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Consider the very different behaviors or strategies that individual students use to learn a new language. Shy, introverted, analytically-oriented Marianne learns Spanish through grammar drills and sentence analysis. Uncomfortable with spontaneous speech in Spanish, she rehearses as much as she can in private. In contrast, sociable,

extroverted, globally-oriented Jose from Mexico avoids grammar drills but seeks out social conversation in English, his new language; he is content to get the general meaning without knowing every word.

When intuitive Bill studies Russian, he constantly tries to build a mental model or big picture of the language. He avoids step-by-step language learning. Noriko, attuned more to the senses (movement, sound, sight, and touch) than to intuition, looks for English texts that proceed one step at a time. She uses flashcards, and with her classmates, she initiates "total physical response" exercises that involve all the senses.

Serious Sarah outlines every French lesson, plans her study sessions, does all the exercises in her textbook religiously, and is not happy unless she is on time or ahead of schedule. Playful Michael tells jokes in German and has fun with the language, but has trouble organizing his work, coming to closure, and submitting his assignments on time.

These learners are using different kinds of language learning strategies, or specific actions and behaviors to help them learn. Their strategies differ greatly, at least in part because their general learning styles (overall approaches to learning and the environment) are so varied. Recent research (Ehrman & Oxford, 1988, 1989; Oxford & Ehrman, 1988) suggests that learning style has a significant influence on students' choice of learning strategies, and that both styles and strategies affect learning outcomes.

This Digest briefly summarizes existing research on learning styles and strategies in foreign and second language learning. Readers are urged to go further by consulting the references provided at the end of the Digest.

WHAT IS MEANT BY LEARNING STYLE?

The term learning style is used to encompass four aspects of the person: cognitive style, i.e., preferred or habitual patterns of mental functioning; patterns of attitudes and interests that affect what an individual will pay most attention to in a learning situation; a tendency to seek situations compatible with one's own learning patterns; and a tendency to use certain learning strategies and avoid others (Lawrence, 1984). Learning style is inherent and pervasive (Willing, 1988) and is a blend of cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements (Oxford & Ehrman, 1988). At least twenty dimensions of learning style have been identified (Parry, 1984; Shipman & Shipman, 1985).
"Field independence vs. dependence." One of the most widely researched dimensions of learning style is field independence vs. dependence. Field independent learners easily separate key details from a complex or confusing background, while their field dependent peers have trouble doing this. Field independent learners show significant advantages over field dependent learners in analytical tasks (Hansen & Stansfield, 1981; Chapelle & Roberts, 1986).

"Analytic vs. global processing" seems to be closely allied with field independence vs. dependence, and indeed may be a more fundamental and more explanatory dimension of learning style. However, little foreign or second language learning research exists concerning the analytic-global dimension except in the context of brain hemisphericity. The left hemisphere of the brain deals with language through analysis and abstraction, while the right hemisphere recognizes language as more global auditory or visual patterns (Willing, 1988). Leaver (1986) speculates that right-brain learners--those who prefer the kinds of processing done by the right side of the brain--are more facile at learning intonation and rhythms of the target language, whereas left-brain learners deal more easily with analytic aspects of target language grammar.

"Cooperation vs. competition" has been only lightly studied as a dimension of style in the language learning field. Reid (1987) found that in the language classroom, learners rarely report using cooperative behaviors (behaviors that one would infer to reflect a cooperative style); however, this finding might well be related to instructional methodologies that often preclude cooperation and foster competition. In studies where students were taught specifically to be cooperative, results revealed vast improvement in language skills as well as increased self-esteem, motivation, altruism, and positive attitudes toward others (Gunderson & Johnson, 1980; Sharan et al., 1985; Jacob & Mattson, 1987).

"Tolerance for ambiguity" is another style dimension of language learning. Learning a language can be a difficult and at times ambiguous endeavor, and students who can more readily tolerate ambiguity often show the best language learning performance (see Chapelle & Roberts; 1986, Naiman, Frohlich & Todesco, 1975).

The Myers-Briggs Type indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985) contributes four more dimensions to learning style: extraversion vs. introversion, sensing vs. intuition, thinking vs. feeling, and judging vs. perceiving (the last dimension referring to the immediateness of the need for closure). Several of these dimensions appear to significantly influence how students choose to learn languages, according to recent research (Ehrman & Oxford, 1988, 1989; Oxford & Ehrman, 1988).

Other important style aspects that may relate to language learning performance are leveling-sharpening of detail, reflectivity-impulsivity, and constricted-flexible thinking (Parry, 1984). Additional research needs to be conducted on all style dimensions in order for teachers to understand more about the basic stylistic preferences of their students.

WHAT ARE LEARNING STRATEGIES?

Language learning strategies are the often-conscious steps or behaviors used by language learners to enhance the acquisition, storage, retention, recall, and use of new information (Rigney, 1978; Oxford, 1990). Strategies can be assessed in a variety of

ways, such as diaries, think-aloud procedures, observations, and surveys. Research both outside the language field (e.g., Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, & Campione, 1983) and investigations with language learners (see reviews by Skehan, 1989; Oxford 1989; Oxford & Crookall, 1989) frequently show that the most successful learners tend to use learning strategies that are appropriate to the material, to the task, and to their own goals, needs, and stage of learning. More proficient learners appear to use a wider range of strategies in a greater number of situations than do less proficient learners, but the relationship between strategy use and proficiency is complex. Research indicates that language learners at all levels use strategies (Chamot & Kupper, 1989), 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.

Many different strategies can be used by language learners: metacognitive techniques for organizing, focusing, and evaluating one's own learning; affective strategies for handling emotions or attitudes; social strategies for cooperating with others in the learning process; cognitive strategies for linking new information with existing schemata and for analyzing and classifying it; memory strategies for entering new information into memory storage and for retrieving it when needed; and compensation strategies (such as guessing or using gestures) to overcome deficiencies and gaps in one's current language knowledge (see Oxford, 1990).

Language learning strategy research has suffered from an overemphasis on metacognitive and cognitive strategies, which are admittedly very important, at the expense of other strategy types that are also very useful.

Some preliminary research suggests the existence of sex differences in strategy use (see review by Oxford, Nyikos, & Ehrman, 1988). Choice of language strategies also relates strongly to ethnicity, language learning purpose, the nature of the task, and other factors (see Politzer, 1983; Politzer & McGroarty, 1985; Oxford, 1989). As noted earlier, one of these related factors is, no doubt, learning style.

Important effects of training in the use of language learning strategies have been discovered by a number of researchers (see Atkinson, 1985; Bejarano, 1987; Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Cohen & Hosenfeld, 1981; Oxford, Crookall, Lavine, Cohen, Nyikos & Sutter, forthcoming). It is clear that students can be taught to use better strategies, and research suggests that better strategies improve language performance. Just how language learning strategies should be taught is open to question, but so far it has been confirmed that strategy training is generally more effective when woven into regular classroom activities than when presented as a separate strategy course.

Language learning styles and strategies appear to be among the most important variables influencing performance in a second language. Much more investigation is necessary to determine the precise role of styles and strategies, but even at this stage in our understanding we can state that teachers need to become more aware of both learning styles and learning strategies through appropriate teacher training. Teachers

can help their students by designing instruction that meets the needs of individuals with different stylistic preferences and by teaching students how to improve their learning strategies.

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