Language Learning Strategies in Teaching Foreign Languages in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)

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Abstract: Foreign languages become a real need for the people to communicate. In the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) teachers of foreign languages look for innovative types of teaching based on the recent achievements of science in order to provide high quality of education. On the achievements of psycholinguistic, cognitive science, methodology and pedagogical approaches our attention is aimed to the language learning strategies that help to learn and teach foreign languages.

Key words: Language learning strategies · Foreign language · Learning and teaching process

INTRODUCTION

Society in which we live is constantly changing and new demands are offered for members of this society. In the transition from an industrial to an information society, the ability to acquire knowledge and skills that are owned by people, depending on the conditions in which it is to adapt to new situations, becomes more valuable. Such qualities as self-reliance, initiative, responsibility for their own performance and ability to self-learning become necessary [1]. Thereby, foreign languages become a real need for the people to communicate. Any language plays a great role in human activity and as a result it can be viewed from many angles. Nowadays new styles and types of learning and teaching are required. Instructional strategies - these are the steps that make students to improve their own learning. Strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active self-learning, which is so necessary for the development of communicative competence. Appropriate language learning strategies have a significant impact on the development of speech skills [2]. Different ways and strategies of fast and efficient information processing are offered for students in both implicit and explicit forms, from which they select the most suitable for their training style [3]. Choosing a strategy the students specifically involve their cognitive processes: perception, memory, performance, thinking,

organizing their activities. Modern methods suppose a large number of strategies used in the process of teaching and learning a foreign language and with some degree of certainty we can state that these processes can be seriously alleviated, if not just a teacher, but students will know these strategies and they will be able to choose best for them and use it while working in a group and for their independent work [4].

In the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) teachers of foreign languages seek for innovative types of teaching based on the recent achievements of science in order to provide high quality of education. As it is mentioned by Ana Gimeno "the professional world and labour market require students to possess a good command not only of technical content and knowledge but also of personal and professional skills" [5, p. 3170].

Russian scientists as A.A.Leontiev, A.N.Leontiev, P.Y.Galperin, L.S.Vygotsky, I.A.Zimnaya, N.V.Imedadze, E.Y.Protasova, S.L.Rubinshtein, held a lot of researchers in the field of cognitive science, phsychology and education. Teachers, researchers and scientists use and approve various methodological and pedagogical concepts as Brain-based Language Learning, Communicative teaching and active learning methodologies, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). Brain-based Language Learning is developed from the achievements in using new technologies in Cognitive

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Science, Biology and Physiology. For example, Brent De Chene from Waseda University (Japan) focuses his research on the linguistic ability of the individual and gives hypothesis that the ability has a biological basis. He looks first at the acquisition of language by children, considering both the gap between the input and the output of acquisition and the automatic but age-limited nature of the process. Brent De Chene underlines that one of the main lines of argument pointing to the conclusion that there must be a genetic or biological basis for human linguistic capabilities is that the linguistic ability and knowledge of individual far surpass what explicable on the basis of the data it is exposed to in childhood and that forms the basis for language acquisition [6, p. 6].

Kee-Ho Kim from Korea University, connects foreign language learning with the work of brain. He informs that "modern technologies such as fMRI and PET are providing new insights into the functioning of the brain...fMRI images are now showing that the notion of a clear dichotomy between the roles of the hemispheres is an oversimplification. The corpus callosum, the nerve fibers connecting the hemispheres, allows each side of the brain to exchange data relatively freely. As a result, even though the left and right hemispheres may be respectively associated with math and music, it is now known that while beginners at math use the left brain more, high level mathematicians and chess champions actually use more of the right brain" [7, p. 24].

In the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) there are investigations on ethnolinguistic mentality of the Northern peoples. Scientists have held researches of associations of the Northern peoples and compare with other peoples' associations. So their results are taken into consideration for teaching and learning foreign languages. Brain-based Language Learning concept is not so spread in the Republic, but some attempts are made for its existence.

Communicative teaching and active learning methodologies are widely used in the Sakha republic (Yakutia). Communicative teaching and active learning methodologies is fully regarded by Ana Gimeno and et. They underline that "active learner roles can only be attained through active teaching and learning that imply a radical shift away from traditional learning attitudes where the teacher or instructor played the main role in the process and the student was regarded as a mere receiver of static knowledge. A collection of diverse teaching and learning methods and philosophies advocate a more active role of the language learner, some of which are included in the following list:

- Communicative Language Teaching: language is ideally (or even only) taught and learnt through the continuous and active use and communicative interaction, rather than by formal instruction, since the latter would only lead to a situation of language as usage, as opposed to language as use.
- Learning by doing: it involves a type of learning which is basically experiential, whereby learners, instead of facing theoretical knowledge, follow a more practical approach and carry out specific and authentic tasks and projects that help them acquire certain skills.
- Collaborative and cooperative learning: collaboration is a type of interaction among learners in order to achieve a common goal or deal with a common task or problem.
- Cultural exchange: language is culture, so when learning a language, learners should be, by some means, encouraged to get in contact with the corresponding L2 language" [5, p. 3172].

Scientists and teachers in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) are interested in Content and Language Integrated Learning. As it is mentioned by Ana Gimeno, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) "refers to situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language" (Marsh 1994). According to this research, as it said by Ana Gimeno, CLIL has also a very strong motivational component, since learners feel they can successfully do things – and acquire real content knowledge – with language (Marsh 2000). In fact, with CLIL, students are playing an active role and taking part in two totally different learning tasks, with different goals, content and methods: learning a language and a different subject simultaneously. In this respect, it has a lot in common with the learning of a Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), where students learn a target language in the context of a specific subject matter, rather than through the first-hand acquisition of that subject matter (content knowledge). Therefore, CLIL could be seen as a step ahead of traditional LSP, since it activates both professional and personal skills, which are traditionally dealt with separately [5, p. 3172].

As for the researchers of Yakutia this theory is understood as teaching and learning a foreign language through content. Educators and scientists of Yakutia are sure that the information which is included into the content of texts or conversations are important for

learners. They teach a foreign language and at the same time they learn about their subject. Such position helps to develop language learning strategies which have crucial values for a foreign language learners because nowadays we speak about communicative competence. Russian school of psycholinguistics view the language in two angles: the inner, conceptual language and the outer, formal language, which is used in communication [8, p. 30]. The results of psycholinguists gave an impact for changed language research way of thinking about language learning strategies, conceptions about the teaching – learning process changed in many ways due to the switch from behavior learning theories to cognitive learning theories.

Recent investigations of Masoud Gholamali Lavasani and Fereshteh Faryadres show that foreign language learners use less language learning strategies than second language learners. They are completely right when they say that "second or foreign language learning are one of the most important education matters in most of school in throughout the world. There has been a prominent shift within the field of language education over the last twenty years with greater emphasis being put on learners and learning rather than on teachers and teaching" [9, p. 191]. These scientists highlight that "extensive investigation has shown the importance of language learning strategies in making language learning more efficient and in producing a positive effect on learners language use. Foreign or second language (LS) learning strategies are specific actions, behaviors, steps or techniques students use often consciously to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing and using the L2 (Oxford, 1994). Research indicates that language learners at all level use strategies but that some or most learners are not fully aware of the strategies they use or the strategies that might be most beneficial to employ." [9, pp: 191-192].

As it is noticed by Masoud Gholamali Lavasani and Fereshteh Faryadres "Language learning strategies have been classified by many scholars (Rubin 1987, O'Malley and Chamot 1990 and Oxford 1990). According to Rubin, there are three types of Strategies used by learners that contribute directly or indirectly to language learning (Hismanoglu, 2009). According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), teaching strategies can be classified into three generic categories: metcognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social /affective strategies (Chang, 2009)" [9, p. 192].

In the article of Lavasani and Faryadres there is Oxford's (1990) classification of language learning strategies. According to Oxford's (1990) definition,

Language learning strategies which directly involve the target language are called direct strategies. These strategies include memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. All of these direct strategies involve mental processing of language. [10, p. 151].

According to Oxford (1990), direct strategies are memory, cognitive and compensation strategies:

• Memory strategies are employed for storing and retrieving new information. The principle of memory strategies is meaning. All the steps that the learner adopts relating to memory strategies have to be personally meaningful to the learner in order to make the strategies work. An example of memory strategy is "I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them" [10, p. 294]. Under this category, there are for subsets of strategies: creating mental linkages, applying images and sound, reviewing well and employing action.

• Cognitive strategies have a unified common function: manipulating or transforming the target language. There are various approaches under this category, however, the common function is manipulating or transforming the target language by the learner. An example of cognitive strategies is "I try to talk like native English speakers" [10, p. 295]. There are four subsets of cognitive strategies: practicing, receiving and sending message, analyzing and reasoning and creating structure for input and output.

• Compensation strategies are used to help learners use the new language for comprehension and production regardless of the limited knowledge learners have with the new language. Making up for an inadequate repertoire of grammar and especially vocabulary, is the purpose of compensation strategies. An example of compensation strategy is "to understand unfamiliar English word, I make guesses" (Oxford, 1990: 295). Guessing intelligently in listening and reading and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing are the two subsets of compensation strategies.

The Oxford (1990) views indirect strategies are metacognitive, affective, social strategies.

• Metacognitive strategies are "actions which go beyond purely cognitive devices and which provides a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process" [10, p. 137]. An example of metacognitive strategies is "I pay attention when someone is

speaking English". There are three subsets of strategies within metacognitive strategies: accumulating learning, arranging and planning ones learning and evaluating learning.

- Affective strategies refer to learners emotional, attitudes, motivation and values. Suggested that through affective strategies language learners can gain control over the above factors. An example of an affective strategy is "I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making mistake" [10, p. 296]. The subsets include lowering ones anxiety, encourage oneself and taking ones emotional temperature.
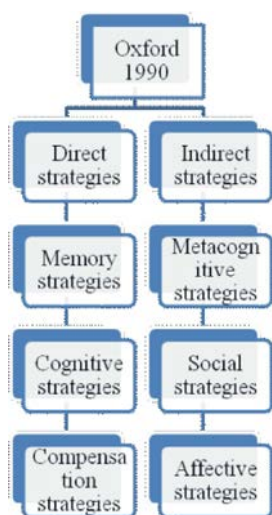
Pic. 1: Oxford's (1990) classification of language learning strategies

- Social strategies refer to learner's communication with people who use the target language. An example of a social strategy is "I try to learn about the cultures of English speakers" [10, p. 296]. There are there subsets of social strategies: asking question, cooperating with others and empathizing with others and each subset consists of two specific strategies.

According to our research in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) foreign language learners mainly use memory, cognitive, social and compensation strategies. Metacognitive and affective strategies are used less frequently by learners. But foreign language teachers use all strategies in teaching but by intuition. So this work should be continued. According to our questionnaire more language learners at schools use direct strategies then indirect. They try to memorize words and word combinations, create mental linkages, apply images and

sound, review and use English in reading, writing, listening and speaking. This strategy is widely use at kindergarten and school level.

Schoolchildren in Yakutia feel some difficulties in practice, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning and creating structure for input and output when they learn a foreign language. But some of them are quite good at cognitive strategies because of bilingual nature of their existence.

Compensation strategies are helpful for foreign language learners of Yakutia and most of schoolchildren use them without hesitation. They often use gestures, body language and sounds. Intelligently guessing in listening and reading and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing are the main methods in teaching foreign languages as well as affective strategies.

But learners are not very good at encouraging oneself and very shy from their nature. So while teachers use affective strategies in teaching, learners are not so enthusiastic in this strategy. Social strategies are used by both teachers and learners. For teachers these strategies are very helpful for creating dialogues, conversations, situations, solving problems etc. But for learners there are some difficulties for asking question, cooperating with others and empathizing with others.

In conclusion, teachers' activities are aimed to accumulate learning process in such a way that helps to give a focus to the learner to practise certain language activities or skills which is one of subsets of metacognitive strategies. Learners now try to arrange and plan their learning. They organize it so they may get maximum benefit from their energy and efforts. The most difficult thing is evaluation learning which helps learners with problems like monitoring errors and evaluation of progress.

The problem of developing language learning strategies in teaching foreign languages is only at the beginning of our research and we are planning to continue it.

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