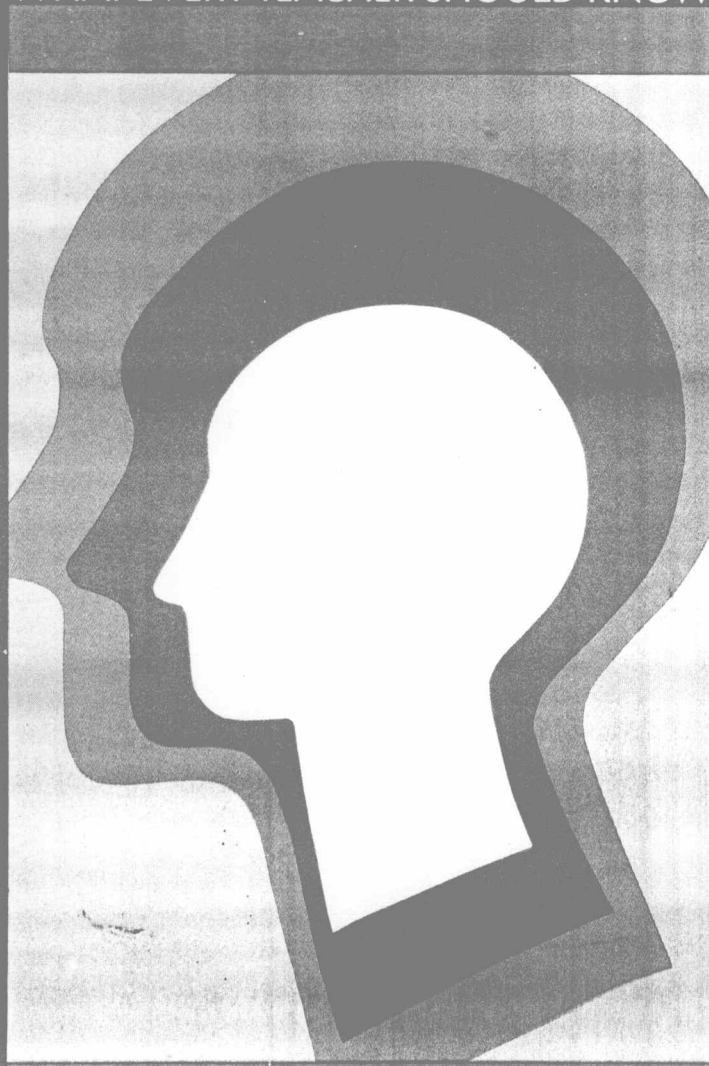


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REBECCA L. OXFORD

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

WHAT EVERY TEACHER SHOULD KNOW



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LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

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What Every Teacher Should Know

Rebecca L. Oxford

The University of Alabama



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This book is dedicated to my family—David, Merry Lou, George, Tom, Ellie, and Mac—my most loving supporters.

It is also dedicated to the memory of Charles Meister, my favorite and best teacher, by whom I was first challenged to learn.

Foreword

In recent years there has been a shift in focus from the teacher to the learner—from exclusive focus on the improvement of teaching to an increased concern for how learners go about their learning tasks in a second or foreign language. It has become clearer that much of the responsibility for success at language learning rests with individual learners and with their ability to take full advantage of opportunities to learn. This being the case, books which train language learners directly and those which are intended to train teachers to train learners, such as this volume by Rebecca Oxford, are now clearly in vogue.

The appearance of Oxford's book marks a turning point in the treatment of learner strategies in foreign and second language learning. For the first time since learners and their strategies have begun to receive prime attention, there appears on the market a solo-authored volume that combines a solid theoretical basis and an astute mastery of the research literature with an impressive array of practical suggestions to teachers concerning how to train their students to be more successful language learners. The book presents, among other things, a new strategy classification system, suggested means for assessing students' learning strategies, and a model for strategy training accompanied by numerous strategy training exercises. The concept of strategy training is brought to life by a chapter describing a number of actual strategy training projects.

As a further testimonial to the value of the book, the volume underwent field testing and was received quite favorably by teachers, teacher trainees, and language learners. It was found, for example, that incorporating strategy training exercises into regular classroom activities, and treating learning strategies as a means of enhancing progress that students were already making, was more beneficial than having the exercises constitute a separate entity, disconnected from ongoing classroom work. This book was found to heighten an awareness of how to learn in general, not just how to learn languages.

It is most fortunate that the field of foreign and second language learning has a researcher, teacher trainer, and learner trainer as dedicated as Rebecca Oxford, and her book should serve the field well for many years to come.

Andrew D. Cohen
Jerusalem

Preface

*A more practiced eye,
A more receptive ear,
A more fluent tongue,
A more involved heart,
A more responsive mind.*

These are the characteristics we want to stimulate in students to enable them to become more proficient language learners. This book helps teachers encourage such qualities by means of *language learning strategies*, actions taken by second and foreign language learners to control and improve their own learning. *Learning strategies are keys to greater autonomy and more meaningful learning.* Although learning strategies are used by students themselves, teachers play an important role in helping students develop and use strategies in more effective ways.

A PERSONAL TALE

Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know is the result of years of struggling with issues of language learning and teaching. In my own school and university experience, most of the foreign language instruction was in the grammar-translation mode, consisting of memorized word lists, recited passages, verbatim translations scribbled in book margins, and no real interaction in the language. It was a painful shock to discover that most of my language teachers did not view communication as a priority, and the few who did care about communication knew little or nothing about how to help their students learn to communicate. Therefore, I spent many years making straight A's in my language courses but secretly feeling like a communicational failure.

Totally discouraged with language instruction as I experienced it, I began to take events into my own hands. Against what seemed to be insurmountable institutional odds, I started assuming some personal re-

sponsibility for my own language learning. I invented my own private strategies for learning new languages, techniques including making mental linkages, grouping and comparing words, and using pictures and colors. Eventually it dawned on me that new languages could be learned more readily through foreign travel, living abroad, and correspondence with foreign friends, and with great personal effort I began to use those techniques, too. Little did I know that these and other strategies had been potentially accessible the whole time, but that the instructional establishment had simply not understood the need to encourage learners to use such strategies.

By the time I became a language teacher, audiolingualism had arisen as a challenge to grammar-translation, and they both shared the stage as the primary language instructional methodologies. The language teaching profession was still not ready for much real communication. Nevertheless, I ventured to bring some homemade communicative instructional activities into the classroom. I also shared a few treasured learning strategies with my students, though I had no name for them; language learning strategies had not yet been "discovered."

Much has changed since that time. Communication at last seems to be a priority in many language classrooms. Communicative language instruction and its measurement-focused twin, proficiency-oriented instruction, have taken hold. Language learning strategies, based on the idea of learner self-direction, are beginning to command attention around the world. Now teachers require a practical and simple guidebook to help them in two ways: to understand learning strategies, and to train students in using better strategies in the context of a communicative approach to language learning. Born of my own grappling with language instruction, this book is intended to meet teachers' need for such a guidebook.

WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM THIS BOOK

This book is mainly for teachers of second or foreign languages at secondary, university, and adult levels, but language teachers in elementary schools are sure to find many useful ideas here as well. It will be especially useful for teachers seeking ways to help students become more active, self-directed, and effective learners. This book need not be used only by teachers in traditional academic settings; language trainers in international business settings, government agencies, and military institutions will also find it valuable. *Language Learning Strategies* can be used as a text for experienced teachers enrolled in advanced degree programs or in-service training workshops on learning strategies, communicative language instruction, proficiency-oriented instruction, or active learning of

any kind. In addition, the book will be helpful as a course text for individuals who are training to become language teachers.

Because many learning strategies useful for languages are also applicable to other subject areas, teachers outside the language field may find a wealth of practical ideas within these covers. In this book, researchers are likely to uncover new areas of investigation, and language students may obtain useful strategy suggestions.

WHAT THIS BOOK OFFERS

Because the field of language learning strategies is so new, few books currently exist on the topic. This book is unlike other existing resources in that it

- Contains a clear, eight-step model for strategy training and a large number of ready-to-use-or-adapt strategy training exercises covering all four language skills.
- Presents useful surveys for assessing students' learning strategies with clear directions for administration and use, along with student profile sheets.
- Contains a new strategy system covering six main types of strategies in a coherent and consistent way, with visual and verbal cues throughout the book to help readers remember the system.
- Offers a networking chapter with real-life illustrations of learning strategies in action around the world.
- Is based on the latest language learning strategy research, which is interwoven in a practical, useful fashion throughout the text with detailed references in the chapter notes.
- Provides concrete examples of language learning strategies using different languages, such as English, French, German, Spanish, Russian, Italian, and Japanese, and different learning tasks and situations.
- Has been thoroughly field-tested with teachers in a variety of language learning settings.
- Makes extensive use of pictures and diagrams to highlight important material and spark interest.

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I am deeply grateful to the five people who led the field test: H. Douglas Brown of San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California; W. Flint Smith and Joseph Wipf of Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana; Roberta Z. Lavine of the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland; and Will Sutter of the Danish Refugee Council and the North Jutland Department of Adult Education, Aalborg, Denmark. Their comments were invaluable to me in making the final revisions, and their conclusions will be helpful to many readers. Flint was particularly adept and generous in helping me make key editorial decisions. Equally important was the support of my esteemed colleague and friend from the School of Education of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Andrew D. Cohen, whose constant letters gave me encouragement and excellent ideas.

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Finally, I am thankful to the more than one thousand language teachers who have attended my strategy workshops or have written or called to

ask for information about strategies. Your enthusiasm underscores the value of language-learning strategies. This book is chiefly directed to you and your teaching colleagues around the world. My challenge to all language teachers is to help students use better learning strategies, so that their eyes will be more practiced, their ears more receptive, their tongues more fluent, their hearts more involved, and their minds more responsive.

Rebecca L. Oxford
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

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