13 Using language learning strategies to transform teaching and learning experiences in mainstream classrooms

Mario Moya

Major questions addressed in this chapter are:

- What is the role of home languages (L1) in the development of communicative competence in English (L2)?
- How can transferable language learning strategies (LLS) be used in the classroom to learn English in the context of the National Curriculum?
- Can strategy-based approaches be used to develop learners' autonomy for greater engagement and development of new skills in L2?
- What are the major issues around the pedagogical value of translanguaging and the 'Third Space'?

Abstract

This chapter discusses the way in which learners' ability to understand and convey information can be enhanced if both teachers and learners use their existing linguistic repertoires by tapping into transferable skills to make teaching and learning more creative and relevant. The complex heterogeneity that characterizes mainstream classrooms in the United Kingdom requires novel teaching and learning approaches to bring the curriculum to life at a time defined by many uncertainties. Within this intricate context, which is also characterized by a growing number of students who are competent in two or more languages, such heterogeneity has contributed to refreshing the agenda of languages in the country. At the same time, the role of early second language learning and multilingual literacy practices appears to be slowly resurrecting. In order to provide generalist teachers with the skills necessary to develop

their multilingual awareness and promote multilingual literacies, this chapter focuses on increasing subject knowledge and pedagogical competence in a relatively short time following the tradition of strategy-based instruction, but within a social constructivist understanding of learning through collaboration.

Introduction

The constant influx of learners from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds other than English into the English education system has posed different challenges to schools and teachers as they need to deploy a range of resources to support those students and help them succeed. For such multilingual learners there appears to be a linguistic tension produced by two distinct domains of use: while home languages[1] (henceforth L1) are mainly confined to the intimacy of the family group, English is exclusively employed at school and mainly for educational purposes. While learners' L1 have been increasingly encouraged in British schools over the years, some misunderstandings remain regarding their pedagogical value. This is because of a prevalent belief that mixing languages in school inevitably leads to linguistic hybridity, metaphorically described as the 'Third Space', that hampers the development of the learners' communicative competence in L2. Although such concerns are reasonable, they tend to overlook the fact that the emphasis on 'English-only' policies makes the domains of use (home vs. school) even more fragmented, potentially leading to L1 loss. Additionally, concerns about bringing L1 to the school ignore that multilingual learners have a variety of language learning strategies at their disposal that can be retrieved and transferred to L2, allowing these learners to access the National Curriculum, for example, through a combination of actions, such as code-switching or *translanguaging*.

The complex nature of diversity in the classroom can be challenging and problematic for teachers as they need to find effective ways to cater for the varied needs of their students, which is even more difficult if those learners are new to English. However, embracing diversity and using the learners' existing linguistic repertoires as a teaching resource can create purposeful learning communities, infusing the curriculum with novel and creative approaches where all students, regardless of their cultural and linguistic provenance, are equally acknowledged and are given opportunities to develop a growth mindset to thrive.

The role of learners' home languages in the development of communicative competence in English

The use of the learners' L1 when learning English has been the focus of an ongoing debate, resulting in a variety of pedagogical practices in primary and secondary schools. This is partly because of the influence of communicative approaches in the twentieth century discouraging L1 use (Pennycook, 1994) and because of the 'monolingualising nature of the National Curriculum' (Conteh, 2012, p. 39)

still prevalent in some schools. So, the proponents of an 'English-only' policy proclaim that learners need to be totally immersed in L2 to guarantee fluency and accuracy (Pacek, 2003) and to access the National Curriculum (DfE, 2011). Others, however, argue that it is impossible to separate the L1 from the learners' identity and cultural background (Auerbach, 1993; Norton, 2000; Ricento, 2005). One reconciling position considers that L1 have a potential to help learners acquire English without asking them to relinquish their linguistic capital. The emphasis on linguistic experience at the level of cognition makes it difficult for these learners to compartmentalize languages and, therefore, any attempts to suppress them for the purpose of school instruction imparted solely in English will invariably delay the learning process or result in utter failure (Martín Martín, 2000). This position argues that multilingual learners tend to link all the languages in their repertoires, the basis of the Linguistic Interdependence Theory (Butzkamm and Caldwell, 2009; Cummins, 2007), which proposes that the underlying proficiency learners have in their L1 allows them to master an additional language much easier and at a faster rate than monolingual learners. Swain and Lapkin (2013) suggest that the principled use of L1 is a legitimate instructional strategy 'to illustrate cross-linguistic comparisons or to provide the meaning of abstract vocabulary items' (p. 123). They also suggest that learners should be permitted 'to use their L1 during collaborative dialogue or private speech in order to mediate their understanding and generation of complex ideas (*languaging*) as they prepare to produce an end product (oral or written) in the target language' (ibid., pp. 122–3). This stage is described as the 'Third Space', discussed later.

Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

The idea that multilingual learners start their schooling in English with no knowledge of the language was long prevalent in many educational settings. Teachers adhering to this belief thought it was desirable, and even necessary, for these learners to spend time 'listening' to the new language before becoming engaged in classroom activities with other peers. During this phase, called 'the silent period', teachers assumed that 'children [were] absorbing the new language and building up their comprehension' (Clarke, 1999). During this period, teachers expected to see whether learners could follow basic spoken and written commands and instructions and produce prefabricated language chunks in English. However, evidence emerging at the beginning of the twenty-first century contradicted the belief that learners remain passive during the silent period (Harris, 2019). For example, Bligh (2014, p. 21) highlights the role of 'mother tongue thinking' as a means of making sense of the learners' new 'community of practice', and notes that learners are not silent, but they are actively making sense of the world internally through their L1, using a wide range of LLS.

LLS have been defined as 'activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own learning' (Griffiths, 2007, p. 2) or 'specific actions, behaving as former steps or techniques students employ to improve their progress in internalising, storing, retrieving, and using the L2' (Nyikos and Oxford,

Table 13.1 Strategy groups and their domains

Strategy type	Domains
Cognitive	Language manipulation involving reasoning, analysis, and practice
Memory	Retrieval of information stored in the long-term memory
Compensation	Inference processes to compensate for missing knowledge
Communication	Use of compensation techniques in spoken interactions
Metacognitive	Evaluation of one's learning facilitated by reflection and action planning
Affective	Control over emotions, attitudes and motivations
Social	Co-operation with others in the language learning process

Source: Adapted from Oxford (1990).

1993, p. 17). Rubin (1975), a pioneer in the field, used his observations to describe and contextualize LLS in relation to the behaviours of a prototypical good language learner. He concludes that those learners like to communicate with others (communication strategy) and are tolerant and outgoing with native speakers (empathetic strategy). They plan according to a personal learning style (planning strategy) and practise willingly (practice strategy). They have the technical know-how concerning language (formal strategy) and develop an increasingly separate mental system in which they brainstorm ideas in L2 (novelization strategy), while making sense of new words and concepts (semantic strategy). At the same time, although good language learners are methodical in approach, they are flexible and are constantly looking to revise their linguistic understandings (experimental strategy) by testing out hypotheses. While most of the research produced in the 1980s and 1990s produced fuzzy results, and most of the classification of strategies lacked consensus (Cohen and Macaro, 2007), Oxford's (1990) taxonomy became a point of reference. This is summarized in Table 13.1.

Given the number of strategies and their complex nature, Oxford (1990) groups them into two clusters: those related to the immediate use of L2 (cognitive, memory, compensation and communication), which she calls 'direct' and those concerned with the learners' ability for self-regulation (metacognitive, affective and social strategies) or 'indirect'. Responding to some criticisms concerning the currency of LLS, Oxford (2017, p. 11) acknowledges 'the compatibility of learning strategies and concepts such as self-direction and autonomy … and the nexus of autonomy, self-regulation, and strategies'.

Strategy-based instruction (SBI) approaches

The major contribution of LLS to teaching practice has been the notions of autonomy and learner-centredness, which are the foundations of strategy-based

approaches. While such concepts were originally discussed by Locke and Rousseau, who were opposed to a content-centred or curriculum-centred education (Noddings, 2018), LLS apply these notions of autonomy and learner-centredness to redefine the role of teachers as facilitators of learning opportunities. Learners are seen essentially as problem-solvers, who are aware of their own needs, deploying an array of strategies to achieve their goals and progress to the next stage in their learning experience (Manyukhina and Wyse, 2019). In this framework, LLS are context-dependent, teachers are not the only source of knowledge and learners, as they acquire more knowledge and skills, become the more knowledgeable ones who can support their peers. Although there are different strategy-based models, the communicative ones are based on dialogic interaction following a socio-constructivist perspective; teaching groups form a learning community where one student learns from another (Norton and Pavlenko, 2019). This is an iterative process and is largely based on the learners' ability to engage with three main skills: (1) metacognition, a higher-order thinking that enables understanding, analysis and control of the cognitive processes (Haukås, 2018); (2) shared cognition, the collective cognitive action from individual group members where the collective activity has an impact on the overall group goals and learning outcomes (Levine, 2018); and (3) action planning, an ability to think about learning goals and decide which strategies are the most effective to achieve those goals (Welsh *et al.*, 2019). Action planning involves the evaluation of learning outcomes and the strategies put into practice and, as a result, this stage promotes reflection (metacognition), thus closing a circuit, enabling the process to start again.

The debate on whether strategies can be taught has dominated the field of language pedagogy for quite some time (Nisbet and Shucksmith, 2017; Oxford, 2017), though the current position appears to favour explicit instruction (Dörnyei, 2005) as LLS are unconscious and learners may not be aware they are using them. Therefore, the explicitness of language strategy instruction (LSI) affects the degree to which learners retain and transfer strategies. In direct or informed LSI, learners are informed of the value and purpose of strategy instruction, are told strategy names and are prompted to use specific strategies on an assigned task. In embedded LSI, learners are presented with materials and activities structured to elicit the use of strategies, but are not informed of the reasons why this approach is being practised. These approaches are examined in the context of three strategy-based instruction (SBI) models in the next section.

Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA)

The most popular instructional models employed during the 1980s and 1990s were the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) (Albashtawi, 2019) and the Problem-Solving Process Model (PSM) (Orosco and Abdulrahim, 2018). The CALLA approach is aimed at improving multilingual learners' level of L2 ability to develop academic language skills as opposed to social language use.

The CALLA approach moves through a number of stages where the roles of the teacher and the students reverse. At the beginning of LSI the teacher has the

major responsibility. By contrast, the students' responsibility is relatively limited. As the students widen their repertoire of learning strategies, their responsibility increases while that of the teacher's reduces. The students' responsibility progresses so that eventually they can self-assess strategies and use them independently, having previously received feedback.

Problem-solving model (PSM)

The PSM is based on four metacognitive processes: planning, monitoring, problem solving and self-evaluation. Individual strategies are presented within each of these four processes and they are operationalized through either a description of the task that learners perform or a question they ask themselves and use at various stages in their learning (Table 13.2).

Table 13.2   Example of the metacognitive processes involved in the problem-solving model

Planning	
Goal setting	What do I need or want to do?
Think about what I know	What have I learned before?
Prediction	What am I going to hear? What do I need to say?
Selective attention	What are the key words?
Monitoring	
Self-questioning	Am I understanding? Am I being understood?
Using what I know	What might what I already know help me?
Visualization	Am I making a mental picture as I read or listen?
Self-talk	'I can do it!'
Personalization	What does it mean to *me*?
Co-operation	Am I helping my peers and letting them help me?
Problem solving	
Inferencing	Can I make a guess?
Substituting	Can I say it in another way?
Clarification	Do I ask when I don't understand?
Self-evaluation	
Goal-checking	Did I achieve my goal?
Self-evaluation	How well did I do it?
Strategy evaluation	Did the strategy work well for me?

Chamot's SBI model

Chamot's model (2004) consists of three major stages underpinned by the assumption that strategies can be taught. Before the lesson, during the preparation stage, the teacher decides: (1) which strategies to use based on the needs of the group; (2) the type of practice opportunities to give the students; and (3) follow-up activities to consolidate learning. The teacher considers the needs of the teaching group in relation to the complexity of the task and their current ability and then decides on the strategies to teach. In the next stage, the teacher undertakes an initial presentation of the new strategy, including a brief statement about why the strategy is important and how it is expected to assist students. The teacher models the strategy, demonstrating the steps involved in approaching and completing a task. Immediately after, the teacher moves to the practice stage, where learners practise the new strategies in class and are asked to reinforce learning through homework.

The three instructional models emphasize the importance of providing multiple practice opportunities so that learners can use the strategies autonomously, encouraging learners to evaluate how well a strategy has worked, choose strategies to complete a task and transfer them to new tasks.

Translanguaging and the 'Third Space'

In recent times, some schools have been more tolerant in allowing, or even encouraging, multilingual learners to employ their linguistic repertoires in classrooms. Where this is the case, code-switching among multilingual learners is a common feature. While these learners routinely switch between different languages in their everyday social interaction, in educational contexts, especially in the classroom, code-switching was deemed inappropriate or unacceptable, as a deficit or dysfunctional mode of interaction, and in many cases prohibited by policy (Li and Lin, 2019). Hartmann *et al.* (2018) define code-switching as the practice of 'alternating between two or more languages in a single conversation, [which] is a marked feature of multilingual communities' (p. 1615) and this phenomenon, as explained by Talaat (2003), should be considered a source of creativity.

Translanguaging is similar to code-switching in that it refers to multilingual learners shuttling between languages in a natural manner (Canagarajah, 2011). Lasagabaster and García claim that translanguaging is

> a pedagogical strategy … which fosters the dynamic and integrative use of bilingual students' languages in order to create a space in which the incorporation of both languages is seen as natural and teachers accept it as a legitimate pedagogical practice.

(2014, p. 557)

García and Kleyn (2016) explain that multilingual learners strategically select words, rules, speaking style and pronunciation from their idiolect that includes features of the L1 and English. Chumak-Horbatsch (2019) explains that 'guided by their *translanguaging instinct*, [these students] adjust language boundaries, disrupt linguistic and cultural cues and move beyond and between language varieties, styles, registers and writing systems' (p. 13). According to García and Wei (2014), translanguaging is 'part of a moral and political act that links the production of alternative meanings to transformative social action' (p. 37). They acknowledge that such a welcoming of multilingual language practices in classrooms as a tool for transformative social action is nonetheless controversial, arguing that the controversy points to a general undervaluing of multilinguals' fluid practices in school settings. A translanguaging approach to teaching allows both learners and teachers to draw on their full linguistic repertoires and enables them to engage in a wide range of language practices in the classroom. Additionally, as García-Mateus and Palmer (2017) put it, translanguaging disrupts the normalized instructional assumptions of a monolingual National Curriculum and promotes social justice by affirming the legitimacy of the language practices of multilingual learners, teachers and their home communities. This, therefore, includes the acceptance of code-switching, translation and the use of varieties of vernacular forms of the L1, all of which are often devalued in school. Research shows that, when such aforementioned pedagogical practices are put in place, multilingual learners feel valued, recognized and develop novel dispositions for learning (Durán and Palmer, 2014; Gort and Sembiante, 2015), which may include hybrid forms of L2 or *languaging* in the 'Third Space'.

From the perspective of critical pedagogy, Guitiérrez (2018) introduces the metaphor of the 'Third Space' to refer to linguistic practices that use L1 in formal and informal educational settings to empower multilingual learners and teachers who, by virtue of being a linguistic minority, are often ignored by the monolingual practices of a dominant language and, consequently, their voices are silenced. This metaphor, according to Guitiérrez (ibid.), is akin to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1980) and describes the social environment for development in which learners begin to reconceive who they are and what they might be able to accomplish academically and beyond. Two of the main features of the 'Third Space' are hybridity and diversity of ethnic, linguistic and educational practices that are not seen as problematic, but rather as important cultural resources in the learners' development (Cole, 1998). In a school context, multilingual learners negotiate what is known, for example, local cultural knowledge and linguistic registers, as they attempt to make sense of their identity in relation to prevailing notions of self and cultural practices. Moya (2020) explains that this perspective looks at the individuals, their identities, their aspirations as well as their own views of the world, acknowledging their linguistic capital as factors contributing to their academic achievement, thus subverting the English-only, one-size-fits-all curricula. Safford (2003) argues that there is a conflict between the celebration of ethnic and linguistic diversity, on the one

hand, and the universal model of language development and assessment, on the other. One such practice that tends to ignore the voices of learners coming from linguistic minorities is assessment as it inadvertently curtails the educational success of multilingual learners (ibid.). However, the National Curriculum provides many affordances, particularly through Modern Languages in Key Stage 2, to allow these learners to celebrate their linguistic identity and use translanguaging to bridge home and school. These learning zones, which McKey (2002) also calls 'zones of contact', promote the development of global awareness and understanding, empowering learners to have a voice in school settings that are immanently polycontextual, multivoiced and multiscripted.

Vignette: Chamot's (2004) revised SBI model in practice

The strategy-based instruction models described above have traditionally followed a cognitive perspective with an emphasis on the role of memory to store and retrieve linguistic knowledge. This is not surprising as most of the research, in fact the agenda of the time, around LLS stated that the role of the mind was like a 'black box'. While it was unknown what happened inside the mind, applied linguists sought to explain language acquisition by using computer terminology such as input, or instances of L2 exposure and output, or instances of production, with information processing occurring between them. Within the cognitive paradigm, there was an assumption that multilingual learners were able to resort to different strategies stored in the long-term memory, which had been internalized because of repeated use and which were, by and large, unconscious. Therefore, the teacher was instrumental in bringing the internalized strategic knowledge and LLS practice to the fore through a careful task design, prompting their conscious use. According to these models, language learning emerges from the learners' engagement with input-rich resources by employing specific strategies that are not explicitly taught, but are taken for granted. However, since a new understanding of learning as a social and situated experience (Lave and Wenger, 1990) taking place in a community of practice (Wenger *et al*., 2002), contributions from the ethnography of communication have promoted a new understanding of how linguistic practices occur in classrooms. Alexander (2008) emphasizes the need to create interactive opportunities in such environments where dialogue is used as a tool for learning (Mercer, 2000). To exemplify this point, Chamot's (2004) model has been reviewed, incorporating talk as a vehicle for learning. The revised model, presented in Table 13.3, is applied in the context of an English lesson, though it can be used with any other subject in the curriculum. The revised model consists of four stages, namely: presentation, comprehension, assisted practice and reflection, and learners are required to use their L1, if necessary, to discuss how strategies are applied to solve language problems, followed by a reflection on the outcomes of the experience.

Table 13.3 Chamot's (2004) SBI model revised

Stages	Chamot's model (2004)	Stages	Revised model
One	The teacher decides: (a) which strategies to use based on the needs of the group, (b) the type of practice opportunities to give the students; and (c) follow-up activities.	Presentation	The teacher presents the learning outcomes and key LLS for learners to use. L2 is embedded in a context, followed by questions and answers to elicit information, such as type of text, genre and content. Learners are encouraged to work in pairs and, if necessary, use translanguaging for exploratory talk.
Two	The teacher considers the needs of the teaching group in relation to learning tasks.	Comprehension	Learners work in pairs on a focused task assigned by the teacher. For example, the identification of parts of speech, characters, tone and genre, among others. Learners discuss and agree on the strategies to use to work out the meaning of words and structures. They may use think-aloud protocols as part of the exploratory talk in L1 if necessary.
Three	The teacher undertakes an initial presentation of the new strategy, or a combination of strategies, including a brief statement about why the strategy is important and how it is expected to assist students.	Assisted practice	Once the learners have identified key language features such as vocabulary items, grammatical structures, phonological units, etc., they practise their own utterances using different strategies, such as an online translation for vocabulary development and pronunciation model, using chanting, singing or tapping the rhythm of the words to commit the pronunciation to memory, and then assess one another, providing feedback. The L1 is not used in this stage.
Four	The teacher models the strategy using think-aloud protocols, demonstrating the steps involved in approaching and completing the language task. The teacher plans for immediate practice. The students practise the new strategies in class and are asked to reinforce learning through a piece of homework.	Reflection	Learners reflect on their learning experience, recording their views on a journal and tracking their progress using 'I can statements' (e.g., I can understand simple directions to go from Y to Z). They also discuss their performance, providing feedback to one another, and decide on their next learning goals. They keep a record of achievement where they also include future goals. Learners can use their L1 to explain complex situations in L2 with the support of other peers for translation.

The revised SBI model makes overt use of direct strategies, however, the use of indirect strategies is evident throughout the four stages. Learners are engaged in a process of negotiation with peers, discussing alternatives, using metacognition to monitor their learning and regulating their emotions as they contribute ideas for the resolution of tasks, reducing stress and anxiety while increasing participation and sense of belonging. The 'I can' statements also provide learners with tangible evidence of their learning, thus developing their self-esteem, happiness and involvement in lessons, as documented by Moya (2014). The indirect strategies, therefore, are powerful tools to promote self-efficacy, which is a person's beliefs about whether s/he feels s/he can successfully complete a task in a specific context (Bandura, 1997). The revised model contributes to the development of learners' self-efficacy by allowing them to experience success and get constructive feedback from significant others, by observing others succeed who are similar in competences to themselves and by evaluating their own emotional states and their responses to the learning experiences (Bandura, 1977).

Conclusion

For teachers, making a richer and motivating curriculum relevant to all is no mean feat, as they need to harness an understanding of how learners' life experiences can be used to plan creative and engaging lessons. Traditionally, learning has been associated with the active promotion of direct strategies linked to cognition and memory, while the indirect strategies (metacognition, affective and social) have remained largely underestimated. With a renewed emphasis on a learner-centred approach, a more holistic vision of learning has led to the consideration of the funds of knowledge and various skill sets that learners bring to the classroom, as well as the importance of creating the right internal and external conditions to develop more resilient learners with a growth mindset. Interestingly, Dweck (2006) argues that people can be placed on a continuum between two extremes: one that a person is born with fixed amounts of abilities, including intelligence, and that these cannot be changed (i.e., fixed mindset); the other representing the view that everyone can develop their potential further and grow their intelligence or change personal traits (i.e., growth mindset). According to Mercer and Dörnyei, 'a person with a growth mindset would believe that language learning abilities can always be enhanced through *strategic efforts* and that everyone can improve on their base level of abilities' (2020, p. 34). This idea resonates with the importance of cultivating the indirect LLS (metacognition, affective and social) as they have a direct link with the theory of learner attributions (Weiner, 1992) concerned with the various explanations that learners give to reflect on their past successes and failures. In this sense, Mercer and Dörnyei explain that:

> [F]uture willingness to engage with tasks is improved by a learner making 'healthy' attributions, that is, concentrating on factors contributing to their

> failures that they can influence and change. That is, future engagement will occur if students feel they have control over their learning outcomes.
>
> (2020, p. 35)

In the example model discussed above, learners exercise their autonomy to identify their next learning goals emerging from peer discussion, where feedback is given as a compassionate practice (Jones and Vari, 2018), followed by an individual assessment of their performance. The use of reflection enables learners to track their progress and this, in turn, can be used as further evidence for teachers to transform the practice of formative assessment and make it more encompassing and fairer, since the learners are in control.

While many teachers have understood the importance of promoting the learners' existing knowledge and skills, there is still some further room to capitalize on the tacit knowledge and skills that multilingual learners possess by encouraging the development of a 'Third Space', the metaphorical place where L2 emerges as a result of the use of LLS, to breach the gap between home and school. This is an example of 'linguistically appropriate practice' (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2019) that calls for teachers to reflect on their teaching beliefs and practices, inviting them to be more linguistically responsive so that they can promote learners' autonomy and self-efficacy for them to grow and thrive in settings where they feel valued.

Taking the discussion in this chapter into account, teachers might choose to reflect on the following questions from their own experience:

1 How do multilingual learners with a limited amount of English in a class approach the learning of subject-specific content?
2 Which strategies do these learners use in order to negotiate learning?
3 How might students be encouraged to use language learning strategies to develop their linguistic capacity to learn another language?
4 How, in your view, can teachers promote the notion of 'Third Space' in their classrooms?

Note

1 According to Moya (2019), 'bilingualism' and 'multilingualism' in England have many implications and are susceptible to many interpretations; therefore, the use of L1 here as a generic terminology includes bilingual, multilingual and plurilingual speakers.

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