

**CURRENT RESEARCH IN TEACHING
AND LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
BY GRADUATE STUDENTS IN MEXICO**

Griselda Murrieta Loyo
Edith Hernández Méndez

Coordinators



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© Griselda Murrieta Loyo (MA): grises@uqroo.mx
© Edith Hernández Méndez (PhD): edith@uqroo.mx

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La Editorial Manda
Callejón General Anaya 50-4
Col. San Mateo Churubusco
Delegación Coyoacán
Teléfono: (55) 5689 8170
Correo-e: editor@editorialmanda.com

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Glossary of Abbreviations

Acquisition Codification Recall & Support (ACRA)
 Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)
 Comprehensive Medium and Higher Education Reform (RIEMS)
 English as a Foreign Language (EFL)
 English as a Second language (ESL)
 English for Academic Purposes (EAP)
 First Language (L1)
 Foreign Language (FL)
 Formant One (F1)
 Formant Two (F2)
 Higher Education Faculty (FES)
 Language Learning Strategies (LLS)
 National Higher Education Evaluation Centre (CENEVAL)
 Native Language Magnet Theory (NLM)
 Pilot Program for Primary School English (PNIEB)
 Quintana Roo Science and Technology Council (COQCYT)
 Second Language (L2)
 Second Language Acquisition (SLA)
 Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP)
 Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL)
 State of Mexico Autonomous University (UAMEX)
 Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)
 Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)
 Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)
 Technological Institute of Chetumal (ITCh)
 United Nations Education Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO)
 Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM)
 University of Quintana Roo (UQROO)

INTRODUCTION

Edith Hernández Méndez
Griselda Murrieta Loyo

Foreign language teaching and learning has been a topic of research since the need for communicating with speakers of other languages arose. Even so, research in the field was undertaken by few Mexican universities until very recently. The study of foreign language teaching and learning was scarce or non-existent in Quintana Roo state until the end of the 1990s when the first students of the English Language Bachelor of Arts (BA) at the University of Quintana Roo wrote theses on the topic.

In 2006, the university began to offer a Masters with a double major – in Education with English Teaching and Technology in Education. As a result theses in the area of Applied Linguistics became more numerous and methodologically more rigorous.

Graduate students from the program have improved research and the communication of their findings with the academic community, thanks to more solid training, tapping the experience of specialists and experts in a variety of topics, and improving their research skills.

Graduate students in academic events have increasingly begun to present their research. This book is one result of these efforts. It represents the work of master's program staff and that of manuscript reviewers from several higher education institutions, all of whom volunteered to share their time and expertise with commitment, impartiality and goodwill to produce a book of quality.

This publication would not have been possible without the financial support received from Fondos Mixtos (COQCYT) and the tireless participation of University of Quintana Roo academic group Higher Education and Linguistics Studies (Estudios Lingüísticos y de Educación Superior), whose members were responsible for motivating graduate students to present their papers and publish their results.

Undeniably, the graduate students' hard work, tenacity and patience were the essential ingredients that nurtured this work. Some of them were nervous because it was the first time they had published, but nonetheless they committed themselves with enthusiasm to editing, correcting, extending and improving their articles with the idea of sharing their studies, results and ideas, and offering proposals or knowledge that would enhance improvements in language teaching or learning.

The bulk of the articles summarize graduate students' theses from the University of Quintana Roo's double major masters. However, a graduate student from the State of Mexico Autonomous University (UAMex) also participated. This makes this work one of the first attempts to gather and disseminate theses written by graduates in this field from across the nation.

The book consists of five articles – all of them thesis summaries – covering pronunciation, beliefs and learning strategies. The methodology used is also varied, as we have descriptive, phenomenological and quasi-experimental studies.

Deymi Collí Novelo studies the language learning strategies used by 142 English language students at the University of Quintana Roo, Campus Cozumel. Collí used the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, 1990) to collect data. The results showed that students are medium users of the

strategies defined by the Oxford framework. The metacognitive strategy was the most used and compensation strategy was the least used. Students made greater use of metacognitive strategies and social strategies at each of the three language ability levels studied.

Yareny Aguilar presents her study *Beliefs About Foreign Language Learning And Their Relationship With Academic Achievement*. This is a quantitative investigation which used the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory questionnaire (BALLI) (Horwitz, 1987) as its main instrument. The aim was to identify the most and the least common learning beliefs in a sample of 326 students. The study included gender and academic performance as external variables. A detailed statistic analysis reveals the relationship between these variables and the beliefs of the subjects under study.

Esthela Ramírez Hernández from the UAMex looked into teaching pronunciation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. During two months she followed an experimental study examining both productive and perceptive activities. The purpose was to apply pronunciation teaching techniques and activities and verify their effectiveness in English learning.

The fourth paper is presented by graduate student Leydi Cahuich in collaboration with Universidad de Quintana Roo professors María del Rosario Reyes and Antonio Higuera. It is a case study analyzing English teaching in the high school curriculum and the impact that the language learned by four students from a rural high school has on their academic achievement in English courses at a higher education institution in an urban area. One interesting finding is that after eight years of EFL in-

struction, the participants in their study have not even achieved an intermediate proficiency level in the language.

Eduardo Montalvo wrote the last article: *The Relationship between Language Learning Beliefs and Academic Achievement*. It is a quantitative study examining the language learning beliefs held by students from the English Language bachelor's degree at the University of Quintana Roo. It also collects data using Horwitz's BALLI inventory. Although findings were not very significant in terms of relationships between grades and beliefs, some unexpected information emerged regarding gender.

Whether you are interested in all the topics or in a particular one, we can assure you will be reading the most current research in EFL language teaching and learning done in Mexico at this level. It is frequently very difficult to find recent research in the field of Mexican EFL teaching and learning because theses are rarely available online or in all bookstores throughout the country.

There is a tradition of having college library stocks full of theses which makes research more difficult because researchers need to visit almost all libraries in the country to find out if there is previous research on their chosen topic.

With this situation in mind, this compilation of thesis summaries hopes to become a work of reference and be one of the first of its type. The papers included in this book can help those who already are researching the topic, or they can be the trigger for further research. We sincerely hope you will enjoy the whole book!

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY USE AT UQRoo, COZUMEL CAMPUS

Deymi Colli Novelo
(UQRoo, Cozumel Campus)

First developed in the 1970s, the cognitive view of learning influenced researchers who had previously studied only teaching to change their focus to look at learners. Researchers started to study learners' characters and the effects of these on learning languages, beginning with what good language learners did while they were learning. Later, this type of study was formalized as study of language learning strategies (LLS).

Oxford (1990) found that students who learn with ease are those who use a wide variety of learning strategies. Schwarz (1997) identified some problems which make learning difficult, such as anxiety about making grammatical or pronunciation mistakes, understanding the teacher and remembering vocabulary. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) observed that the use of certain affective learning strategies reduced the level of anxiety.

This paper seeks to describe LLS use by those under study, as well as the relationship with gender and proficiency level. This investigation seeks to contribute to providing effective instruments to students who face difficulties in the English language learning process and also teachers develop educational programs that address specific students' needs, encourage less successful students in their goals of learning a new language, and help English teachers assist those with poor learning skills to attain an appropriate level of English.

Theoretical framework

Language learning is considered as an active process where students can control the development of competences through conscious strategies. This contrasts with earlier ideas where teachers were seen as controlling the class and the learning that takes place within it through memorization, repetition, and translation.

Definitions of Language Learning Strategies

LLS give language teachers valuable clues about how their students assess, plan and select appropriate skills so as to understand, learn or remember new input presented in the classroom. Following up on these ideas, many studies describe what successful learners typically do, and as a consequence, several definitions of LLS have emerged. This study presents some of the more commonly used definitions listed in the order in which authors first wrote about them. See table 1.

Table 1. Definitions of Learning Strategies

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Rubin (1975:43) | “Technique or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge.” |
| Bialystok (1978:71) | “Optional means for exploiting available information to improve competence in a second language.” |
| Rubin (1987:23) | “Strategies which contribute to the development of the language system which the learners construct and affects learning directly.” |
| Wenden (1987:6) | “Language learning behaviors learners actually engaged in to learn and regulate the learning of a second language.” |
| Chamot (1987:71) | “Techniques, approaches or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information”. |
| Cohen (1998:5) | “Learning strategies are viewed as learning processes which are consciously selected by the learner”. |
| Oxford (1990) | “Learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations”. |

While Rubin sees LLS as a mechanism that students use to gain knowledge, Wenden sees LLS as a behavior which can regulate learning. Later, Chamot sees LLS as a way of thinking. Bialystok’s definition is not clear enough, the author uses because vague terms which do not specify the elements of LLS.

Authors do agree on some common features of LLS, such as facilitating comprehension, storage, retrieval, and use of information. Also Oxford claims that there are no good or bad strategies, and that the efficacy of a strategy depends on the context (Oxford, 2003:4). This study is based on Oxford’s definition

because Oxford not only describes the cognitive process but is also clearer in the identification, retention, storage, or retrieval of words.

Taxonomy of Language Learning Strategies

Many classifications of strategies have emerged as a result of the different studies on language learning strategies, “making it difficult in many cases to compare strategies reported in one study with those reported in another” (Chamot, 1987:71). Such classifications may be confusing when carrying out research because even though those taxonomies are different, at the same time they “reflect more or less the same categorizations of language learning strategies without any radical changes” (Hismanoglu, 2000).

Rubin began the process in 1981, proposing a classification scheme that placed strategies into two groups: strategies that directly impact learning, and strategies that contribute indirectly. The direct strategies include clarification, verification, monitoring, memorizing, deductive reasoning, practice, guessing and inductive reasoning. The indirect strategies include creating opportunities for practice and production tricks. She also claims that learning strategies contribute to the development of a linguistic system.

Later, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classified according to how learners implement learning strategies. They divided the strategies in three main categories: metacognitive, cognitive and social or affective strategies. Metacognitive strategies indicate things an individual already knew about learning such as planning, selective attention, self-management, self-monitoring,