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The Strategy Factor in Successful Language Learning

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Review

Griffiths, C. (2013). *The Strategy Factor in Successful Language Learning*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

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Since the mid 1970s there has been a growing interest in the analysis and classification of strategies that advanced multilingual speakers apply in order to develop and improve their language skills. Many authors including Rubin (1975), Bialystok (1981), O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Cook (1991) have explored the complex and to a great extent unknown universe of language acquisition from this perspective. However, there seems to be no consensus as regards the role of linguistic and communicative strategies in language learning or even in the definition of basic terminology or in identifying key conceptual aspects that would pave the way for new theoretical approaches.

In *The Strategy Factor in Successful Language Learning* Carol Griffiths (2013), a renowned expert in the field of English language teaching and teacher education, intends to cast some light in the learning strategy field from the premise that learners “may be empowered to manage their own learning” if they are trained “to work out the answers for themselves” through effective strategies (p. 1). To this end, the author clarifies fundamental concepts such as strategy, skill and style through an extensive literature review and examines the correlation between strategy use, strategy type and strategy frequency and successful language learning in different contexts and for different purposes. In so doing, Griffiths places the learner at the heart of the learning process and draws on responsibility and autonomy as central

factors in the learning of new languages from a cognitive perspective. In this sense, the author upholds that strategies are learnable and teachable. This view contrasts with more traditional methods, namely the grammar-translation method or audiolingualism, which is based on behaviourist principles and which, therefore, minimises the role of the learner in their own learning process.

The book is divided into four main chapters, each dealing with essential issues within this multilayered discipline. Chapter 1 addresses controversy by proposing well-informed definitions and possible solutions to terminology inconsistencies, sound strategy classification, and underlying theory from the literature; chapters 2 and 3 seek to answer basic questions concerning the role of age, choice, purpose, motivation, time or affect along with other psycholinguistic aspects regarding the effectiveness of strategic learning and to approach strategy research from the point of view of the learner by means of quantitative and qualitative studies; finally, chapter 4 reviews pedagogical research, studies of strategy-based instruction, content, methodology, and teacher perceptions, which can be especially relevant for teacher training purposes.

Through well-organised prose and a highly readable style, Griffiths does not simply discuss the main theoretical concepts of strategic language learning theory. Instead, she provides the reader with evidence based on empirical studies, reinterprets the existing literature, analyses the implications of the data presented in the light of pedagogical research findings, and indicates under-researched areas for further study. For this reason, the target audience may range from undergraduate students and student teachers who wish to look into basic language learning research to teacher educators, in-service teachers, and researchers. It may also prove to be useful for language learners who wish to find out about the complexities of language acquisition from a strategy-based approach and to develop their own strategies.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that the research perspectives on language acquisition explored mainly focus on the acquisition of traditional varieties from the point of view of the native speaker and that new trends on multilingual research in the face of the increasing number of lingua franca English speakers are perhaps overlooked. Throughout

the book there are numerous references to native-like speech production, pronunciation, and grammar control as the implicit goals of language learners, which might be true in some cases. However, little attention is paid to the fact that effective communication as opposed to mastery might be one of the main aims of developing language speakers, many of whom might already speak more than one or two languages by the time they start learning a new one. Hence, the strategies that might be relevant to these kinds of speakers will differ from those of the learners described in the book.

In any case, this book offers an interesting classification of learning strategies, clear and concise descriptions of ambiguous terminology which is being used inconsistently, an analysis of numerous research studies, qualitative and quantitative evidence, and a hands-on approach to language teaching and learning written in a pedagogical style. Thus, it is safe to say that Griffiths has made a major contribution to this complex area of knowledge and that her work will undoubtedly prove to be useful to a wide range of readers.

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