Characteristics of a good language learner in relation to her language learning strategies

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to know the characteristics possessed by Meta, a single subject in this study, as a good language learner in relation to her language learning strategies. It is a case study design. The result of the research shows that Meta possesses all of the kinds of language learning strategies (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies). In terms of memory strategy she visualizes new languages. She remembers new words by writing the words for many times. In terms of metacognitive strategy she creates opportunities to practice English language skills. She identifies errors in understanding or producing the new language. She tracks the source of important errors and tries to eliminate them. She also evaluates her own progress. In terms of cognitive strategy she makes summary of English text, she highlights certain words and does scanning and skimming in reading English text. In terms of affective strategy she pushes herself to take risk in language learning situation, she discovers and controls motivation that influences language learning, she gives reward to herself for doing good performance in her language learning. In terms of social strategy she works with other language learners to improve her language skills. In terms of compensation strategy she uses guessing technique in reading and uses synonym technique in speaking.

Keywords: language learning strategies, good language learner

Introduction

Learning a language is a challenging task, but each learner and every language learning experience is unique. Lightbown and Spada (2006) stated that even students are in the same foreign language class, some students progress rapidly while other students making very slow progress. According to them a good language learner is the one who possess some characteristics, and those characteristics help the learner to get success in language learning.

Furthermore Griffiths (2009) states some variables that affect language learning and help students become good language learners, and one of them is language learning strategy. Many researchers have shown that language learning strategies have important role in language learning.

The result of the researcher's observation in English Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Mulawarman University, shows that there is a successful language learner, especially in speaking, namely Meta. She was considered as a good language learner because she has the criteria of a good language learner. Based on researcher's observation, she uses many strategies in her language learning which makes her become a good language learner.

Meta has good achievement in learning English. Her Grade point Average was 3.84, and she also had some achievements related to English, such as in 2012 she was the winner of NUEDC (National University English Debating Championship) which was held in Mulawarman University and joined by many faculties.

This study intended to find out what makes Meta become a good language learner. By finding the characteristics of a good language learner in relation language learning strategy, teachers could encourage less successful language learners to use the appropriate strategies in order

for them become a successful language and an independent learner.

Methodology

It is a case study in which the subject of the study was a student of Mulawarman University, English Department namely Meta (initial name) who investigated in depth in order to find her characteristics as a Good language learner in relation to her language learning strategies.

First, the subject was given SILL questionnaire in order to find out the subject's learning strategies. The subject of the study had her questionnaire, SILL (Strategy Inventory Language Learning) on 8th of March 2014, 50 statements were answered by using 5-point likert-scale that ranged from one (never true of me) through five (Always or almost true of me).

SILL is a structured questionnaire used to assess how often learners use specific language learning strategies. The instrument consists of 50 statements. Items 1-9 concern the effectiveness of memory (memory strategies); items 10-23 concern the use of mental processes (cognitive strategies); items 24-29 concern the compensation for missing knowledge (compensation strategies); items 30-38 concern the organization and evaluation of learning (metacognitive strategies); items 39-44 concern emotion management (affective strategies); and items 45-50 concern others (social strategies).

The data that was taken from SILL was analyzed by finding the average score from the total score of each learning strategy based on Oxford (1990). The average score of each category was categorized into some classifications in order to find the frequency of the strategy used by the subject. Below is the table of classification of SILL

Table 1. Oxford Calculating Method, Oxford (1990).

Frequency	Average	Classification
Low	1.0 to 1.4	Never using this strategy
	1.5 to 2.4	Usually not using this strategy
Medium	2.5 to 3.4	Sometimes using this
High	3.5 to 4.4	Usually using this strategy
	4.5 to 5.0	Always using this strategy

Second, there was semi-structured individual in-depth interview. The interview was only related to the specific strategies that often used by the subject. Forty six questions were prepared by the researcher and about seventy questions were given to the subject. The interview took fifty five minutes. The interview was held on March 8 2014.

Semi-structured Individual in-depth interview was analyzed by using Flow Diagram by Miles Huberman (1994) which included three concurrent flows of activity. Each of the flow is described as follows:

Data Reduction Stage

Individual in-depth interview was transcribed into Microsoft Word. The transcript was categorized and coded and the data that showed significant contribution to the study was taken.

Displaying Data

The researcher compacted the data, organized information that permitted conclusion drawing and action.

Drawing and Verifying Conclusion

The data which was displayed was analyzed and conclusion was made and it was verified to the theories in order to determine the truth and accuracy of the conclusion.

This study used two kinds of triangulation in order to increase the validity of research findings. The first triangulation was data triangulation. The data in this study was gathered from different sources of data. They were questionnaires, semi-structured individual in-depth interview, and documents such as the copy of Kartu Hasil Studi (Grade Point Average Result), some certifications, and memo of the subject. This study also had interview outside of the subject, there were two participants, Wilma and Ade, the subject's friends who always studied together with the subject and has known the Subject's language learning strategy very

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well; she was interviewed to get the valid information of subject's language learning strategy.

The second triangulation was theory triangulation. The result of the data in this study was checked to the relate theories of a good language learner in relation to language learning strategy, as stated by Guion Lisa (2002) theory triangulation involves the use of multiple professional perspectives in order to interpret a single set of data/information. Multiple theories are used in examining a situation or phenomenon.

In the theory triangulation, this study used some theories. The first theory was about good language learner by Griffiths (2009). The second theory was about language learning strategy by Brown (2007), Longman (2002), Wu (2008) and Oxford (1990).

Discussion

From the responses of the subject and interview of triangulation it was found that the subject of this study, Meta uses six of the language learning strategies by Oxford (1990) as follows,

Table 2. Language Learning Strategies possessed by Meta Based on SILL Questionnaire by Oxford (1990)

Strategy	Frequency	Classification
Memory	High	Always / almost always used
Cognitive	High	Usually Used
Compensation	High	Usually Used
Metacognitive	High	Usually Used
Affective	High	Usually Used
Social	High	Usually Used

After the result of the questionnaire was gotten, the subject was given interview and it was checked by the interview triangulation with two people who were considered as two of the subject's closest friends who know about subject's Language Learning Strategies very

well and also theory. It can be concluded that there are some Language learning Strategies that are possessed by subject as well as characteristics possessed by her related to her language learning strategis, they are:

Memory Strategy

Memory strategies are the techniques in remembering new word or information. Meta has two strategies, they are:

- Using imagery by relating new language information and word to concepts in memory by means of meaningful visual imagery

- Remembering new words by writing the words for many times in order to get familiar with the words.

This finding was supported by Rebecca Oxford. Oxford (1990) stated that Memory strategies are the techniques in remembering new information. Moreover she also added some strategies related to memory, one of them is using imagery by relating new language information to concepts in memory by means of meaningful visual imagery.

Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies are the strategies which are used by learners to help them understand the information in the language material. By having and doing these strategies learner can understand and produce the new language. Meta's strategies related to Cognitive strategies are:

- Making summary of text in written and spoken

- Highlighting the text

- Doing skimming and scanning in reading English text

According to Oxford (1990) cognitive strategies are essential in learning a new language. These strategies involve more direct manipulation to the learning material itself. They help learners to develop their knowledge and help them to understand the information in the language

material. Longman (2002) also added that thinking, remembering, perceiving, recognizing, and classifying are kinds of cognitive strategy.

Moreover Oxford (1990) also stated that highlighting and making summary or abstract of a longer passage and repeating in reading to find out the idea of the text are the three kinds among many strategies related to cognitive.

Compensation Strategy

Compensation strategies are the techniques used by language learners to help them make up their missing knowledge in the process of comprehending or producing the target language. The researcher found that Meta has some strategies to help her make up her missing knowledge in certain skills, they are:

- Guessing in reading English text

- Using synonym in speaking

According to Wu (2008) compensation strategies help learners to make up their missing knowledge in the process of comprehending or producing the target language such as guessing (in listening and reading), and using gestures, a synonym or description. These techniques help learners to understand and produce spoken or written expression in the new language without complete knowledge.

Metacognitive Strategy

Metacognitive strategies are the strategies that language learners used to manage their learning and evaluating themselves in order to reach the goal of their learning. The researcher has found that Meta has three strategies related to metacognitive, they are

- Seeking out or creating opportunities to practice any and all of the four language skills through English club and English competition

- Identifying errors in understanding or producing the new language, determining which ones are important, tracking the source of important errors and trying to eliminate such errors.

- Self evaluates her own progress in the new language (self evaluating)

According to Oxford (1990) metacognitive strategies are the strategies that help learner to take their own way to manage their learning, evaluating themselves in order to reach the goal in language learning. Moreover she also added that creating opportunities to practice, identifying errors in producing new language then trying to eliminate such errors in the future, and evaluating progress in the new language. Are the three kinds of metacognitive strategies.

Affective Strategy

Affective strategies are emotional factors such as feeling, emotion, motivation, attitude, and values that may influence language learning. It was found that Meta has some affective strategies such as,

- She pushes herself to take risk in a language learning situation, even though there is a chance of making mistake or looking foolish

- She discovers and controls her motivation that influence her language learning (Get motivated to be an English speaker by "Harry Potter" movie)

- She gives herself a valuable reward for a particularly good performance in the new language learning.

According to Oxford (1990) affective strategies help learner to regulate emotion, motivation and attitude, these emotional factors are controlled by learners and influence their language learning in an important way. These strategies may encourage learners and lower their anxiety in language learning.

Social Strategy

Social strategy is activity which engages learners to have opportunities to practice their knowledge. This strategy put learners in an environment where practicing is possible, this strategy related to the effectiveness of interaction with others. Meta also has social strategy. She joins English club where she can practice her knowledge and works with other language learner to improve her language skill

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According to Oxford (1990) social strategies are those activities which engage the language learners to have opportunities to practice their knowledge. Moreover she also said that working with other language learners to improve language skills is one of the social strategies used by language learners.

From the explanation of language learning strategies that Meta possessed above can be concluded that there are nine characteristics that Meta possessed related to her language learning strategies, as follows:

Table 3. Characteristics that Meta possessed as a good language learner

No	Characteristics
1	She finds her own way, she takes responsibility for her own learning (she practices her language skills in language learning environment, plans her language learning activities, gives reward to herself, and evaluates her progress) (Metacognitive and Affective strategies)
2	She is creative in using various media in language learning, shetries to feel the language by experimenting its grammar and words (Cognitive strategy)
3	She creates opportunities for practice in using the language (English) inside and outside of the classroom. (Social strategy)
4	She uses memory strategies to bring back what has been learnt. (Memory strategy)
5	She uses contextual cues to help her in comprehension. (Compensation strategy)
6	She makes errors work for her and not against them (Metacognitive strategy)
7	She learns to make intelligent guesses. (Compensation strategy)
8	She learns to use certain tricks to keep conversations going (Compensation strategy)

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