

Chapter 92

Facebook Discussion to Enhance English Learners' Metacognitive Strategies

Pei-Ling Yang

Oriental Institute of Technology, Taiwan

ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate the effect of Facebook discussion on EFL learners' metacognitive strategy application. Various language learning strategies suggested in many studies have a positive and significant influence on learners' academic accomplishment. However, there is little research on how to promote the learners' learning strategy applications through the assistance of social networking. Social networking has been drawing huge attention in different research fields. Especially in higher education, it has been applied to promote learning, interaction, and engagement. Thus, in this study, 83 EFL college learners are recruited to participate in the Facebook discussion for the purpose of examining whether learning contexts would have an influence on learners' strategy applications, especially the metacognitive strategies. After a semester's study, the participants in the Facebook discussion group reported to apply more metacognitive strategies and most of them have positive attitudes towards the Facebook-assisted discussion.

INTRODUCTION

Learning a second or foreign language has been one of the school requirements in many countries. To be a good language learner does not just refer to being good at tests but most importantly, how to learn a target language effectively and efficiently should be taken as a priority. Particularly in a Chinese society, test scores are highly valued while the significance of language in use tends to be easily ignored in formal curricula. From many researchers' views, good language learners are highly associated with high strategy users (Bremner, 1999; Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Gass & Selinker, 2001; Green & Oxford, 1995; Liu, 2006; Nguyen, 2010; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Nyikos, 1991; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Vann & Abraham, 1990). Language learners can take learning strategies to help enhance their learn-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7663-1.ch092

ing. In language learning, strategies are crucial because of their particular characteristics in assisting learning, such as developing self-directed involvement and communicative competence. "Appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence" as claimed by Oxford (1990, p.1). Learning strategies, from the view of educational psychology, refer to "thoughts, emotions, and behaviours that facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and skills, or the reorganisation of one's knowledge base" (Weinstein & Meyer, 1994, p.335). One of the fundamental features of language learning strategies is their focus on communicative competence (Oxford, 1990) as illustrated in Table 1. It takes meaningful and contextualized language to develop communicative competence. Language strategies provide learners with opportunities to participate actively in authentic communication, which also encourages the development of communicative competence (Oxford, 1990).

Language learning strategies are claimed to have direct and positive influence on learner performance; many studies show that learners with fewer learning strategy applications are outperformed than those with more ones (Bremner, 1999; Green & Oxford, 1995; Yilmaz, 2010). Language learning strategies are commonly defined as operations used by learners in the way to assist in acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information (Rigney, 1978). The above definition, however, does not deliver the inspiring purposes of applying learning strategies to learning. Oxford (1990, p.8), therefore, expands the definition to "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations." Learning strategies are defined by Cohen (1990, p.5) as "learning processes which are consciously selected by the learner." In other words, learning strategies are not naturally acquired by learners but they are skills they learn and use for the purpose of enhancing their learning performance (Cohen, 1998). Therefore, learning strategies could be learned (Oxford, 1990) and then be of assistance in mastering a target language (Dornyei & Skehan, 2003). Language learning strategies, according to Oxford (1990), can be classified into two categories: direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies include memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies while indirect refer to metacognitive, affective, and social strategies (Figure 1).

Table 1. Features of language learning strategies

Features of Language Learning Strategies
contribute to the main goal, communicative competence.
allow learners to become more self-directed.
expand the role of teachers.
are problem-oriented.
are specific actions taken by the learner.
involve many aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive.
support learning both directly and indirectly.
are not always observable.
are often conscious.
can be taught.
are flexible.
are influenced by a variety of factors.

(Adapted from Oxford, 1990, p.9)

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