ways over the years. My own working definition would be as follows:

Thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalized by language learners, to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks from the very onset of learning to the most advanced levels of target-language performance.

The element of *choice* is important here because this is what gives a strategy its special character. These are also moves which the learner is at least partially aware of, even if not being fully attentive to them. Note that the notion of consciousness is part of the definition of strategies, although as we will see below, this is a controversial issue. In my view, the element of consciousness is what distinguishes *strategies* from those processes that are not strategic. Strategies have been further classified in various ways – for

example, strategies for language learning vs. language use, strategies by language skill area, and strategies according to function (namely, metacognitive, cognitive, affective, or social). We will look at each of these types of classification below.

Attention also needs to be given to the issue of how to refer to the language being learned: as the *second language* (L2), the *foreign language* (FL), or the *target language* (L_T). Technically speaking, learning a second language means that the language being learned is that which is spoken in the community where the language learning is taking place, while a foreign language is not spoken in the local community. The term *target language* (as used in the working definition above) simply refers to that language being learned, whether as a second or foreign language. The reality is that sometimes a language which is widely spoken in a given community is still learned as a *foreign* language because the learners may have little or no direct contact with speakers of it (e.g., the case of Arabic in Israel for many native Hebrew-speaking learners). Likewise, there are foreign language learning situations where the learners find or create for themselves a large enough community of speakers of the language so that the learning experience for them is more that of learning a *second* language (e.g., learning Hebrew while living in a section of Los Angeles where there is a concentration of native Hebrew speakers). In this volume, while *foreign language learning* will be used to refer exclusively to a situation where the language is not considered to be spoken in the local community, learners of the dominant language spoken in the community will be referred to *second language learners*. For the sake of simplicity, the generic L2 label will be used to refer both to second and foreign language learning, unless specified otherwise. The caveat here is that language researchers need to take these sometimes subtle distinctions into account in their efforts to interpret language use data, especially as it relates to achievement, since L2 and FL learning may differ in numerous ways.

As indicated above, much of the information presented in this chapter derives from a survey of world experts (Cohen 2007). The chapter begins by looking at the features of a language strategy, followed by consideration of the reasons for using these strategies. Then we deal with strategy selection and effectiveness. Next, we consider the concepts related to learners' use of strategies. We continue with a discussion of how language strategies can be linked to learning style preferences. The chapter ends with a brief focus on motivation and its role in strategy use, the differential effect of tasks on strategy use, and the influence of the learners' immediate living and work context on strategy choice.

2.2 Exploring “second language learning and use strategies” through a survey of experts

Twenty-three international scholars met in June 2004 at Oxford University to “push the envelope” on language learning and language use, calling themselves the International Project on Language Learner Strategies (IPLLs). The group jointly agreed to explore the four following areas:

1. how language learner strategies are defined
2. how strategies relate to learners’ short- and long-term goals
3. how strategies relate to individual and situational differences (i.e., the interaction among individuals, the group that they might belong to, and the learning situation that they might find themselves in)
4. how to demonstrate and communicate the importance of strategies to the end-user (i.e., bridging the gap between strategy theory and classroom practice) (Macaro and Cohen 2007: 2–3)

As the first concrete outcome of this gathering of experts, it was agreed that a survey be constructed and administered in order to collect from world experts their current take on terms and issues in the language learner strategy field (Cohen 2007).² Key terms and issues were identified from position papers, PowerPoint presentations, and discussions posted on the IPLLs website at the University of Oxford. Once source of input for the questionnaire was an article (Macaro 2006) which dealt with problems related to strategy research and which proposed a series of features essential to describing a strategy. Altogether, 18 experts who attended the meeting and one who did not attend responded to the questionnaire that was constructed and circulated after the meeting (see [Appendix](#) at the end of the chapter for a copy of the IPLLs questionnaire).

The results of the survey underscored a paradox of language learner strategy research. While the field fascinates researchers and teachers alike – possibly because there is a sense that effective language learning and language use depends in part on strategies – there is still a lack of consensus as to a unified theory. Rather, at least this group of experts appears to agree to varying degrees on the use of some concepts and definitions and to disagree to some extent on others (see Cohen 2007). While these results may frustrate those who would want to see consensus, the value in conducting such a survey is to see where there is, in fact, a range of views, rather than to assume

unanimity – especially as to which terms experts actually use in their own work and how they use these terms. In fact, the beauty of conducting such a survey of experts is that it reminds us that experts in a field may have divergent views on seemingly agreed upon topics.

The findings from the survey revealed that there was a lack of consensus among experts in the field as to how conscious of and attentive to their language behaviors learners need to be in order for those behaviors to be considered “strategies,” as opposed to being thought of simply as “processes.” There was also some disagreement as to the extent to which a behavior needs to have a mental component, a goal, an action, a metacognitive component (involving planning, monitoring, and evaluation of the strategy), and a potential that its use will lead to learning, in order for it to be considered a strategy. There was, however, consensus that strategies are generally not used in isolation, but rather in sequences (e.g., strategies for looking up a word in a dictionary) or clusters (e.g., strategies for preparing written summary of a text). This fact is often overlooked in studies which report on strategies as if the isolated use of each were the norm.

Continuing with the findings from the survey, two contrasting views about strategies emerged, with each having its merits. On the one hand, there was the view that the actual strategies that learners use to complete tasks are likely to be detailed, specific, and combined in sequences or clusters with other strategies. On the other hand, there was the view that it is best to conceptualize strategies at a more global, flexible, and general level. My own bias is in favor of the detailed approach to strategies and strategizing, as can be seen from the Spanish Grammar Strategies website that was launched in July 2009.³ The 72 strategies appearing in this website are all presented in sufficient detail so that users of the website can be expected to operationalize them with relative ease.

With regard to the purposes for language learner strategies, there was consensus that strategies enhance performance in language learning and use, both in general and on specific tasks (see 2.5 for more on the reasons for language learner strategies). There was also consensus that strategies are used to help make language learning and use easier, faster, and more enjoyable. The experts were found to be somewhat unlikely to see strategies as compensating for a deficit, so the deficit notion of language strategy use seems to have fallen out of favor, at least in the eyes of these experts. My own feeling is that strategies still serve in a compensatory fashion in numerous instances, regardless of whether learners are viewed as being at deficit.

The respondents generally felt that whereas the use of learner strategies can lead to enhanced autonomy, being an autonomous learner does not

necessarily imply that the learner is drawing selectively and effectively on a refined repertoire of strategies. The experts reported using the terms *autonomy* and *self-regulation* either synonymously or in a relatively similar fashion. *Self-management* appeared to be a useful term but overlapped with self-regulation. *Independent language learning* was used by some of the respondents but was also seen to overlap with autonomous language learning, and *individual language learning* was not reported to be used much at all by these experts.

2.3 Alternative ways of defining language learner strategies

We now return to the absence of consensus found in the survey as to whether strategies need to be *conscious* in order for them to be considered strategies. Drawing on Schmidt (1994), we could stipulate that language learner strategies are either within the *focal attention* of the learners or within their *peripheral attention*, in that learners can identify them if asked about what they have just done or thought. In reviewing the literature on consciousness and attention, Dörnyei (2009: 132–35) points out that *consciousness* is, in his words “a notoriously vague term” and that *attention* actually refers to “a variety of mechanisms or subsystems, including alertness, orientation, detection, facilitation, and inhibition.” If the behavior were so unconscious that the learners are not able to identify any strategies associated with it, then the moves or functions associated with this behavior should probably be referred to simply as *processes*, not as *strategies*. For example, learners may skim a portion of text in order to avoid a lengthy illustration. If the learners are conscious (even peripherally) as to why the skip is taking place, then the move would be termed a “strategy.” Ellis (1994) pointed out that if strategies become so automatic that the learners are no longer conscious of employing them, they are no longer accessible for description through verbal report by the learners, and thus lose their significance as strategies.

The survey questionnaire sent to the group of international experts focused separately on that part of consciousness represented by *attention* (Question 7.1; Cohen 2007). There was relatively solid consensus that attention can be viewed as a feature on a continuum, from the learner being fully focused on the strategy at one end, to the learner giving the strategy only minimal attention at the other. In contemplating this continuum, one respondent pondered the issue of just how much attention was necessary for a process to make it strategic. In the view of another respondent, we

need to allow for the level of attention to shift during the strategic process. In other words, at the beginning of the process, the strategy might be at the center of attention, but as the plan is carried out, the strategy is then reduced to peripheral attention, then to a stand-by mode, and perhaps ultimately to a “no attention” mode. So, that would give this feature a potentially fluctuating nature, depending on the strategy being used by a given learner. And note that we are focusing now only on degree of consciousness with regard to the strategy and not with regard to the degree with which the strategy is being used effectively.

Let us now consider in greater depth some of the ways of defining strategies.

2.3.1 Language learning vs. language use strategies

One way of defining language learner strategies is by distinguishing language *learning* strategies – namely, strategies for the learning of language material for the first time – from language *use* strategies, which are strategies for using the material that has already been learned, at least to some degree (see Cohen and Weaver 2006).

Language learning strategies

Language learning strategies include strategies for identifying the material that needs to be learned, distinguishing it from other material if need be, grouping it for easier learning (e.g., grouping vocabulary by category into nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and so forth), having repeated contact with the material (e.g., through classroom tasks or the completion of homework assignments), and formally committing to memory whatever material is not acquired naturally through exposure. Such memory work may, for example, be essential to adult learners in the mastery of kinship terms, the numbers in languages with multiple counting systems, and other vocabulary that will not simply be acquired through exposure to the language, or at least not quickly. The actual memory techniques might involve repetition or the use of mnemonics. Note that repeated contact with material could be seen as a form of rehearsal, although rehearsal usually implies that the material is at least partially learned already and can therefore be rehearsed.

Adult learners may have a keen sense of just what it is they may need to commit to memory (e.g., certain complex vocabulary or grammatical forms) and what they can leave to more automatized language learning, often referred to as *acquisition*. For the purpose of this discussion then, a distinction

is being made between that language material which is learned consciously (say, as the consequence of explicit teaching by an instructor or self-instruction) and material which seems to go directly into the acquisitional base or perhaps is initially learned, though perhaps for only a brief period of time. Here we are picking up on Krashen's distinction of old which, although criticized in the past still has utility as a metaphor (see Krashen 1991). Dörnyei (2009: 159–61) revisits the learning vs. acquisition debate and frames it in terms of the noninterface, weak interface, and strong interface positions, whereby the third position would hold that by practicing the material, learners can convert explicit knowledge into implicit knowledge.

Let us look at an example of a strategy with a high level of specificity. It is for remembering when to use the subjunctive in Spanish with a high level of specificity:⁴

Use a mnemonic keyword such as WEIRD (W – wishes, will; E – emotions; I – impersonal expressions; R – recommendations; D – doubt, desire, denial).

To remember how to form the subjunctive, several students in the Spanish Grammar Strategies website report using a rhyme. This example is from a female student, Sam:⁵

“Think *yo*, drop the *-o*, *-a* to *-e*, and *-e* to *-a*.” This rhyme helps [me] to remember that, in order to form the subjunctive, I have to think in the *yo* form, drop the *-o* at the end of it and then change the *-ar* verbs to *-er* verbs and the *-ir* and *-er* verbs to *-ar* endings.

Language use strategies

Using the material at whatever the current level of mastery involves at least four subsets of strategies: *retrieval strategies*, *rehearsal strategies*, *coping strategies*, and *communication strategies*. *Retrieval strategies* are used to call up language material from storage by means of whatever memory searching strategies the learner can muster. In the above example with the subjunctive, retrieval strategies would be those strategies used to help remember when to use the subjunctive and how to form the present subjunctive. Likewise, a language use strategy could entail using a keyword mnemonic in order to retrieve the meaning of a given vocabulary word. Here is an example:

A learner encounters the verb *ubicar* “to locate,” which she had learned by means of the keyword mnemonic “ubiquitous,” and she wants to retrieve the meaning of the word. The language use strategies would include any efforts by the learner to retrieve the meaning of the word *ubicar* – involving the linking of the Spanish sounds /*ubik*/ with the English /*yubik*/, and then perhaps seeing an image of someone who keeps turning up everywhere that the language learner looks for her.

Rehearsal strategies constitute another subset of language use strategies, namely, strategies for rehearsing target language structures. An example of rehearsal would be form-focused practice, such as practicing the Spanish subjunctive forms for different verb conjugations so as to be able to use them correctly in a midterm exam. A learner could also rehearse a subjunctive form in preparation for using it communicatively in a request in Spanish to a boss for a day off. As suggested above, some rehearsal strategies could be part of language learning as well as part of language use. First, you commit the structures to memory through rehearsal, and then once you have learned them, you use them in an actual communicative exchange.

Coping strategies are of two kinds – those that learners use to allow them to compensate for a lack of some specific language knowledge, and those for creating the impression that they have control over material when they do not. The former have, as indicated above, been referred to as *compensatory strategies* and the latter as *cover strategies*. Compensatory strategies would include, for example, lexical avoidance, simplification, and approximation when the exact word escapes you under pressure or possibly because you simply do not know the word that well or at all. Consequently, you may engage in a form of paraphrase or word invention.

The second type of coping strategy, namely “cover strategies,” involves creating an appearance of language ability so as not to look unprepared, foolish, or even stupid. A learner’s primary intention in using such strategies is not to learn any language material, nor even necessarily to engage in genuine communication. An example of a cover strategy would be using a memorized and perhaps only partially understood phrase in an utterance in, say, a classroom drill in order to keep the action going. In some cases, the result is the production of an utterance where the learners use only that part of a phrase that they can deal with. In other cases, the learners’ output may reflect an elaborate and complex circumlocution in order to avoid the use of finely-tuned vocabulary or in order to avoid using the subjunctive.

Communication strategies constitute a fourth subset of language use strategies, with the focus on approaches to conveying a message that is both meaningful and informative for the listener or reader. Communication strategies have primarily been viewed as the verbal (or nonverbal) first aid devices which may be used to deal with problems or breakdowns in communication. These devices enable learners to remain active partners in communication, even when things do not go well. They may, for example, use communication strategies to steer the conversation away from problematic areas, to express their meaning in creative ways (for example, by paraphrasing a word or concept), or to create more time to think and to negotiate the difficult parts of their communication with their conversation partner until everything is clear. Thus, these strategies extend the learners' communicative means beyond the constraints of L_T proficiency and consequently help to increase their linguistic confidence as well. Communication strategies also include conversational strategies, such as strategies for maintaining the floor. Examples would be in asking for help, seeking clarification or confirmation, and using fillers (such as *uh* and *uhm*) when pausing while speaking (see Erard 2007, for further discussion), along with other hesitation devices such as repeating keywords.

During the early years of language learner research, a fair amount of attention was given to communication strategies in the literature (e.g., see Tarone et al. 1976; Tarone 1977, 1981; Faerch and Kasper 1983; Paribakht 1985; Poulisse 1990; Bialystok 1990; Dörnyei 1995; Dörnyei and Scott 1997; Dörnyei 2005). Communication strategies were seen to include the following:

1. intralingual strategies – e.g., overgeneralizing a grammar rule or vocabulary meaning from one context to another where it does not apply
2. interlingual strategies –
 - a) negative transfer (i.e. applying the patterns of the L_1 or L_O in the L_T where those patterns do not apply)
 - b) topic avoidance or abandonment
 - c) message reduction
 - d) code switching
 - e) paraphrasing (i.e., using synonymous words or phrases, or using circumlocution)

So when learners experience problems or breakdowns in communication, they may use communication strategies to avoid the problematic areas and

express their meaning in some other way. For example, learners may paraphrase words or concepts (e.g., “I’d like something to dry my hands with” when they don’t know the word for “towel”), coin words (“air maker” when they don’t know “bicycle pump”), or use facial expressions or gestures in an effort to communicate and to create more time to think (e.g., hoping that a frown will signal that they do not approve of the other person’s behavior). At times, learners also compensate for gaps by using literal translation from their L1 or switching to the L1 altogether.

We note that communication strategies may or may not have any impact on learning. For example, learners may use a vocabulary item encountered for the first time in a given lesson to communicate a thought, without any intention of trying to learn the word. In contrast, they may insert the new vocabulary item into their communication expressly in order to help commit it to memory.

Whereas a distinction has been made here between language learning and use strategies, the distinction can be fuzzy at times. In her new book, Oxford (2011) would contend that the distinction is inappropriate given that learning can only be accomplished through use, such as through meaningful communication. But I would contend that for many language learners much of what they “learn,” especially in language classes, never makes it to real-world communication. Here is my favorite example:

In my accelerated Japanese class at the University of Hawai’i in 1996, I had to learn the vocabulary for buying a tie in an elegant department store in Tokyo (the words for “gaudy,” “subdued,” “polka dot,” “plaid,” and “striped”). Since I have never discussed my purchase of a tie and would probably never buy a tie in Tokyo, the learned material was never communicated to anyone. Because the material was never communicated, it did not stand much of a chance of being internalized – especially in the case of an older learner like myself. (I was 55 at the onset of learning the words to regurgitate them on a vocabulary test.) The likelihood is that the material stayed in my memory just long enough for the quiz and then was quickly forgotten.

So this learning vs. use distinction is based not on theory and on potential, but rather on the way language learning, and more importantly, language attrition actually show up in many instances.

If we return to the purpose of making theoretical distinctions, some strategies contribute directly to *learning*, such as memorization strategies for learning vocabulary items (e.g., the use of keyword mnemonics) or organizational strategies for remembering grammatical structures (e.g., the use of charts which emphasize and contrast the key features of the structures to be learned). Other strategies, perhaps the bulk of them, have as their main goal that of *using* the language – for example, verifying that an intended meaning for a given vocabulary item was conveyed or checking to see if a certain grammatical inflection is appropriate in a given context.

Furthermore, some strategies are *behavioral* and can be directly observed (e.g., asking a question for clarification), others are behavioral but not easily observable (e.g., paraphrasing in cases where the product is not obviously a paraphrase of something else), and others are purely *mentalist* and not directly observable (e.g., making mental translations into the native language for clarification while reading). In order to identify them, such mentalistic strategies must be accessed through means other than observation, such as through verbal report.

2.3.2 Language strategies by skill area

A second way to classify strategies, beyond the learning vs. use distinction, is by skill area. Bearing in mind that a skill constitutes the ability to do something (such as looking up a word in a dictionary or paraphrasing a text), strategies are the means used to operationalize this skill. So, using the skills-based approach, strategies are viewed in terms of their role in operationalizing both the *receptive* skills of listening and reading, and the *productive* skills of speaking, and writing (see [Figure 2.1](#)). The three illustrations are purposely added to the text so that readers will pause a moment to consider



FIGURE 2.1 Strategies for listening, speaking, reading, and writing

the host of language strategies that tasks involving each of these language skills might entail. What does it mean to read an L2 text? What challenges might be associated with talking on the phone in an L2? What does it take to write well enough in an L2 so that the readers of the text or message are not distracted at all by any deviant forms?

Strategies are also used for skills that cross-cut these basic skill areas, such as the learning and use of vocabulary and grammar, and the use of translation. With regard to vocabulary, for example, learners need to learn certain words just to be able to understand them when they hear them (especially in the case of spoken slang), while other words are needed for speaking (e.g., informal ways of extending an oral greeting) or writing (e.g., certain written formalities such as graceful ways of opening and closing business letters). Still other words need to be learned in order to comprehend reading material (e.g., academic terms or key newspaper vocabulary).

A second skill area is that of grammar. As the Spanish Grammar Strategies website at CARLA illustrates, dealing with grammar offers a rich area for strategy development. The use of strategies can be an effective way to remember problematic grammar rules, when to use them, and how to apply them (see www.carla.umn.edu/strategies/sp_grammar/).

A third area that also cuts across all four skills is that of translation strategies, in that learners may translate strategically when they listen to someone talking or listen to a TV show – that is, they may just translate certain words or phrases to help in comprehension, rather than attempting to translate everything. A strategic use of translation in reading would also mean not conducting a word-for-word translation (although online dictionaries make this possible these days), but rather finding the words and phrases that really need to be translated for basic comprehension. Likewise, translation strategies may help in effective speaking and writing. In writing, in fact, perhaps one out of every three learners may prefer to write out their text in their native language first and then translate it into the target language (Cohen and Brooks-Carson 2001). Many students prefer to think in the L_T and to translate as little as possible from their L1. Nonetheless, some students may feel the need to use translation from their L1 as a strategy both in learning and using the L_T , at least at the beginning and intermediate stages of language learning.

Before leaving this approach to defining language learner strategies, we need to note that the term *skill* is also used when referring to strategies used to operationalize a given skill. So, for example, “summarizing a text” is, in fact, a skill calling for a series of somewhat specialized reading and writing processes, many of which are strategic in nature. There are also a number of

skills associated with the handling of vocabulary, such as “looking up a word in a dictionary” and “paraphrasing.” At times the skills being operationalized by strategies are themselves referred to as “strategies,” which introduces something of a confusion among terms.

For a skills-based inventory of language strategy use developed by Cohen et al. (2002a) in Cohen and Weaver (2006), check out the *Language Strategy Use Survey*.⁶

2.3.3 Language strategies by function

A third way to classify strategies, beyond the learning vs. use approach and the language skill approach, is in terms of their function, namely, metacognitive, cognitive, affective, or social (Chamot 1987; Oxford 1990; Oxford, 2011). *Metacognitive strategies* deal with preassessment and preplanning, online planning and monitoring, and postevaluation of language learning activities and of language use events. Such strategies allow learners to control their own cognition by coordinating the planning and organization of strategy use, the monitoring of their use, and the evaluation of how the use went in the learning process. *Cognitive strategies* deal with the crucial nuts and bolts of language use since they involve the awareness, perception, reasoning, and conceptualizing processes that learners undertake in both learning the target language (e.g., identification, grouping, retention, and storage of language material) and in activating their knowledge (e.g., retrieval of language material, rehearsal, and comprehension or production of words, phrases, and other elements of the target language).

Social strategies encompass the means employed by learners for interacting with other learners and native speakers, such as through asking questions to clarify social roles and relationships, asking for an explanation or verification, and cooperating with others in order to complete tasks. Finally, *affective strategies* help students regulate their emotions, motivation, and attitudes. In addition, they are used to reduce anxiety and provide self-encouragement.

Returning to findings from the survey being referred to throughout this chapter (Cohen 2007), while there was relative consensus that monitoring is a prototypical metacognitive function of a strategy, the extent of monitoring likely to be found in actual strategic behavior was questioned (Question 7.1). While one view expressed was that monitoring is a necessary dimension for a strategy, another was that the extent of monitoring would depend on the activity itself, and that for some tasks, it might not take place at all, and for various reasons (for example, on that particular task, engaging in monitoring would detract from task performance, such as in certain speaking tasks).

Another view expressed was that the extent of monitoring depended on the style preference of the learner. The respondent felt that since monitoring implied that learners were conducting an analysis of the effectiveness of a strategy while using it, this might be truer of more concrete-sequential learners than of intuitive learners, who might simply sense whether the strategy was working effectively for them.

While some respondents recognized the metacognitive function of *evaluation* as a necessary dimension for a strategy to have, they felt that in reality learners may not often reflect on the effectiveness of a strategy (Question 7.1). Turning to the style preference literature, one respondent noted that some students will include evaluation as a post-task step, while other learners will not necessarily engage in end-of-task evaluation of strategy effectiveness, but rather will check their ongoing intuitive sense of whether a strategy is working.

The problem with trying to distinguish strategies in terms of the functions that they play is that the distinctions are not so clear-cut. In other words, the same strategy, say “ongoing summarization of the text being read,” may be interpretable as either cognitive or metacognitive. Indeed, it might not be possible to draw the line neatly between what would be viewed as the *metacognitive* strategies aimed at planning out how to summarize a text and then evaluating the results, on the one hand, and the *cognitive* strategies associated with summarizing the text such as that of reconceptualizing a given paragraph at a higher level of abstraction, on the other. It is likely that both types of strategies may be engaged simultaneously in an overlapping way. In that case, delineating whether the strategy is cognitive or metacognitive could be problematic. In fact, the same strategy may function at different levels of abstraction. For instance, skipping an example in the text so as not to lose the train of thought may reflect a metacognitive strategy (i.e., part of a conscious plan not to get distracted by detail), as well as a cognitive strategy to avoid material that would not assist in writing out the gist of the text.

Be that as it may, there is a research literature suggesting that higher-proficiency learners use more metacognitive strategies and use them more frequently, as well as a literature that suggests that more successful learners use metacognitive strategies more often than less successful learners (see Chamot 2005; Anderson 2008). The challenge, then, is to obtain a fine-tuned description of just what metacognitive strategy use actually looks like, since it usually involves the interplay of metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and social strategies.

Let us look at an example of how this might play itself out:

A high-proficiency learner, Gabriela, is good at inferring the meaning of L2 words from context when she reads. On an in-class reading task involving an unseen passage, she starts by underlining unfamiliar words. The strategies that Gabriela uses are at times cognitive and at times metacognitive, such as in checking to see if any of the unknown words have structural clues as to their meaning. The linguistic analysis itself calls for cognitive strategies, while the planning of when to use it and how to use it involves strategizing at the metacognitive level. The learner also deploys the affective strategy of positive self-talk in order to keep herself calm and focused. She makes further use of metacognitive strategies in her efforts to monitor her progress. One such strategy is to see if the inferred meaning for a given word in the passage makes sense, given her comprehension of the rest of the passage. Since the teacher has said that students can consult with each other as they read the passage, she also uses the social strategy of checking with two peers to see what they think several vocabulary items mean in context.

2.3.4 Other ways to classify strategies

There are still other ways that strategies could be classified. Here are some examples:

By age

Teachers who have taught learners at widely different age levels would attest to the fact that the learners' age may be an important variable when classifying strategies. In most cases, it is not an issue of whether the strategy itself is used only by older or younger learners. Rather, the issue is one of how learners at different age levels might use it, as well as how the strategy is described to the learners, since younger learners may not be familiar with terms used to describe such strategies. With older learners it may be possible to talk about "metacognitive" strategies used in planning, monitoring, and evaluating language tasks, while with young learners, it may be better to refer to "strategies for thinking about what to do, for looking at how it's going, and for checking up on how it went." In other words, the strategy functions can and should be referred to explicitly, but terms used in the explanations and the explanations themselves will need to be simplified for younger learners. So, for example, the Spanish Grammar Strategies website

referred to earlier contains numerous strategies that could work effectively even for elementary-school pupils who are, say, in Spanish immersion classes, or for pupils in Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) programs in the U.S. However, it is important to note that for use at this age level, it would be necessary to simplify some of the carrier language that appears on the website.

By proficiency level

Research suggests that learners at a given proficiency level may favor certain receptive or productive strategies. For example, a study of mental translation into English by learners of Spanish at the University of Minnesota (Hawras 1996) found that beginners favored word-for-word translation, even if this meant that their reading was painstakingly slow and disjointed. Advanced learners in that study reported translating only when necessary and were observed to use metacognitive strategies more than less-proficient students did. Nonetheless, there are problems associated with simply counting the frequency of use of strategies by category, and assuming more is better. There is a qualitative dimension that is overlooked. More proficient learners may end up using *fewer* strategies to accomplish a task because they operationalize them effectively, which is less the case with lower-proficiency students (see O'Bryan and Hegelheimer 2009 for a case study documenting this phenomenon). What are several reasons for this phenomenon? Since the higher-proficiency learners already know a lot about the L2, it may take less time for them to absorb new words and structures. For example, they see a word and know where to store it in their mental lexicon. In addition, they may use word analysis effectively to learn new words on a task for which less-proficient students end up using a mnemonic because they do not have the depth of knowledge to analyze the word based on its *morphemes*.⁷

A case study by Graham et al. (2008) charted the strategic behavior of two students who performed differently in a listening comprehension test, when assessed at two time points some seven months apart:

The two students, Sue and Alan, were given multiple-choice vocabulary and grammar tests, and were found to “display similar levels” of linguistic knowledge. The authors conducted an item-by-item analysis of the strategic reactions of the two students to the particular problems posed by each item. The results showed that the less successful

listener, Sue, used many strategies associated with successful listeners but used them ineffectively on both occasions. For example, she listened selectively for particular words, monitored her comprehension, and made deductions based mostly on what she had *not* heard. However, she deployed these potentially beneficial strategies repeatedly, in isolation, and with no follow-up. So, for example, if her comprehension monitoring told her she had misunderstood, she did not then use a remedial strategy. In contrast, the stronger listener, Alan, acknowledged the provisional nature of his interpretations, and double-checked against later, in-text evidence, combining strategies into more effective clusters. So, unlike in Sue's case, when in doubt, he displayed an ability to identify the key information to help resolve the issue.

By gender

If the target language has some clear and strictly followed patterns of address between men and women and the learners of this language come from a language background that does not have these distinctions, they may need to develop strategies for following these distinctions effectively so as not to offend members of either gender. Naturally, this would encompass learning about specific cultures and subcultures that use this language as well, since gender distinctions are as much a cultural matter as they are a language one. In fact, in some cultures and subcultures, a language learner would not be allowed to address a member of the opposite gender at all, except in clearly defined circumstances. Nowadays, the picture has become more complex given differences between biological gender and the gender roles that individuals may assume for themselves in, say, the gay community.

By specific language or culture

Learners of some languages appear more likely to use certain strategies for both learning and performing the language than they might with other languages. For example, English speakers might need to use a variety of visualization strategies to learn Japanese *kanji* characters, given that these logographic characters do not have any connection to the English alphabet. Native Chinese-speaking learners of Japanese, on the other hand, would not need the same number or type of visualization strategies because the characters used for writing in their native language formed the basis for

the development of Japanese *kanji*. A caveat here is that while there will be strategies relevant to a specific culture, classifying language strategies according to how they pertain just to this culture would be a difficult challenge. If, for example, the issue were how to perform a series of speech acts (such as apologizing, complaining, or requesting), probably at least some of the strategies appropriate for performing these speech acts in Japanese would also pertain to performing the speech acts in other languages. If so, it would be because cultural features are often shared across cultures and are not exclusive to one or the other. So, for example, showing deference in Japanese culture when apologizing to a colleague for some work glitch might play itself out somewhat similarly in Chinese and Korean culture. Such an apology might, however, be handled with less deference in a U.S. workplace.

2.4 The features of a strategy

Now that we have looked in some detail at the basic distinctions to be made in classifying strategies, let us consider some of the features of a given strategy: the explicitness of the action, the amount of strategy clustering, and the potential for leading to learning.

2.4.1 The explicitness of the action

In the survey results (Cohen 2007), there was a full range of reactions to the statement that the action component in a given learning situation needs to be explicit (for example, knowing what is actually involved in “re-reading a text” or in “rehearsing and memorizing a dialog”) (Question 5.2). There were those who felt that since strategies are conscious, the learners should be able to state explicitly what a strategy such as “re-reading a text” actually entailed. Then there were those who, while being in agreement with the intent of the statement, felt it was the job of the researcher eliciting strategy data to find out what “re-reading a text” actually means since the action could have a number of possible goals. One respondent noted that when in his own investigations he had not taken this kind of fine-tuned tack, the result had been the collection of fuzzy data, where it was not really clear what the learner had actually done or why.

Those undecided on this explicitness issue felt that while having learners articulate their strategic action explicitly might enhance the learners’ awareness and consciousness, this might also require strategy instruction and then practice. One of these respondents questioned what was meant by

“explicit.” She felt that while learners need to know what they are doing, the degree of explicitness required depends on the learner. For instance, if the strategy is, “I will ask myself questions while reading to improve my comprehension,” she felt that numerous students could leave it at that. Others who are more detail-oriented or who need much more structure, on the other hand, might, in her view, take the strategy to the level of asking themselves at least three factual questions per page and will look in the text for answers to these questions, while yet other students might break the task down on a one-step-at-a-time basis (processing the text on a paragraph-by-paragraph level). Those disagreeing with the statement felt that learners are unlikely to articulate their strategic actions, in part because they do not have the metalanguage to do so. It seems reasonable to me both that some learners have an easier time of reporting what they are doing than do others, and also that some learners are likely to fine-tune reading comprehension strategies for a given passage more than other learners.

One area of concern that emerged from the survey was that strategies often occur in sequences or clusters (see Cohen 2007). Consequently, it may be difficult for researchers to isolate the impact of a single strategy because its actual impact is cumulative, and is based on the effect of other strategies as well. With regard to the function of a given strategy, as indicated in 2.3.3 above, while it may be more elegant to list the strategy types by function (i.e., metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective) for definitional purposes, the reality is that strategies are actually deployed in complex, interacting ways such that, at a given moment, it may be a challenge to determine the type of strategy that is being utilized. What makes this subtle, then, is that, say, three strategies in a cluster (e.g., strategies for summarizing a text) may actually represent more than that if several of these strategies can be further subdivided according to their function. In other words, the same strategy, such as “reconceptualizing a word at a higher level of abstraction”, can be realized with a metacognitive and a cognitive representation: the metacognitive planning goes on at one split second and the cognitive strategy of searching for the appropriate term at the next.

Let us now look at an example from the area of pragmatics.

A male employee, Herman, requests that his female boss, Ashley, allow him to go on vacation during a peak work period. Herman uses not just one strategy, but rather a combination of them in sequence to achieve the socially-appropriate effect. He first deliberates about



whether to take a relatively direct approach (“Hi, Ashley. I have a question for you. Is it possible for me to take the second week off next month for a family reunion?”) or to use a more indirect request strategy (“Hi, Ashley. I was wondering whether I could take some vacation time a few weeks from now. I have a family reunion coming up in Vermont.”). He opts for the second alternative. Then, depending on the pragmatics of the particular speech community, it may be strategic for Herman to adjust the delivery of his speech act of requesting in deference to Ashley’s age, status as boss, and gender. Herman would also need to know what it means to get vacation days allotted in that speech community, especially at peak times.

In some sociocultural contexts, it may be important to refrain from actually requesting vacation time, but rather just to indicate to the boss the dates of the family reunion, and to let the boss suggest the vacation days. Discourse recorded through corpus data reveals that it could take a number of turns for the interaction to resolve itself, one way or the other (Félix-Brasdefer 2007). Some of these strategies will cluster together (e.g., social strategies for courteous engagement with his boss, cognitive strategies for selecting tactful language material, as well as metacognitive strategies for planning when, where, and how to make the request). Some of the strategies will appear in sequence, and possibly with overlapping functions, as Herman crafts his best request strategies for the goal at hand: e.g., an alerter, then a request, then a justification, and then perhaps a sweetener, such as “I’m willing to work overtime before I go and after I get back.”

2.4.2 Amount of strategy clustering

There was general consensus among respondents that strategic behavior could fall along a continuum from a single strategic action to a sequence of such actions (Question 7.1), with only one or two dissenting voices. Respondents generally felt that depending on the task at hand, sometimes one strategic action (for example, “creating a keyword mnemonic to remember a difficult vocabulary word”) might be enough to handle the task, but for more complex tasks (for example, “looking up a new word in a dictionary”) the use of a cluster of strategies would be more likely.

Taking this strategy clustering notion further, there was relatively strong agreement with the statement that for a strategy to effectively enhance learning or performance, it needs to be combined with other strategies either simultaneously in *strategy clusters* or sequentially in *strategy chains* (Question 5.5). The experts generally felt that no single strategy can function well in isolation. One respondent pointed out that while the notion of “strategy combinations” sounded sensible to him, the field had tended to describe strategies as isolated phenomena rather than as existing in clusters. I would agree wholeheartedly with this observation. As noted in 2.2 above, most language learner strategy research continues to perpetuate the false impression that strategies are, in fact, used in isolation, when almost invariably they are combined with others in some form or fashion.

Several of the respondents pointed out that the use of strategy clusters would invariably depend on the nature of the task. One of these respondents contrasted a complex reading comprehension task (where a series of strategies would be needed to complete the task) with a less complex decoding task (which could be completed by means of the strategy of “finding and applying patterns”). But that respondent was quick to note that a strategy such as “using prior knowledge” would most likely be needed for virtually any learning task. Another respondent considered this clustering of strategies to be an irrefutable reality if we take a close look at the task-specific or situation-specific research. She drew upon her recent research with beginning French students in suggesting that strategies do not simply increase as a result of instruction, but rather that clusters of them change over time.

Among the undecided, one respondent did not feel that strategy clusters were always essential. Another felt that although strategy combinations are often used for even the simplest of tasks, the use of strategies in combination is not a necessary precursor to success. Finally, a dissenter insisted that learning is neither black nor white, and that some strategies work more effectively when combined with others in strategy clusters or sequences, but that other strategies can work well without clustering.

There was also relatively strong agreement with the statement that strategy clusters include and are evaluated via a metacognitive strategy or series of metacognitive strategies (which monitor and evaluate them) (Question 5.6). One respondent commented in agreement that strategy clusters are complex and involve adding and shedding strategies often from moment to moment, in line with ongoing monitoring and evaluation. In her view, the bringing together of strategy clusters involves a high level of planning and orchestration, due to the deployment of metacognitive strategies. Another respondent said that such strategy orchestration is what enables learners to

distinguish the best strategies from the rest. Others were keen to point out that while metacognition may play a beneficial role, only some of the strategies in sequences or clusters receive metacognitive scrutiny and that not all learners monitor or evaluate their use of strategies, regardless of whether they are used singly or in clusters.

It is important to point out that, however difficult it may be to describe with precision the number and type of strategic actions being taken at a given moment to handle a given language task, there is consensus in the research literature that more effective language learners are likely to be more strategic than less effective learners. As pointed out in 2.3.3 above, the literature also tends to suggest that the more use of metacognitive strategies, the better (Anderson 2008).

2.4.3 The potential for leading to learning

The majority of survey respondents agreed that a description of a strategy would need to include its potential for leading to learning, even if only expressed at the level of an hypothesis (Question 5.3). So, if “putting a word into a sentence so as to remember it” is to be considered a language learning strategy, then it must be made clear how doing this action would lead to learning. Several even felt that it was “vital” to specify the relations between a certain strategy and its consequences in learning. One respondent noted that while we can only propose that the use of a given strategy will lead to learning in combination with other strategies, a hypothesis needs to be provided regarding how a given cognitive action in combination with others in working memory can lead to (a) long-term memory development and (b) the development of a skill in the long term. He offered “advance organizers in French L2 listening” as an example of the development of a skill over time. He noted that these advance organizers constitute a strategy cluster (e.g., “predict content,” “identify possible French words that might come up,” “beware of any *liaisons* which might derail you,” and “prepare to visualize certain parsed bits of language”) + metacognition (“stay calm” and “think about how you coped last time”). He stated that eventually this cluster would become relatively automatic and if the hypothesis were correct, should lead to improved listening.

One undecided respondent felt that including “potential for learning” as a feature would eliminate numerous behaviors which traditionally have been considered strategic but which do not involve making an effort to learn anything (for example, using the cover strategy of “laughing at a joke that was not understood”). Another respondent interpreted this feature as

referring more to how a *teacher* rather than a learner might view a strategy, yet she agreed that at some level it could be beneficial for learners to consider the appropriateness of a strategy for a given task, goal, and purpose.

Among those who disagreed with the statement, one respondent noted that especially less successful learners might choose a strategy for the sake of comfort rather than because of its effectiveness in learning – for example, purposely committing only enough effort to language learning so as to get just a passing grade. Another felt that instead of loading a strategy description with details such as how a strategic action might work cognitively, we need to go for simplicity and clarity. In addition, she felt that a strategic action might lead to learning in different ways for different learners.

A final comment here would be to remember that many language strategies do not have as their aim language learning but rather language use or performance. So perhaps for those strategies we would need to indicate how the strategy will contribute to performing a given language task. For example, alerting the interlocutor that you are just a learner trying to make a request might serve to relax you enough so that you can perform the speech act better than you thought you could. Also, this strategy could enhance future performance in that whatever feedback you get from the interlocutor as to how to make such requests appropriately in a similar situation could help you to do it better next time.

2.5 The reasons for language learner strategies

In the survey of the experts, the respondents were asked to indicate how they would rate five possible reasons for using language learner strategies.

2.5.1 To enhance learning

There was general agreement that learner strategies have as a purpose the enhancement of learning (Question 8.1). In addition, one respondent stated that without strategies, conscious learning cannot take place. Another respondent commented that if we accept the distinction between language learning and language use strategies, then learner strategies should be aimed at enhancing both the learning and the use of an L2.

2.5.2 To perform specified tasks

Most respondents were in agreement with the statement that learner strategies have as their purpose to perform specified tasks (Question 8.2), even

though strategies referred to in the literature are often described in broad, general, and even fuzzy terms. Several respondents noted that the selection of strategies will depend upon the task, with the understanding that some strategies are specific to a given task (e.g., using a specific jingle to remember certain verbs that have irregular forms) and other strategies could be applied to various tasks (e.g., using a keyword mnemonic to remember new nouns in a language). Finally, one respondent felt that it was inappropriate to assume that learner strategies had as their purpose to perform specific tasks since it would be up to the individual learner to make that determination, and not something predetermined by the nature of the strategy.

2.5.3 To solve specific problems

Most respondents agreed that a purpose for strategies is to solve specific problems (Question 8.3). One respondent gave the example of how a series of listening strategies might be used when a learner is having difficulty perceiving and correctly parsing an L2 phrase. In this case, he felt it would take other strategies to show that this first strategy was not useful in making sense out of the utterance. A dissenting voice commented that strategies are not necessarily aimed at solving problems and gave as an example the strategies for using filled pauses (such as “uhm . . .”) which, in his view, may not be intended to solve a problem at all.

2.5.4 To make learning easier, faster, and more enjoyable

While most respondents agreed with the notion that strategies serve to make learning easier, faster, and more enjoyable (Question 8.5), they sometimes did so with reservations. On the positive side, strategies were seen to allow learners to develop more knowledge of themselves and of what their language learning is all about. This self-awareness aspect was what makes learning for them more satisfying and enriching. Another respondent pointed out that at the beginning stages of strategy instruction students may (and usually do) perceive that incorporating new learning strategies into task completion takes more time and effort than just working on a task in their accustomed way. But then when the strategy pays off in greater success on the task, the students begin to find that the use of this strategy with the given task makes for truly easier, faster, and more enjoyable learning. On the more negative side, it was felt that overusing strategies or using them

too much in isolation rather than in meaningful combinations could prove unhelpful and might lead to slowing down the learning process. It was also pointed out that there are strategies which end up making learning more tedious, more complex, and slower (for example, “finding L1 equivalents for all unknown words in a text before answering the reading comprehension questions” because of a belief that this is the only way that they will make sense out of the text).

2.5.5 To compensate for a deficit in language proficiency

The notion of “compensating for a deficit” (Question 8.4) drew a range of responses with half disagreeing, some of them strongly. As one respondent put it, it depends on what we mean by “deficit.” He noted that if someone were to give him an advanced text in Spanish to read (and he had only received a few hours of Spanish instruction), then he would compensate for his extreme deficit in the language by using everything he had at his disposal such as other Romance languages, common sense, and prior topic knowledge. However, if he encountered phonological problems while attempting to understand spoken Spanish after only minimal instruction in the language, the use of compensatory strategies might not help him identify and distinguish the Spanish sounds.

Among the numerous dissenters, one respondent commented that given the way she interpreted “compensate” and “deficit,” the terms were a bit loaded for her and did not capture the extent to which strategies can facilitate future learning. She did not see the use of strategies as a stop-gap measure, especially since she viewed learners as continuing to develop and refine their strategy use throughout their experience of learning a language, an aspect which the statement did not reflect. Another respondent felt that operating from a deficit mentality is what we have been trying to overcome for years. Finally, a respondent speculated that whereas educators may tend to relate to strategy use in terms of deficit (e.g., ESL students need strategies to help with their “problems” in learning to express themselves orally), what motivates learners to select certain strategies may have nothing to do with a deficit in language proficiency. For instance, learners may strategize about when and how to fill their pauses when speaking in an L2. They may also strategize about the level of formality to use in a letter that they are writing. These, then, are strategies that help them fine-tune their L2 use in areas where the basic proficiency exists.

2.6 Strategy selection and effectiveness

The survey also included items dealing with the original source of the given strategy and the effectiveness of strategy use for the given learner. With regard to how they came up with a particular strategy, respondents reported that they often devised them on their own, sometimes they got them from a teacher, and sometimes from a peer (Question 7.1). Several respondents posited that there was likely to be a gradual movement from initially looking to authoritative sources for ideas as to strategies to use and then eventually coming to generate their own strategies. While respondents saw as potentially difficult identifying the actual source for a given strategy, they felt that tracking the types of strategies learners used and their source might nonetheless provide useful insights about the value of strategy instruction. Research that I conducted with a colleague on the lasting impact of creating mnemonic strategies for remembering vocabulary over time found that the meanings for words learned by means of mnemonics were recalled more successfully than other words over a 100-day period (Cohen and Aphek 1981).

With regard to the effectiveness of the strategies deployed (Question 6.6), respondents were asked to react to the following statement:

The strategies a learner uses and the effectiveness of these strategies very much depend on the learners him/herself (e.g., age, gender, language aptitude, intelligence, cognitive and learning style preferences, self-concept/image, personality, attitudes, motivation, prior knowledge), the learning task at hand (e.g., type, complexity, difficulty, and generality), and the learning environment (e.g., the learning culture, the richness of input and output opportunities). We must view strategies within this larger framework to properly interpret their role in the language learning process.

Perhaps not so surprisingly, this statement received almost uniform support. Those who have worked in the language learner strategy field as long as many of these experts have seen firsthand the impact of learners' background, task, and context on strategy use and effectiveness. Nonetheless, one respondent, speaking for himself but probably on behalf of others as well, admitted that he himself rarely considered all of these factors while conducting a given study or while engaged in strategy instruction, and that to do so would be "mind-boggling." Another stressed that we need more research into the learners' own prior knowledge base in order to understand the extent to which their strategy use reflects group behavior or their own individual patterns.

2.7 Concepts related to learners' use of strategies

There exist a number of terms being used to describe learners' own efforts to improve their skills in a particular L2. Some of the more prominent ones include *autonomous language learning*, *self-regulation*, *self-management*, *independent language learning*, and *individual language learning*. The survey of experts sought to determine how experts related to these various terms for referring to sometimes overlapping concepts.

2.7.1 Autonomous language learning

While the clear majority of respondents on the survey reported using the concept of "autonomous language learning" (Question 2.3), there was some diversity in terms of how the concept was applied. Generally, respondents said that they used it to refer to learning which has as its ultimate goal to produce self-motivated students who take control of the "what, when, and how" of language learning and learn successfully, independently of a teacher, and possibly outside of the classroom without any external influence. But "autonomous" has also been applied to situations where the teacher determines the "what" and the "how," and the learner only has control over the "when."

One respondent saw the value of defining autonomy at three different levels:

1. "autonomy of language competence" – the threshold level at which learners can say or write whatever they want to
2. "autonomy of language learning competence" – the level at which learners can deploy cognitive and metacognitive strategies consistent with or in place of the teacher's teaching approaches, and also without the immediate presence of a teacher
3. "autonomy of choice" – the learners' role in determining personal language goals, the designated purposes for learning the language and proficiency goals, and the extent to which the learner has input into the content and modality of the language curriculum

This third level is crucial for lifelong language learning, especially when there is no teacher or tutor on the scene.

With regard to problems encountered in using the term *autonomous*, a respondent noted that while "autonomy" (from the ancient Greek) literally

means “self-regulation,” the phrase “autonomous language learning” has over time gathered new denotations, some of which are mutually exclusive (for example, if we compare autonomy from a technical vs. a psychological vs. a sociocultural vs. a political-critical perspective; Oxford 2003). In addition, “autonomous language learning” was sometimes understood (or maybe misunderstood) to be counter to the values of certain cultures. As a case in point, a second respondent indicated that from his experience as an academic in Japan, there was a danger that EFL teachers might view “autonomous learning” as an excuse for abandoning teaching. Finally, a third respondent pointed out that “autonomous learning” is not the same as “strategic learning” in that a learner can work independently in a rote, nonstrategic manner. She also noted that learners who are not effective autonomous learners may be very effective (and strategic) learners in a supportive group setting. It is this final point which may prompt advocates of strategy instruction to find out just what the actual role of language learner strategies is in any given autonomous language learning program, rather than making assumptions which may be inaccurate.

2.7.2 Self-regulation

The majority of respondents reported using the term “self-regulation” (Question 2.2). One identified the term as that used in the educational psychology literature and as synonymous with “self-management” – see below. Another said if she used it, it was referring to Vygotsky’s concept of self-regulation, with his theoretical and practical focus on specific sets of learning behaviors that would be recognized today as cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies (see Vygotsky 1986). She added that various experts see students making use of general learning strategies in order to become more self-regulated in their learning. A third respondent indicated that grounding learner strategies in cognitive psychology does not allow for the recognition of the affective side of learning. He views “self-regulation” as a broader term that allows for both the cognitive and the affective side of strategic learning.

Various respondents noted difficulties in trying to distinguish “self-regulation” from “autonomy.” In fact, two respondents indicated that they used “self-regulation” synonymously with “autonomy,” with “autonomous” being used as an adjective to describe the self-regulating person or group. One respondent pointed out that for some scholars, “self-regulation” is now being used to more or less replace “strategy” as a term, but that doing so

leaves unanswered the obvious next question, “What do learners *do* to self-regulate? (which is to use strategies).” Another respondent picked up on this same use (or misuse) of the term and viewed this use of “self-regulation” as being in conflict with the research and theory on learner strategies from cognitive and educational psychology.

In his most recent book on the psychology of SLA, Dörnyei (2009: 183) minimizes the value of looking at language learner strategies altogether since what learners do is better viewed as “idiosyncratic self-regulated behaviour, and a particular learning behaviour can be strategic for one learner and non-strategic for another.” Ortega (2009) follows the same line of reasoning as Dörnyei, and likewise gives short shrift to language learner strategies in her recent textbook on SLA. Then similarly, Oxford (2011) embraces a self-regulation model for L2 learning, but unlike Dörnyei’s approach echoed by Ortega, in Oxford’s model, learners actively and constructively use strategies to manage their own learning. We also note that in this latest publication Oxford only mentions autonomy several times in passing. So, the compromise position would be to include self-regulation as perhaps an umbrella notion when referring to language learners and to also include the strategies that they use for both learning and performing in an L2.

2.7.3 Self-management

As with self-regulation, the majority of respondents indicated that they used the term “self-management” (Question 2.1). For one respondent, learner self-management was the combination of procedures and knowledge. Another reported using the term to refer to learners who (a) use metacognitive strategies extensively to monitor, plan, and evaluate their strategy use, and (b) are able to control their own learning and seek/find solutions to problems in their learning. A third respondent similarly reported using self-management as a metacognitive strategy which can be applied to any learning task. She saw four components to the concept of self-management which included having learners (1) determine how they learn best, (2) arrange conditions that help them learn, (3) seek opportunities for practice, and (4) focus attention on the task.

Various problems were raised with regard to the use of the term. One respondent felt that while in her view all strategies reflect a form of learner self-management, some researchers in the field have used the term “self-management” to refer only to metacognitive strategies (as noted in the

previous paragraph). In the strategy instruction sessions that she has led, this usage (limiting “self-management” to metacognitive strategies) has been confusing to the participants, especially to those teachers among them who were using the term more broadly. Another respondent saw self-management as a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite to strategic behavior. She viewed the concept as having some overlap with self-regulation, but she thought that “self-regulation” was more inclusive of the range of strategic behavior – including both the *will* (i.e., the motivation to use self-management) and the *skill* (i.e., the ability to use both metacognitive and task-specific learning strategies).

2.7.4 Independent language learning

The term “independent language learning” (Question 2.4) drew a mixed response. Half of the respondents reported that they used it and half not. Six of those indicating that they used it tended to use it as a synonym for “autonomous language learning,” which also says something about how they relate to the term “autonomous.” Another respondent said that she uses this term when she wants to focus on learners who are taking responsibility for their learning through independent study (for example, in self-access centers).

As to problems with the term, one respondent felt that the term interfaced with autonomous language learning in sometimes ambiguous ways. Another respondent indicated that it was a problematic term in distance education because it was associated with a perception that learners can and should be independent, without sufficient attention being paid to issues of learner proficiency or support. In her view, independence needs to be balanced with an awareness of the abilities and competencies of the learner and with concern for the support available to learners to ensure successful learning experiences. A third respondent commented that while for some learners there is language material which is best learned independently, there is also material which certain learners best learn in an interactive social context.

2.7.5 Individual language learning

Most of the respondents reported not using the term “individual language learning” (Question 2.5). Two of those who reported using it, indicated that it serves for them as a synonym for “independent language learning.” According to one respondent, what makes the term problematic is the lack

of clarity in comparing it to “independent” and “autonomous” language learning. Another respondent gave an interesting spin to the notion of “individual” language learning, suggesting that it could refer to personal or even quirky approaches to language learning. She was thinking of how some good language learners that she has encountered are reluctant to share their strategies with others out of a belief that their strategies are not good for anyone else because they are highly personalized.

The findings on the use of these five terms, then, would speak in favor of the need to define terms carefully if we use any of these in our work. Just because the terms have been around a long time does not mean that their intended meaning will be clear to others.

2.8 Linking language strategies to learning style preferences

Up until now little mention has been made of learning style preferences in our detailed description of language learner strategies. Strategies are usually linked in some way to style preferences, ideally out of choice. Language learning and use strategies do not operate by themselves, but rather are directly tied to the learner’s underlying *learning style preferences* (i.e., their general approaches to, and preferred ways of, learning). It has been pointed out that each style preference makes its contribution to learning and that consequently learners benefit from identifying their style preferences, viewing these as a “comfort zone,” and stretching their comfort zone through practice (Oxford 2001).

Researchers both in educational psychology (e.g., Sprenger 2003) and in the L2 field (e.g., Ehrman 1996) have observed that learners may well approach learning in different ways, and that what suits one learner may not work for another. The concept of *learning styles* has been used to describe these tendencies or preferences when it comes to learning (for a recent description of styles, see Hadfield 2006). There is the question as to which theory of learning styles to use since over 70 exist (Coffield et al. 2004). Furthermore, the research literature is inconclusive as to whether there is benefit to having instructors attempt to match their approach to teaching to the learning style preferences of their learners (Coffield et al. 2004). Current thinking is that rather than attempting to individualize instruction so that learners are taught in their supposedly preferred modalities, significant learning gains can accrue from the use of a mixed-modality approach to instruction (Hadfield 2006: 381). Here is an example:

Rather than simply presenting new words and phrases orally, the teacher makes sure to provide the students with a handout that has the words and phrases on it, along with phonetic information and important grammatical information as well. This approach supports learners who prefer a visual approach to learning the new words, especially those who are not so good at taking class notes, partly because their aural skills are weak.

There is also a question as to whether learners' style preferences are immutable or whether they can shift as part of the learning process (Hadfield 2006). Nonetheless, it would seem to me valuable to encourage learners to attempt "style-stretching" in order to benefit from approaches to learning that they had been resisting in the past. Here is an example of what encouraging style-shifting in the classroom might look like:

Let us say that a given nonnative reader, Alejandro, is so global in his approach to reading academic texts that he repeatedly misses specific details that could have helped him in deriving meaning from the texts. His teacher has noted this pattern both in Alejandro's performance in class and in his results on tests and quizzes. With a modest intervention from his teacher, which might include suggested strategies for distinguishing important details from extraneous information in an academic text, Alejandro could possibly learn to shift his approach to reading, so as to attend more to specific details while also maintaining his global perspective.

Learning style researchers have offered a multiplicity of theoretical frameworks for dealing with learners' style preferences (Hadfield 2006). In my opinion, the main value of such frameworks for a language learner would be to provide dimensions that have some bearing on the L2 learning experience, especially beyond simply focusing on the sensory/perceptual (visual, auditory, and tactile) preferences. The following are three categories of style preferences that in my experience over the last 20 years have proven relevant and useful to language learners: sensory/perceptual, cognitive, and personality-related preferences (Reid 1995; Ehrman 1996). See [Figure 2.2](#) for some examples of the three types of learning style preferences (from Cohen and Weaver 2006).

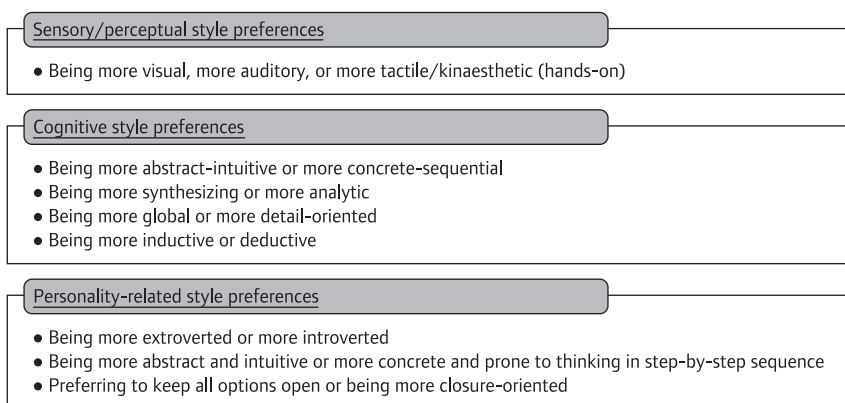


FIGURE 2.2 Categories of learning style preferences

Let us look at an example to illustrate how styles may play a role in language learning and language use (based on Cohen 2003):

Suppose an instructor asks students to read a 500-word text about a new fully electric automobile as compared with a hybrid one, and then to do three tasks:

1. write the main point of the passage in one or two sentences
2. respond to an inference item (e.g., “From what is reported about the fully electric car’s weaknesses, what can be inferred about the hybrid car’s strengths?”), and then
3. summarize the key points of the passage

In this example, we might find that certain cognitive style preferences are activated more than others – for the sake of illustration, concrete-sequential vs. abstract-intuitive, analytic vs. synthesizing, and global vs. detail-oriented. If this were the case, then perhaps those learners who are more concrete-sequential are the ones who will check the headings and subheadings in the text about electric and hybrid cars to get a sense of its organization, whereas the more abstract-intuitive learners will skip around the text, looking for keywords here and there but without looking for the organizational



pattern and using it as their guide for moving sequentially through the article. What impact then might these two contrasting style preferences and accompanying strategies have on the selection of the main idea for the text? If the main idea were “given away” by a particular subheading and only the concrete-sequential learners followed these subheadings meticulously, then these learners might have an advantage in doing the task. If the main idea is not simply spelled out in the text but is derived by reconceptualizing the issue at a higher level of abstraction, then perhaps the abstract-intuitive learners might have an advantage in doing the task.

With regard to the subtask calling for inferring what is *not* stated in the text about the strengths of the hybrid car, learners with a more abstract-intuitive preference might be relatively comfortable relying on their background knowledge and opinions to make the necessary inference. The more concrete-sequential learners might have a tendency to focus on the clues in the text and consequently find that the answer to the question eludes them. Learners with a tendency to be more global and synthesizing in their approach to this reading task might enjoy summarizing the text because they are predisposed to using strategies for integrating material into a summary. On the other hand, more detail-oriented and analytic students may find it difficult to perform the summary if their predisposition to analyze texts and to pay attention to specific details interferes with their efforts to summarize it.

If learners have a better sense of their style preferences, it may be easier for them to see why it is they prefer using certain strategies and not others. For example, if the learners are more global in their style preference, they may enjoy using reading strategies which assist them in getting the gist of an article – such as using inference when things are not spelled out in the text. If they are more inclined to focus on details, they may feel uncomfortable when using a global approach, and may prefer to have the meaning of specific details in the text spelled out clearly before they attempt to put it all together into a gist.

Some years ago research efforts were made to document how the teacher’s instructional style preferences and approach to L2 instruction may benefit

students with certain style preferences over learners whose preferences are at odds with these. Oxford and Lavine (1992), for example, provided empirical descriptions of potential or actual style conflicts in the classroom. At that time, teachers were advised to provide a mixed-modality approach to instruction as a means for defusing any potential conflicts by the following:

- balancing structured with unstructured activities and inductive with deductive course material presentations
- making liberal use of visuals for the benefit of those who learn best by seeing
- carefully moderating the use of repetitive drills for vocabulary and grammar practice
- allowing students the option of cooperating on homework, and by other means (Felder and Henriques 1995)

We note that this suggested approach to L2 instruction is fully consistent with the mixed-modality approach to instruction which Hadfield (2006) and others would recommend.

The final issue would be one of how to assess the learners' style preferences and those of the teacher before determining the appropriate instructional approaches for the given class. It may be beneficial to learners, teachers, and program evaluators to collect on a routine basis some information on the students' learning styles, bearing in mind the underlying controversy regarding the validity of such measures (Coffield et al. 2004). The *Learning Style Survey* (Cohen et al. 2002b in Cohen and Weaver 2006)⁸ encompasses the three style categories presented above, and has helped hundreds of language learners at the University of Minnesota over the years to heighten their awareness as to their style preferences.

2.9 Adding motivation to the mix

It is possible for a learner to have a fine repertoire of language learner strategies and yet not make progress in language learning because of a lack of motivation to do so. Just because the strategies are available does not mean that they will be accessed. So learners need strategies to keep motivated. The social psychological approach to motivation provided the field the rather static sociolinguistic notions of an instrumental vs. an integrative motivation to learn an L2. *Instrumental motivation* is characterized by the desire to gain some social or economic reward through L2 achievement (such as

getting a new job, a promotion, or an award for excellence). Learners with *integrative motivation* are said to have a desire to identify with another language community and get to know the people, and to evaluate the learning situation positively (for an overview, see Gardner 1985; Clément and Gardner 2001). The problem with this approach is that it is pitched at too macro a level to capture those moment-to-moment decisions based on actual language experiences. It is these in-the-trenches experiences that may make or break a learner's desire to stick with a language or to call it quits.

In response to this rather static social psychological approach, Dörnyei popularized the notion of motivation as a dynamic process in a continuous process of change (2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2003). It was in the spirit of this view that an instrument was constructed, *Taking My Motivational Temperature on a Language Task* (Cohen and Dörnyei 2001),⁹ with the intention that it be administered before, during, and after a group of learners do a language task in class. The construction of this instrument was largely my effort, based on my reading of Dörnyei's publications on the topic of motivation. Dörnyei helped me with some of the items and had his graduate students try out the instrument. I have had hundreds of undergraduate students at the University of Minnesota use this instrument on themselves and on three of their peers over the years, with relatively good success. There is no easy way to validate the instrument since many of the items on it are presumed to function independently of each other.

Learners start by indicating the "motivational baggage" that they bring to the given task. They then are to indicate how good they think they are at learning languages, how much they like learning this particular language, how important it is for them to learn this language, how motivated they are to learn in this given learning situation, how motivating this language course is, how motivating this teacher is, how much they like learning with these peers, and how willing they are to do better than their fellow students. Then before they actually begin the task, they are asked to rate how beneficial they think the task will be, how interesting it is, and how confident they are that they will do well on it. As they begin doing the task, they then indicate how motivating they find the setup of the task (e.g., the physical conditions, the grouping), and whether being anxious about doing the task will help or hinder. As they look ahead to completing the task, they are to consider how motivating a factor it is for them to think of the feedback they will be receiving on their performance. After completing the task, they consider how motivated they are to do other similar tasks in the future.

Of course, the next question is, "What can learners do to increase their motivational level if the *Motivational Temperature Measure* indicates that their motivation is low?" The following are some suggestions:

In cases where learners have no control over what is being taught, nor the way it is being taught, then it is more important than ever that they be in touch with their favored ways of learning so that they can at least take control of this aspect of the learning process. They can start by revisiting the results of their learning style preference survey to see if the strategies that they are using are consistent with these preferences. If not, they may want to try out strategies which are more consistent with their inclinations as a learner. So if they enjoy an auditory approach to learning and are asked to read a difficult text, they could ask a native speaker to tape-record the text so that they can listen to it being read (with proper stress and intonation). If learners have a choice as to the skill areas that they will work on, and they enjoy speaking, then they could focus on speaking tasks as a motivator. For learners who are put off when the topic is boring, they could make sure that their language studies only involve topics of keen interest to them. There are, of course, many more ways for learners to increase their motivation, but they need to start with the awareness that this is possible and the desire to increase their motivation. Then it is a matter of strategizing as to how to do this most expediently.

Before leaving this brief look at the process approach to motivation, there is a need for an update with regard to motivation in L2 learning. While Dörnyei (2005) conceded that individual learners may be able to identify discrete learning tasks in order to chart their motivational fluctuations, he was troubled by the assumption that the processing of the task occurs in relative isolation rather than simultaneously with other processes. More recently, Dörnyei and Ushioda have embraced a *sociodynamic perspective on motivation*, involving the interaction of motivation with numerous internal, social, and contextual factors. Their current approach to motivation reflects a complex dynamic systems view of motivation which features the following complementary perspectives (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2010: 75–90):

1. *a person-in-context relational view of motivation*, with explicit emphasis on the complex individuality of learners, where their identity as language learners is just one aspect of their social identity with attention to the integration of motivation and social context
2. *the L2 motivational self system*, which suggests that there are three primary sources of motivation for L2 learning – the learners' vision of

themselves as effective L2 speakers, the social pressure coming from the learners' environment, and positive learning experiences

3. *motivation from a complex dynamic systems perspective*, where the interconnected components of motivation undergo multiple interferences from their own trajectories, resulting in nonlinear, emergent changes in the overall system behavior

My own bias is to continue to make use of the motivational temperature measure with the caveat that some learners will be better able than others to describe how their motivation to perform a given task fluctuates as they perform it. While such an approach is giving only a partial picture of learners' motivation, the insights gained from data gathering in one local task-completion context may nonetheless provide helpful insights to learners and to their teachers as well. My sense is that researchers tend to focus more on teachers and what they can do to be motivating than on learners and what they can do to increase their own motivation. As a hyperpolyglot, I worry about how a very specific experience with a frustrating language task (or a series of such experiences) can result in learners dropping a language course or ceasing to learn it on their own. That is where an instrument like the *motivational temperature measure* can be of benefit – to help learners chart their motivational fluctuations at the task level. In addition, the instrument does ask learners to look at certain contextual factors as well in terms of how motivating or unmotivating they are.

2.10 The differential effect of tasks

No discussion of language learner strategies would be complete without calling attention to the effect that the particular task might have on the choice of strategies, as well as on the effectiveness of the selected strategy or set of strategies. This chapter has referred liberally to the notion of language tasks without actually defining what a task is. Just as there are differing views as to what language learner strategies are, so there are differing views as to what constitute L2 *pedagogic tasks* (Samuda and Bygate 2008: 62–70). Beyond the definitions, which tend to be teacher-focused, are the learner perceptions of the tasks – perceptions which are likely to determine whether learners will persevere to the end of the given task or not.

It is no surprise to language learners that not all L2 language tasks are created equal. Learners are most likely to warm up to those tasks that are perceived as being relevant, interesting, and doable. Language learning may

TABLE 2.1 Tasks as perceived by learners

teacher-initiated	←	→	student-initiated
group effort	←	→	individual
meaningful	←	→	focus on form
timed	←	→	free
authentic	←	→	inauthentic
relevant	←	→	irrelevant
important	←	→	unimportant
appropriate level	←	→	inappropriate level
useful	←	→	not useful
clear	←	→	unclear
familiar	←	→	unfamiliar
easy language	←	→	difficult language
concrete	←	→	abstract
open	←	→	closed
goal-oriented	←	→	no clear goal
evaluated	←	→	no evaluation
motivating	←	→	nonmotivating

Source: adapted from Peter Skehan, Task-based instruction, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 18, 268–86 (1998) (c) Cambridge Journals, reproduced with permission

well become frustrating and demotivating when the tasks at hand are perceived by the learners as irrelevant, uninteresting, and difficult to handle. Table 2.1 provides a listing of task characteristics presented as continua, where a given task will come out somewhere along the continuum for each of the characteristics. The point is that tasks have numerous characteristics and that these can influence which strategies are selected, how, and how effectively they are used.

Learners' resistance to the material in one or another lesson may result from those learners sitting in judgment of the given tasks in that lesson. They may feel that the material is simply irrelevant to their needs as language learners at the present time, and especially if they do not "need" a good grade in that course, they may not take the task seriously (e.g., learning the language necessary in Japanese for buying a necktie in an elegant department store in Tokyo, as in 2.3.1 above).

2.11 The effect of context on strategy choice

Rather than being stable over a lifetime, the strategies used by individual learners may vary from one learning context to another. The following are three examples from the research literature. In an autobiographical case study, He (2002) described how her choice of strategies shifted according to the phase of her life that she was in, as she studied English in six different phases – as a teenager studying EFL in pre-Cultural Revolution China, as an

independent learner working in a factory during the Cultural Revolution, as a university student after the Cultural Revolution ended, as a postgraduate student and then as a lecturer in Australia, and finally as a teacher educator in Hong Kong. She reported mostly using cognitive and metacognitive strategies in school, but made greater use of metacognitive strategies as an independent learner.

Building on He's approach to viewing strategies in context, Gao looked at both Chinese students' strategy use in China and in Britain and comparing their strategy use in China and Hong Kong. In the first study, Gao (2006) looked at 14 Chinese learners of English, and found that while popular language learning discourses, assessment methods, and influential agents (including teachers, experts, friends, and family members) had an influence on the learners' frequency and choices of strategy use in China, strategy patterns changed when the learners moved to England. Some learners stopped their uses of memorizing, note taking, and regular reviewing strategies to retain new words. Instead, they relied on using more social strategies to guess, acquire, and apply meanings of new words in actual conversations. The interpretation was that the Chinese influences on language strategy use were perhaps undermined when the students started studying in British institutions. In his more recent longitudinal study involving the strategy use of 22 Chinese students who were studied first in China and then in Hong Kong, Gao further demonstrated how contextual realities can mediate the selection of strategies (Gao 2010). When the students in the study arrived in Hong Kong, they found that they needed Cantonese to integrate into the student community, and had to enlist strategies for this purpose. In addition, English assumed for the students an important sociopolitical function as the medium of instruction at the university.

2.12 Discussion

This chapter has provided working definitions of L2 learning and use terminology, considered problematic issues relating to the conceptualization and use of these terms, and briefly demonstrated ways that strategies-based instruction has dealt with these issues in the field.

2.12.1 The survey of experts on language learner strategies and beyond

The survey of experts reported on in this chapter is perhaps the first of its kind in the area of language learner strategies, so for that reason alone, it constitutes a valuable undertaking. Responses to the survey questionnaire

(see [Appendix](#)) produced a number of insights. As indicated above, it would appear that there is still debate as to how conscious of and attentive to their language behaviors learners need to be in order for those behaviors to be considered strategies. I personally would favor only viewing consciously selected processes as strategies. I would also favor having strategies be detailed, so that learners can apply them directly to their language needs, as is the case with the more than 70 strategies presented on the Spanish Grammar Strategies website described in this chapter. While the deficit notion of language strategy use seems to have fallen a bit out of favor, we note that this model still plays a significant role in numerous learner strategy studies appearing in the literature. Perhaps part of this reality is based on the fact that language learner strategies around the world have not necessarily been in touch with the latest thinking on the topic, and may be using instruments designed two to three decades ago.

A few limitations of the survey study should be noted. One limitation was that since seven of the nineteen respondents were non-native speakers of English, which was the language used for the questionnaire, this could have influenced their reactions to the terminological issues. With regard to Question 1.6 as to whether experts distinguished *tactics* or *techniques* from *strategies*, for example, a native Chinese-speaking respondent commented that she did not find it easy to locate equivalent terms for “tactic” and “technique” in Chinese, so that she had difficulty responding to the query. Interestingly, at the time of the survey, the experts were relatively unanimous in their view that neither did they use the term *tactic* nor the term *technique*. In the latest learner strategies book by Oxford (2011), however, a distinction is made among metastrategies, strategies, and tactics, where tactics are very specific applications of both metastrategies and strategies.

Another limitation was that the findings for the survey were reported on a question-by-question basis, rather than reflecting the whole picture of how these issues interrelated for any given respondent. This is a limitation in that it takes a given response out of the larger context. Another limitation is that it was not always perfectly clear whose perspective was being represented in the various questionnaire statements – whether it was that of the learner, of a teacher, of a teacher educator, or of a researcher. One such example was with an item which dealt with hypothesizing about a strategy’s potential for leading to learning:

5.3 A strategy’s potential for leading to learning *must be proposed, even if only at the level of hypothesis. (So if “Putting a word into a sentence so as to remember it” is to be considered a strategy, then it must be made clear how doing this action will lead to learning.)*

Hence, conducting this survey brought numerous issues to the attention of the expert respondents, and in the process of completing the questionnaire the respondents identified lines of investigation that would need to be pursued to gather the kinds of information that could help resolve some of the issues raised. In various instances, experts noted that they simply had not considered some of the issues raised. So, including them in the questionnaire served the important purpose of consciousness raising. The next step would be to investigate some of the debated strategy features to determine more rigorously the extent of their role in language learning.

A concern that I have with regard to self-regulation enthusiasts is that they may be throwing the baby out with the bath water by giving such short shrift to the role of language learner strategies since I feel that a judicious use of them can enhance even the bumpiest of L2 learning experiences. In Ortega (2009: 147–48), there is a comparison between two learners of French, Alice and Richard, who both wrote books describing their language experiences – the first about her successful learning of French from grade 5 (see Kaplan 1993) and the second about his unsuccessful attempts at learning to speak French at 55, after achieving reading ability in French at 19 (Watson 1995). Ortega points out the obvious difference in their ages and suggests though that this is but one possible difference. At various points in her text she contrasts Kaplan and Watson, demonstrating how they differed in terms of aptitude (especially in ability to remember vocabulary), motivation, and affect. There are also numerous comparisons between Alice, the successful French learner, and Richard, the unsuccessful one, in Kramsch's (2009) book *The multilingual subject*, as well.

A more recent, and far more detailed, look at her L2 learning is that of journalist Katherine Rich (2009), who focuses on her learning of Hindi during a year living in India. There are numerous details about how different Hindi is from English and about the gaffes that she made trying to use the language. Unlike the Kaplan and the Watson books, this book pauses the narrative repeatedly to showcase one issue after another in L2 learning, usually from a neurolinguistics vantage point. Rich's insights are based on interactions with a large number of luminaries in the field of SLA. Issues that she raises include:

- the importance of noticing material in order to learn it
- the lack of a silent period for adults in contrast to little children
- the frustration at being limited to only partial language ability in Hindi
- how her visual style preference manifested itself

- how the brain deals with reading in different scripts
- how the nature of the L2 itself may affect thoughts in that language and may even condition emotions

I would like to think that anyone is capable of learning any skill in any language, if provided with strategy instruction geared to the particular learner's needs in the given context. Neither Alice's book nor Richard's provides much in the way of a detailed description as to the strategies that they used for learning and using French. About the most detail Watson provides for any strategy that he employed was the cover strategy whereby he "calculated frantically which question down the line [he] would be asked, and tried to work out the answer before [the teacher] got to it and to [him] . . . no one paid much attention to the answers others gave" (1995: 34–35). Later in the book, Richard shares an insight that he was going about trying to learn French the wrong way – that he "had to bury [his] knowledge of the rules in [his] unconscious before [he] could talk" (Watson 1995: 61). But then there is nothing in Watson's book describing any strategic actions that he took to sidestep his rule-based approach to L2 French use. My argument would be that, with appropriate strategy instruction, he could have overcome what appeared to him to be insurmountable obstacles. Similarly, Rich's book provides little or no insights as to the strategies that she used to learn and use the language. Much of this would have to be intuited from her accounts of dealing with Hindi up to the point where she ultimately calls it quits, after attaining a certain, perhaps modest, level of fluency.

This point about possibilities for learners nicely transitions then into the next issue of tailoring strategies to meet the needs of learners.

2.12.2 What strategies for what types of learners?

The reader of this chapter may have wanted to come away with a handy list of strategies appropriate for a given learner on a given task. Hopefully, a reading of the chapter has made it clear that building a language strategy repertoire is an individual matter. It is possible that no two learners will have the same repertoire. But even if their repertoires are similar, there is no assurance that they will use the strategies at the same time for the same purpose. And even if they do, they may use them in somewhat different sequences or clusters. Not only that – they may use them differently when they use them, due to their individual learner characteristics, purposes for doing a given task, motivation, and so forth. So while a prescriptive approach to language learner strategies might be appealing in general

principle, it would not be very efficient to provide a handy list of strategies for the reasons enumerated above. Even with regard to strategies for just one skill area, such as the Spanish Grammar Strategies website, the most sensible way to handle it seems to be setting it up on the internet and inviting learners to pick and choose their own strategies, based on either a need for assistance with a given grammar structure or according to a learning style preference that they have (for more on this, see 4.2.3).

2.13 Discussion questions and activities

1. Define for yourself *language learner strategies*. Then compare your definition with the one provided in the chapter. Then suppose that you have a colleague who insists that a strategy is still a strategy even if learners use it unconsciously – in other words, without any awareness that they are using it. If you were to endorse this view, what would your reasoning be? If you were to take exception to the view, what would your reasoning be then?
2. With a partner, perform some L2 task, such as reading an unseen text for comprehension (e.g., an article in the newspaper) or writing a short note to a colleague requesting a professional favor. As you are doing the task, have your partner ask you about the language learning and language use strategies that you are using or used to accomplish the task. (You may wish to use verbal report, as described in 3.1.3.) See if you can identify the category that each of those strategies represents (i.e., which are language use strategies such as retrieval strategies or communication strategies, and which are learning strategies).
3. Assume that you are an L2 instructor at an institution that for years has referred to “language learning strategies” without distinguishing among the different categories. They have all been lumped into one general pool. On the basis of this chapter, you now have some handy distinctions to make. Prepare a mini-lecture on these distinctions. Then do an exercise with your colleagues (or with the fellow students in your class). Divide them up into small groups so that each group is dealing with one of the categories of strategies. Have each group identify at least five examples of strategies within that category. Then compare results across groups to see if the examples seem to work. Which examples seem to overlap categories? Find ways for explaining this overlap.

4. At the high school where you teach, you overhear your colleagues talking about “good” and “bad” strategies, and about the need for students to use more strategies and to use them more frequently. You have become informed on this topic and prepare a few remarks to present at the next staff meeting. What would your main points be in setting the record straight for your colleagues?
5. As a staff project or homework assignment, fill out the Cohen et al. *Language Strategy Use Survey* or the *Learning Style Survey* (the web addresses for these instruments are provided in footnotes 6 and 8, respectively, and in the References). As you fill out each item, make marginal notes or tape-recorded comments when you have reactions to what you think particular items are assessing. Compare your reactions to these two instruments with the reactions of your colleagues or fellow students. What do you see as the strengths of each instrument? What would you consider to be its weaknesses? Would you recommend administering them to students in your L2? If not, what alternatives would you recommend?

Appendix: IPOLLS Language Learner Strategy Questionnaire (in Cohen 2007)

The aim of this questionnaire is to gather information as to how scholars, researchers, and experienced teacher/researchers perceive and deal with language learner strategy terminology and how they have responded to, or would respond to, various needs associated with strategy work. It will take a fair amount of time to respond to, perhaps involving several sittings. Hopefully, your investment in time will be worth the effort, so we thank you in advance for your willingness to aid us in this endeavor! Note that *language learner strategies* is being used as a generic way of referring to that broad set of strategies that include a panoply of language learning strategies and language use strategies.

1. Do you make (or would you make) any of the following distinctions, and/or do you see value in doing so?

1.1 *Strategies vs. processes*

<i>Do you make this distinction?</i>	<i>If Yes, why?</i>
--------------------------------------	---------------------

1.2 Macro- vs. microstrategies

Do you make this distinction?	If Yes, why?
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1.3 General vs. specific strategies

Do you make this distinction?	If Yes, why?
Type Y or N below:	

1.4 Direct vs. indirect strategies

If Yes, why?

1.5 Primary vs. support strategies

Do you make this distinction?	If Yes, why?
Type Y or N below:	

1.6 Tactics or techniques vs. strategies

Do you make this distinction?	If Yes, why?
Type Y or N below:	

1.7 Overt/motor strategies (e.g., writing short summaries in the margin while reading a text) vs. strategies involving *thought processes* (e.g., connecting a visual image with a word)

Do you make this distinction?	If Yes, why?
Type Y or N below:	

1.8 Strategies as *intention to act* vs. strategies as *action itself*

<i>Do you make this distinction?</i>	<i>If Yes, why?</i>
<i>Type Y or N below:</i>	

1.9 *Strategic knowledge* vs. *strategic action*

<i>Do you make this distinction?</i>	<i>If Yes, why?</i>
<i>Type Y or N below:</i>	

1.10 *Language learning strategies* vs. *cognitive/learning style preferences*

<i>Do you make this distinction?</i>	<i>If Yes, why?</i>
<i>Type Y or N below:</i>	

2. Which of the following concepts do you use as a key term in your work, how do you use them, and what problems do you encounter (if any)?

2.1 Self-management

<i>Use it?</i> <i>(Y/N)</i>	<i>If Yes, how?</i>
	<i>Problems encountered:</i>

2.2 Self-regulation

<i>Use it?</i> <i>(Y/N)</i>	<i>If Yes, how?</i>
	<i>Problems encountered:</i>

2.3 Autonomous language learning

<i>Use it?</i> <i>(Y/N)</i>	<i>If Yes, how?</i>
	<i>Problems encountered:</i>

2.4 Independent language learning

<i>Use it?</i> (Y/N)	<i>If Yes, how?</i>
	<i>Problems encountered:</i>

2.5 Individual language learning

<i>Use it?</i> (Y/N)	<i>If Yes, how?</i>
	<i>Problems encountered:</i>

3. What literature do you cite when you need a theoretical foundation for learner strategies (e.g., from psychology, linguistics, etc.)?

<i>Your response:</i>

4. Please give your reaction to the following definition of strategies:

Strategies can be classified as conscious mental activity. They must contain not only an action but a goal (or an intention) and a learning situation. Whereas a mental action might be subconscious, an action with a goal/intention and related to a learning situation can only be conscious.

<i>Your reaction:</i>

5. In considering the features that constitute what is referred to as a *strategy*, to what extent would you say the following must be present for it to be considered a strategy?

For each feature, please type Y in the box below the statement that corresponds to your level of agreement and explain your view in the space provided.

5.1 A strategy's description requires the specification of a clear *goal or goals or intentions*.

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Explanation:</i>				

5.2 Learners need to be explicit in a given learning situation about the action component (e.g., what they mean by "re-reading a text" or "rehearsing and memorizing" a dialog).

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Explanation:</i>				

5.3 A strategy's *potential for leading to learning* must be proposed, even if only at the level of hypothesis. (So if "Putting a word into a sentence so as to remember it" is to be considered a strategy, then it must be made clear how doing this action will lead to learning.)

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Explanation:</i>				

5.4 A strategy must have a metacognitive component whereby the learner consciously and intentionally attends selectively to a learning task, analyzes the situation and task, plans for a course of action, monitors the execution of the plan, and evaluates the effectiveness of the whole process.

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Explanation:</i>				

5.5 For a strategy to be effective in promoting learning or improved performance it must be combined with other strategies either simultaneously or in sequence, thus forming *strategy clusters*.

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Explanation:</i>				

5.6 Strategy clusters include and are *evaluated via a metacognitive strategy* or series of metacognitive strategies (which monitor and evaluate them).

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Explanation:</i>				

5.7 Metacognitive strategies subsume *affective strategies* as the latter require knowledge of oneself as a learner through recurrent monitoring of one's learning.

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Explanation:</i>				

5.8 *Social strategies* are clusters of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. (If students of an L2 seek out interaction with native speakers of that language in order to improve their learning, perhaps overcoming fear and shyness, they are not, in effect, doing anything other than deciding on a plan of action based on a cluster of strategies.)

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Explanation:</i>				

6. Please give your reaction to the following statements:

6.1 What we have been referring to as **strategies** may actually be **skills**, or at least a combination of strategies interacting with one another. So, “summarizing a text” or “looking a word up in a dictionary” is not a strategy but a skill, operationalized through either a sequence of or a cluster of strategies.

Your reaction:

6.2 It may be beneficial to do fine-tuned strategy training such as noting how combinations of strategies work in consort (e.g., strategies for looking up a word in a dictionary).

Your reaction:

6.3 When conducting learner training, be aware that focusing on a given strategy may inhibit the learner’s use of another strategy, to the detriment of a positive outcome.

Your reaction:

6.4 While strategies may be initially suggested and modeled by a teacher, their selection and implementation is self-initiated by learners.

Your reaction:

6.5 While various metacognitive components of strategies are realized intentionally (e.g., selective attention, analysis of the situation, decision making, monitoring and evaluation of the strategic plan), the process of actually executing the strategy becomes quicker and more automatic so that the learner has no conscious control over it.

Your reaction:

6.6 The strategies a learner uses and the effectiveness of these strategies very much depend on the learner him/herself (e.g., age, gender, language aptitude, intelligence, cognitive and learning style preferences, self-concept/

image, personality, attitudes, motivation, prior knowledge), the learning task at hand (e.g., type, complexity, difficulty, and generality), and the learning environment (e.g., the learning culture, the richness of input and output opportunities). We must view strategies within this larger framework to properly interpret their role in the language learning process.

Your reaction:

6.7 Strategies aimed at learning or using language also involve data management issues such as storage of the material (which involve memory) and retrieval of it.

Your reaction:

7. Describing strategies prototypically rather than categorically

Let us assume you consider the features of language strategies in terms of how close to the prototypical core they are. Below you will find a set of characteristics in a continuum, which are meant to assist you in this effort of determining how strategy-like a given manifestation of a strategy actually is.

7.1 Please indicate in each box just how well you think that dimension might work for you in this task of determining the prototypicality of strategies.

<i>More strategy-like</i>	<i>Less strategy-like</i>
Purposeful, goal-directed <i>How well it might work:</i>	No clear goal <i>How well it might work:</i>
Planned <i>How well it might work:</i>	Unplanned <i>How well it might work:</i>
Self-initiated <i>How well it might work:</i>	Initiated by another source <i>How well it might work:</i>

More deliberate <i>How well it might work:</i>	More automatic <i>How well it might work:</i>
As the focus of attention <i>How well it might work:</i>	With attention elsewhere <i>How well it might work:</i>
Monitored <i>How well it might work:</i>	Unmonitored <i>How well it might work:</i>
Evaluated <i>How well it might work:</i>	Unevaluated <i>How well it might work:</i>
As a sequence of actions <i>How well it might work:</i>	As a single action <i>How well it might work:</i>
Visible to an observer <i>How well it might work:</i>	Invisible to an observer <i>How well it might work:</i>

7.2 What dimensions would you leave as is? Which would you change and if so, how?

Your response:

8. What are learner strategies for?

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following five views.

For each statement, please type Y in the box below the statement that corresponds to your level of agreement and explain your view in the space provided.

In essence, learner strategies are:

8.1 aimed at enhancing learning

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Explanation:</i>				

8.2 for performing specified tasks

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Explanation:</i>				

8.3 for solving specific problems

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Explanation:</i>				

8.4 for compensating for a deficit in learning

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Explanation:</i>				

8.5 for making learning easier, faster, more enjoyable

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Explanation:</i>				

9. What are your reactions to the following two statements?

9.1 "Without the use of learner strategies at all, it is impossible for someone to learn a language."

<i>Your reaction:</i>

9.2 "It is possible for someone to learn a language without the use of learner strategies, but it is more difficult that way."

Your reaction:

10. With regard to learner training:

10.1 To what extent would you introduce and model strategies in response to specific incidents as they crop up as opposed to introducing them systematically according to a plan?

Your response:

10.2 How do we situate strategy training within culture? For example, assume that you are training students who are learning the Spanish they will use in a variety of different Latin American cultures.

Your response:

10.3 Assuming learners differ in their awareness of strategies, how might you make sure to reach all learners? If there were, for example, a learner self-access website for strategy awareness raising, what materials/activities/screening devices/tasks would we want to have there to be sure to reach every learner irrespective of age, gender, language proficiency, motivation, language aptitude, short- and long-term goals, and cultural background?

Your response:

11. With regard to research methods dealing with learner strategies:

11.1 Do you/would you use verbal report in your research and if so how? For example, how explicitly do you/would you train your respondents? How intrusive are you/would you be in the data-collection process?

Your response:

11.2 How might you establish a tangible link between the use of a strategy or strategy sequence or strategy cluster and a particular learning outcome?

Your response:

11.3 What are some cost-effective means for follow up to determine the long-term benefits of learner training?

Your response:

Notes

- 1 Portions of this chapter have been drawn from two other sources, my chapter in Cohen and Macaro's volume (Cohen 2007) and my chapter in the second volume of Hinkel's research handbook (Cohen 2011) – with extensive revision and integration of that material.
- 2 The second outcome of the meeting was the commitment from most of the participants to engage in a joint book effort which resulted in Cohen and Macaro (2007).
- 3 www.carla.umn.edu/strategies/sp_grammar/index.html (accessed May 7, 2010).
- 4 For a video description of this strategy, go to: www.carla.umn.edu/strategies/sp_grammar/strategies/form/moods/subjunctive/weird.html (accessed July 28, 2010).
- 5 For a video description of this strategy, go to: www.carla.umn.edu/strategies/sp_grammar/strategies/form/moods/subjunctive/formsubjunctive.html (accessed July 28, 2010).
- 6 www.tc.umn.edu/~adcohen/documents/2002-Cohen-Oxford-Chi_Language_Strategy_Use_Survey.pdf (accessed March 17, 2010). There is also a *Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey* (Cohen and Oxford 2002) available at www.tc.umn.edu/~adcohen/documents/2002-Cohen_and_Oxford_-_Young_Learners_Lg_Strat_Use_Survey.pdf.
- 7 A meaningful linguistic unit consisting of a word, such as "girl," or a word element, such as *-ed* in *walked* or *-ish* in "girlish," that cannot be divided into smaller meaningful parts.
- 8 www.carla.umn.edu/maxsa/documents/LearningStyleSurvey_MAXSA_IG.pdf (accessed May 11, 2010).
- 9 www.tc.umn.edu/~adcohen/documents/2002-Cohen_and_Dornyei_-_Taking_Motivational_Temp_Lg_Task.pdf (accessed May 7, 2010).