

LEARNING STRATEGIES

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Learning a foreign language is different from learning one's mother tongue. We know from our own experience that there is no magic formula for a successful language acquisition. What is required for such success is a persistent use of the whole amount of strategies for learning the language and its vocabulary. Learning involves a certain degree of investment of learners' time and effort. Learners should realise that they learn for themselves and therefore should face the learning process consciously and actively. Every language skill and vocabulary as well is acquired through constant observing, focusing, practising, revising, interacting, and experimenting.

Learners may differ in the way they are able to use learning strategies effectively. The task of the teacher is to find out which strategy suits best to individual learners and consequently adapt his/her teaching to learners' needs. Learning strategies can be divided according to various criteria. They can be divided into two groups – **direct (memory, cognitive and compensation)** and **indirect strategies**, which are further subdivided into more categories. We are going to look at the strategies from the point of view of learning vocabulary, and therefore we are not going to deal with all of them.

From the direct strategies (memory, cognitive and compensation) the most important for learning the lexis are memory and compensation strategies. Memory strategies (mnemonics) mean remembering effectively and involve meaning. It does not signify that learners have to memorise the words through English–Moldovan equivalents. There are other possible activities such as:

- **arranging things in order**, e.g. adverbs of frequency: *always, never, often, sometimes, usually*;
- **making associations**, e.g. *bread and butter*;
- **learning the whole lexical units**, e.g. *to be afraid of, to be keen on*;
- **mastering collocations**, e.g. *heavy smoker, great opportunity*;
- **finding pairs**, e.g. masculine – feminine: *cock – hen, deer – doe*;
- **labelling pictures**;

– **creating visual images of words.**

Vocabulary learners can benefit from the following **memory strategies** [2, p. 78]:

1. Creating mental associations such as:

– **Grouping** that means putting words into groups on the basis of different criteria, such as: type of word (e.g. adverbs ending in –ly: *freely*, adjectives ending in –ful: *beautiful*); theme (e.g. words about music: *voices, orchestras, instruments*); practical function (e.g. terms for objects being in the kitchen: *fridge, knife, stove*); linguistic function when students acquire the functional meaning, not the grammatical features (e.g. apology: *be sorry, excuse me, regret, feel bad about*; suggestions: *Why don't we go to the theatre? Let's go to the cinema*); similarity of meaning (e.g. *cold, freezing, arctic*, etc.);

– **Associating/elaborating** that means learning not only isolated expressions, but acquiring them together with other words they go with, such as: (*to be interested in, to be good at, there is/ there are*, etc.);

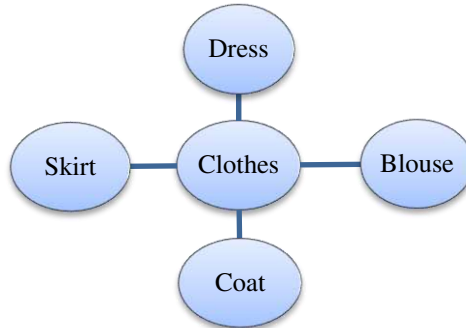
– **Placing new words into a context** that means students being asked to choose an appropriate word from a given box to fill in a gap in the text, (e.g. word *above* can be placed into the sentence: *There are stars me in the sky.*)

2. Applying images such as:

– **Using imagery**; The visual image can be an object, a picture, or a drawing on the blackboard, e.g. when we learn fruit or vegetable, it is easy to bring the fruit (or a picture of it) into the classroom. Visuals are justified because of students' visual intelligence [4, p. 15- 47].

– **Semantic mapping**; Through this strategy students develop certain scheme of the lexis. They learn vocabulary in topical boxes, therefore they will know in which situation they can use a particular word, or which topic it is connected with. The strategy develops well by the means of word maps, word spiders or mind maps [5, p. 45], for example:

3. Employing actions; It happens through physical response (e.g. *sit down, stand up, wave goodbye, or tasting salt, candy*). This strategy supports the kinaesthetic intelligence and may freely be used in the classroom, especially with young children. They can, for instance, move round the classroom, lift up some objects and give them the names (e.g. *school bag, pencil, dustbin, chalk*).



Compensation strategies enable learners to compensate for missing knowledge. It means that learners are able to create or comprehend a text despite limitations in the knowledge of a word or phrase. They either guess the meaning of a word when receiving information, or paraphrase it (change it in other words while producing the information they have got). There are two basic strategies:

1) Guessing intelligently in listening and reading. This strategy is widely used not only by beginners, but by more advanced speakers, too, and even by the native speakers (e.g. we can guess the meaning of the phrase *wet to the skin* from the sentence: *I became wet to the skin, when the rain suddenly came and I did not have my umbrella with me.*) We also have to guess when we have not heard something well enough during the conversation (e.g. *I spoke to Fiona about her yesterday evening. She said the was absolutely boring and the actors were awful.*) We can infer that Fiona was perhaps attending a performance in the theatre, or watching a film on TV. Guessing is important in vocabulary learning. Since we do not know all the vocabulary items of the target language, we often come across an unknown word. We still are able to comprehend the context; even we are capable of understanding the meaning of the word. And this is the way we get familiar with new words, which often become part of the passive stock of our vocabulary [3, p. 27-33].

2) Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing. We are able to express our ideas without complete knowledge of every single word. In that case, beginners often tend to switch to the mother tongue. However, we can use mime or gestures (for expressing

feelings, hesitations, excitement, etc.), ask other people for help, or use a synonym or circumlocution, (e.g. if we cannot remember the word *integral*, we can say something like: *You know, it just cannot come to my mind. It is the mathematical operation opposite to derivation, and its symbol is ∫*). To overcome the limitations in speaking is easier than in writing. During a conversation we interact with our listeners and certain speech fillers are allowed. It is not so easy in the written style. We usually have to write precisely, so we often use synonyms and antonyms to cover the limitations. The practice of both skills gives us the opportunity to work with the language, and to realise that we are able to express ourselves even if a particular word cannot come to our mind.

The **indirect strategies** (meta-cognitive, affective and social) are important for the whole teaching/ learning process. Although they are not specially needed for the vocabulary acquisition, without them the class atmosphere and learners' mental processes would not be suitable for effective learning. They serve as a supportive background for the use of direct strategies. We are only going to mention the social strategies, since they find their application while teaching/learning the lexis [1, p. 39]. **Social strategies** function on the base of interaction with other people. This is done through communication. Our language has to be cultivated continually and then the communication will serve not only for exchanging information, but also for learning something new. In the classroom, social strategies can be developed mainly through teamwork, either pair- or group-work. Through cooperation with others, students will learn how to behave, how to express their thoughts and feelings, how to ask for something and how to respond. These social skills can easily be trained also through a role-play, acting drama, or participating in dialogues and discussions.

In conclusion, we would like to underline that strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence.

Appropriate language learning strategies result in improving proficiency and greater self-confidence. Therefore, we should not forget the different kinds of strategies. They will certainly find their application while vocabulary teaching/learning.

With learning strategies learners become more autonomous. Students may control their own learning processes, which by the means of learning strategies become easier, faster and more transferable. They may increase students' perception that they are able to complete a task successfully. In addition, good language learners are supposed to be creative, and they use strategies to help them in comprehension, and thinking in the language.

References:

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