

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, meta-cognitive, 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 (IPOLLS). 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 IPOLLS 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 IPOLLS 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; Poullisse 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 L_1 . Nonetheless, some students may feel the need to use translation from their L_1 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