Centre for English Language Studies

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Do you think that there is such a thing as a '*good* language learner'? To what extent do you think that it is possible for people to become 'better' language learners? Discuss with reference to your own students, past or present.

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1.Introduction

Teachers and students recognise a good language learner, even if they may not be able to define exactly what makes one. Initial suggestions about the qualities which define a good language learner would probably include: sociability, flexibility, willingness to work hard, use of all opportunities to learn and practise the language both inside and outside the classroom, a lack of dependence on teachers for all of their learning, and a lack of fear about making mistakes or being embarrassed when using the language.

This essay will begin by reviewing some definitions of the good language learner (GLL), classifications of language learning strategies (LLSs) and research findings on the possible use of LLS instruction in the classroom, before describing a small piece of research and classroom observation relating to the strategies used by two groups of students. Findings from the research and observation will then be interpreted in the light of previous research and writing, before some implications are drawn in the conclusion.

While we may agree about what marks out a GLL, we may not be so sure about which of these qualities are innate and which can be learned. If they can be learned, how could we use this knowledge to help students to become better language learners? The debate over LLSs, how they can be defined, and what can be done to help learners to use them appropriately, has added to the field of choices for a classroom teacher.

Therefore, rather than focusing in too much detail on definitions of the good language learner, I believe that the more relevant question is what I can do as a teacher to help students to get the most out of

their learning. This starts with helping students to discover and analyse their learning styles and strategies. We also need to consider what steps the teacher can take in order to accommodate and make best use of individual learners' different styles and aptitudes. In other words, while GLLs can be accommodated according to their learning styles, other 'less efficient' learners can be catered for – and in the process encouraged to become 'better' learners - by the teacher being more aware of two things: firstly, the variety of learning styles, aptitudes and educational backgrounds in the class and secondly, the range of possibilities available to the teacher in the choice of materials, tasks and teaching approaches which can make the most of this variety within the student group.

There may also be some benefit in explicit teaching of study skills of a more basic nature and some discussion about what motivates individual students. In addition, the previous language learning experiences of the students may have an impact on what they expect from a teacher and what they expect from themselves. It would therefore be helpful to make explicit the teaching and learning style of the school or college and also to discuss where this differs from the previous experiences of the student.

2. Literature review

I want to discover how the definitions of GLLs and classification systems of LLSs can help me in answering the questions posed above, and how they can help me to decide the best way to help my students to enhance their own learning. This section will examine the key definitions of good language learners before going on to look at the various ways in which language learning strategies can be classified. It will also look briefly at the evidence available from classroom research on the benefits of LLS instruction.

2.1 Definitions of the good language learner

As more is discovered about learner characteristics, both in learning generally, in language learning more specifically and for our purposes, second language learners, it has become clearer that we can give a reasonably accurate definition of a GLL. Rubin has provided a starting point (1975) which she developed into a widely accepted list of GLL characteristics. (see Figure 1 on the next page)

While some of this is related to learner style, ability and motivation, a large part of it is the result of the student's ability to select and apply the appropriate learning strategies. Chamot and Rubin (1994) take this further, stating that "the good language learner cannot be described in terms of a single set of strategies but rather through the ability to understand and develop a personal set of effective strategies."

In a further effort to define the GLL, Naiman et al (1996) listed the most important learner characteristics as:

"(a) cognitive factors, such as intelligence and language aptitude

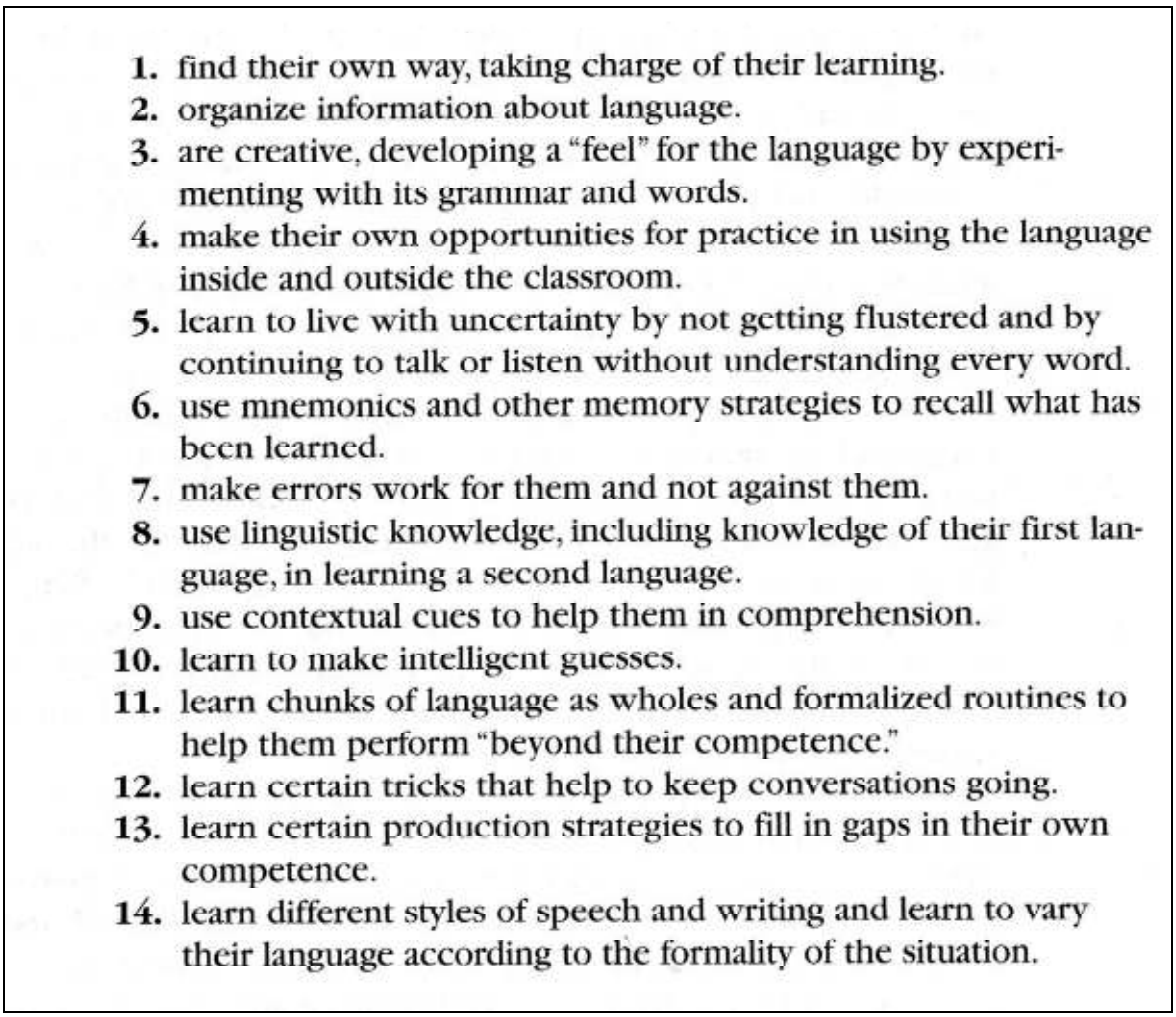
(b) personality factors and cognitive style

(c) attitudes and motivation."

They saw language learning as a process where the learner characteristics above are affected by the teaching input and the L2 environment to produce a learning outcome. In the middle of this process, they place "unconscious processes" and "conscious strategies and techniques" as a way of attempting to describe the language learning strategies later developed and refined by other writers such as Oxford.

Rubin's summary of GLL characteristics cited in Brown (2000)

Good language learners



1. find their own way, taking charge of their learning.
2. organize information about language.
3. are creative, developing a "feel" for the language by experimenting with its grammar and words.
4. make their own opportunities for practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom.
5. learn to live with uncertainty by not getting flustered and by continuing to talk or listen without understanding every word.
6. use mnemonics and other memory strategies to recall what has been learned.
7. make errors work for them and not against them.
8. use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of their first language, in learning a second language.
9. use contextual cues to help them in comprehension.
10. learn to make intelligent guesses.
11. learn chunks of language as wholes and formalized routines to help them perform "beyond their competence."
12. learn certain tricks that help to keep conversations going.
13. learn certain production strategies to fill in gaps in their own competence.
14. learn different styles of speech and writing and learn to vary their language according to the formality of the situation.

Figure 1

Lightbown and Spada (2006) use a similar range of descriptors to Rubin, but add IQ, childhood learning and good academic skills to the list of characteristics, which seems to take us in a different direction. From the field of educational psychology, Dornyei (2005) suggests that the concept of self regulation in a student is a more useful way of attempting to define a good language learner. The approaches of

Oxford and Dornyei will be explored in more detail later, in looking at LLS in Section 2.2, and in examining possible research instruments in Section 3.1.1.

The many different attempts at defining the GLL are all useful in adding more rigour to the anecdotal staffroom definitions. Rubin's list of GLL characteristics (Figure 1) is most helpful, describing in practical terms how GLLs behave in going about their learning. She talks about learners taking charge, about organising their learning and using many kinds of strategy to assist in communication. Also, she has raised the important question (Rubin 1975) of what we can learn from the GLL. In this context, the most important lesson is that there are "many different kinds of 'good language learners' " (p.49); the teacher should not assume that there is a standard GLL and there are many individual differences in how they undertake their learning.

2.2 Helping students to become better language learners

As more definitions have been added to our understanding of the GLL, it has become clear that there are some GLL characteristics which are unlikely to change and others which are more open to influence and instruction. It is this latter category which can help teachers to devise ways of helping students to become better language learners. For example, the motivation of students can be influenced by the actions of a teacher in creating a positive and supportive atmosphere in the classroom, and tools to help students to analyse their learning styles may help them to consider making changes to that style.

However, the GLL characteristic which gives the greatest potential for change is that relating to a student's use of language learning strategies. While there may be differences in how these LLSs may be defined, there seems to be general agreement that they can be taught to students, and that this teaching will help students to become better

language learners. This section will discuss some definitions of LLS before looking at the ways in which they can be used to help students.

2.2.1 Definitions of LLS

Rubin (1975) gives a starting point in referring to LLSs as "techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge" and Oxford (1990) takes this further when she defines LLS as "steps taken by students to enhance their own learning", making the two key elements of LLS clear, namely that they involve specific action on the part of the student and that the student takes that action for a specific learning purpose. A more complete definition from Oxford in Renandya and Richards (2002) adds more types of student activity, listing "specific actions, behaviours, steps or techniques that students (often unintentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills", as well as widening the purpose and introducing the notion of intent.

The definitions of strategies (see Figures 2 and 3 on the following pages) provided by Oxford (1990) give detailed insights into the direct and indirect ways in which students manage their own learning, breaking these down into a detailed taxonomy, which is useful for making teachers aware of the range of externally observable and, more commonly, internalised LLSs. For clarity, I have used the diagrammatic representation of these created in Brown (2000).

In looking at individual differences in students, Dornyei (2005) feels that "there is some sort of trait-like strategic potential that enable[s] certain learners to become effective strategy users." He is careful to distinguish between strategies and learning processes, and says that GLLs, in addition to having the right attitude and motivation, are also marked by their "active and creative participation in the learning process through the application of individualised learning techniques."

Oxford's strategy classification system, cited in Brown (2000)

Direct strategies

Figure 5.1. Oxford's strategy classification system

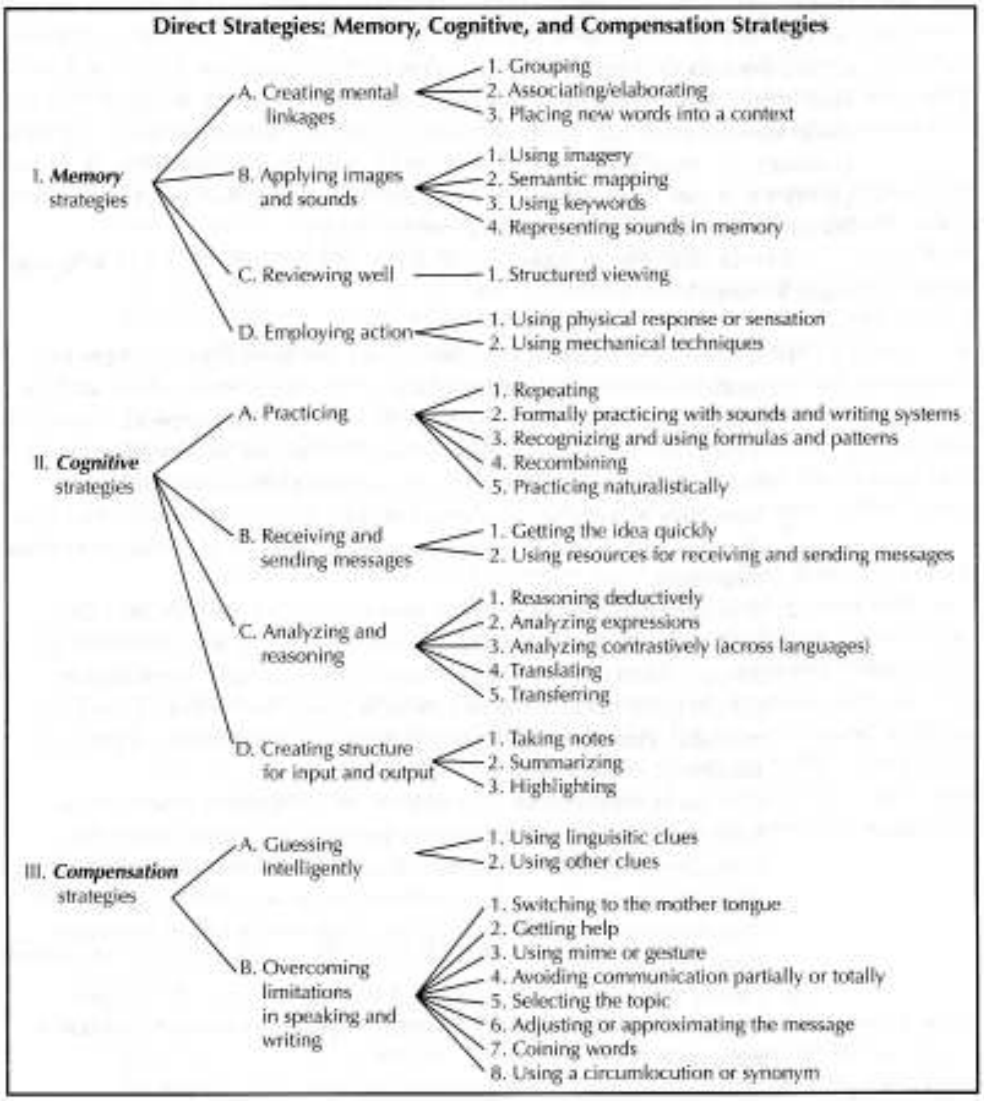


Figure 2

Oxford's strategy classification system, cited in Brown (2000)

Indirect strategies

Figure 5.1. Oxford's strategy classification system (continued)

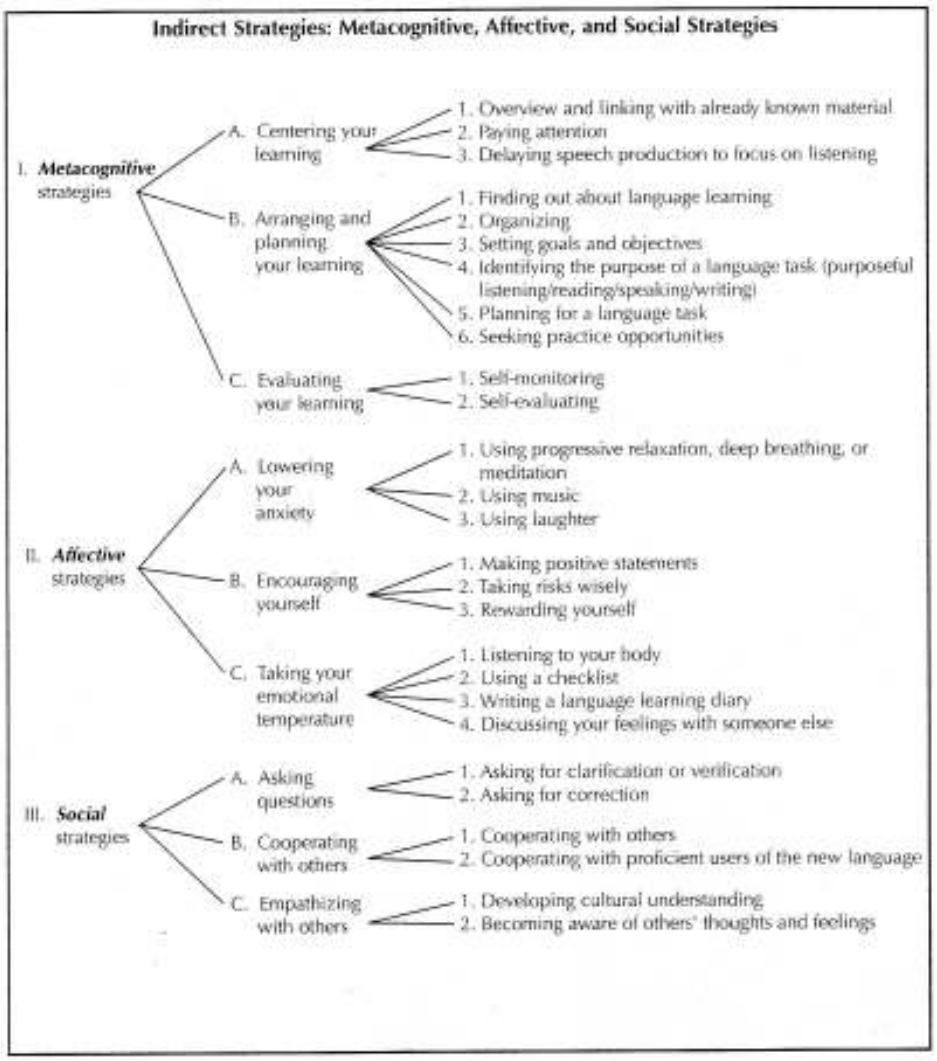


Figure 3

Dornyei (2005) felt that the concept of self regulation, from the field of educational psychology, was more accurate in looking at the way learners use strategies. What he meant by self regulation was the student's capacity to choose, apply and monitor the effectiveness of learning strategies.

This is similar to the approach taken by Chamot and Rubin (1994), who believe that "the good language learner cannot be described in terms of a single set of strategies but rather through the ability to understand and develop a personal set of effective strategies." (p.772)

2.2.2 LLS and helping students to become better language learners

In the same way that there is no single stereotypical GLL, the use of LLS is not to be standardised but rather seen as a set of tools which the student can learn to use in the appropriate circumstances. Although this may make training in LLS more difficult, it is clear that it will help students to become better language learners.

Oxford (1990) says: "Some aspects of the learner's makeup, like general learning style or personality traits, are very difficult to change. In contrast, learning strategies are easier to teach and modify." (p.12)

Grenfell and Harris, cited in Chamot (2005), are even more specific in stating that "less successful language learners can be taught new strategies, thus helping them become better language learners."

In addition, Dornyei (2005) felt that there was "an increasing body of research evidence that learning strategies played an important role in L2 attainment." (p.169)

While this is encouraging, there is a need for more practical help in achieving this improvement. Two books in particular provide that help for teachers and for students. Oxford (1990) is a good source of advice on how to implement a course of LLS instruction, and Rubin and

Thompson (1994) have written a useful book aimed language students, but also of help to teachers.

3. Current students – survey and observations

In order to find out how the literature relates to my current students and to find out more about the LLS of some of my students, I carried out a small piece of action research and also observed how my students used LLS. This was a study done with a limited number of respondents in a short period of time, and it has not been possible to carry out any follow up work such as personal interviews and journal responses, to gain a deeper understanding of actions and choices and to get the students' own perceptions of their styles and strategies. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this assignment, the study was beneficial in highlighting several areas of LLS use.

I wanted to see if there were any correlations between students' use of LLS and other factors, suggested by Dornyei (2005) and Rubin (1975), such as age, gender, language level, nationality, length of time learning English and educational level. I hope to use the findings of this study, together with my own observations in the classroom and reflections on the literature above, to develop better ways of helping my students to become better language learners.

This section will firstly describe the survey process, before reporting on my classroom observations and drawing some conclusions from both sets of findings.

3.1. Student survey

This section will outline some of the options available for carrying out a small study with my students, giving the reasons for the choice of instrument, and then describe the survey process and data analysis, before reporting the findings.

3.1.1. Exploring the options

I considered the various possible ways of discovering information on any correlations between students' personal circumstances and their use and choice of LLS, looking at student journals, interviews, surveys and questionnaires and decided that in the limited time available, a questionnaire/survey would be most appropriate. I considered three in particular: the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) published in Oxford (1990), the Language Strategy Use Inventory (LSUI) devised by Cohen and Chi and published by the Center for Advanced Research on Language Research (CARLA)[1], and the research instrument on self regulation capacity in vocabulary learning (SRCvoc) used by Tseng, Dornyei et al. (2006).

The SRCvoc instrument asks students to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement with twenty statements about vocabulary learning on a six-point scale. Tseng, Dornyei et al (2006) believe that rather than asking questions about student use of specific strategies, it would be more beneficial to "measure language learner self-regulation in a situated manner", namely, in this case, vocabulary learning, chosen because it is a central element of language learning. This means that the replies are more likely to give clear indications of student learning behaviour that will be applicable across all areas of learning.

Tseng et al prefer the phrase 'self-regulation' , which is derived from educational psychology, as they feel "it can help teachers to understand that the most important aspect of strategic learning is not the exact nature of the specific techniques that students employ but

[1] Cohen, A.D., Oxford R.L. and Chi, J.C. Language Strategy Use Inventory [online] http://www.carla.umn.edu/maxsa/documents/langstratuse_inventory.pdf (21st July 2009)

rather the fact that they choose to exert creative effort in trying to improve their own learning." (Tseng, Dornyei et al. 2006)

This capacity for self regulation "can be broken into five facets …: commitment control, metacognitive control, satiation control, emotion control, and environmental control" (Tseng, Dornyei et al. 2006). These five elements are described in more detail in Appendix 1. There is some overlap with Oxford's (1990) list of direct and indirect strategies, mostly in relation to metacognitive strategies or controls, and also in the details of affective strategies and emotional control.

3.1.2. Reasons for the choice

The SRCvoc was chosen for three reasons, one relating to the management of the survey with the students and the others relating to the wider purpose of raising student awareness of LLS and in helping me to find ways of helping students to become better learners.

Firstly, this survey provided an easily understandable set of statements for students to respond to, relating specifically to one discrete and specific area of learning, namely vocabulary. This made it a straightforward process to get a good student response,

The second reason is that in addition to providing useful data, the survey prompts students to think about their learning styles in some detail, not only in terms of observable actions and behaviour, but also in terms of underlying attitudes and emotions.

Also, the design of the instrument, in its focus on one area but its applicability to all areas of learning, makes it easier to look at the development of transferable skills in students for language strategy use.

3.1.3. The survey process

My study was carried out using the SRCvoc instrument (Appendix 2), together with a personal information sheet (Appendix 3) which

collected anonymised details about the age, gender, language level and education of each participant. The two sheets were coordinated by means of a common reference number. The students completed the survey in class, generally taking about 15-20 minutes and with some assistance on one or two items of vocabulary.

I chose two different classes of differing language levels, one at B1 level and the other at C1 level (broadly corresponding to intermediate and advanced levels; for a more detailed description, see Appendix 4), as these represent the widest range of ability in our unit at present.

3.1.4. Data analysis

Data from the completed SRCvoc forms and the personal information forms were put into a spreadsheet, and converted into numerical values to enable more detailed analysis, giving a high score to those responses which reflected a greater capacity for self regulation. Each of the twenty statements relates to one of the five elements of self regulation (see Appendix 1), with four statements for each element. The footnotes to the SRCvoc in Appendix 2 explain how these have been distributed within the survey instrument.

3.1.5. Findings

As Tseng, Dornyei et al (2006) do not include findings from classroom use of their SRCvoc instrument, it is not possible to make any comparisons with my students. Also as the size of my survey is small, the findings can in no way be regarded as authoritative or applicable to other circumstances or groups of students.

Within those limitations, some interesting initial observations may be made. For example, it is evident that the majority of the students gave more positive than negative responses to the twenty statements, and the average scores (80.8, from a maximum of 120) also suggest a positive disposition towards self regulation. However, it should be

pointed out that the SRCvoc was not intended to give cumulative scores in this way and I do not mean to suggest that higher scores indicate better students, merely that a numerical representation of the responses shows a positive disposition towards self-regulation.

Looking in more detail at the responses (Table 1 below) and grouping them according to the five control facets which Tseng, Dornyei et al (2006) used, it would seem that the students agreed more strongly with statements relating to environment and metacognitive control.

General findings – all students

Overall Comparison				
	Total score	Number of respondents	Average score	Range of scores
Students	970	12	80.8	75 - 95

Control facet comparison					
	satiation 1,8,18,19	emotion 2,6,12,15	environment 3,14,17,20	commitment 4,7,10,13	metacognitive 5,9,11,16
Average	14.4	14.2	18.8	16.9	16.5
Maximum	24	24	24	24	24
Range	12 - 18	12 - 17	14 - 23	12 - 21	13 - 20

Table 1

In a more detailed analysis relating to gender shown in Appendix 5, female students also gave a stronger response to the commitment facet.

Briefly, other findings (also in Appendix 5) were that for language level, the lower (B1) students showed a higher capacity in almost all facets; for nationality, the Saudi students showed a higher capacity, which was contrary to observation; and for educational background, there were no significant differences.

3.2. Classroom observation of current students

Surveys like the one described above can be useful in providing information about student use of LLS, particularly those aspects which are not directly observable, but they do not provide a complete picture. Another source of information is the observation of students in the classroom, thought this too is only a partial picture.

3.2.1 Student A

A female student from Brazil has been making full use of some social strategies to improve her communication skills.

For example, she:

- enjoyed working with other students from different countries
- was keen to talk to students and teachers about cultural differences between her country and theirs
- took every opportunity to speak in English to other people
- was more interested in communication than in correct forms of language
- used compensation strategies such as guessing or circumlocution

3.2.2 Student B

A male student in the same class, from Saudi Arabia, who was a little more withdrawn and considered in his approach to learning, has tended to be more analytical and has used more cognitive strategies in his learning. For example, he:

- made sure to take careful notes on vocabulary and grammar during a lesson
- liked to label his learning, building up a clearly defined structure
- enjoyed making connections with other language that he knew

Both of these students, in quite different ways, seem to display several of the characteristics which Rubin (1975) and others believe are indicative of a good language learner, the Saudi student in the way he organises information about language and has started to accept some uncertainty in the language, the Brazilian student in taking every opportunity to use the language and her confidence in communicating her meaning without worrying overmuch about errors.

In addition, they are both open to suggestions about other strategies they could use. For example, both these students responded well to a writing workshop which used peer evaluation to improve a piece of writing homework.

3.2.3 Other students

In contrast to these two students with their successful but different use of strategies, and their openness to new ideas on learning, there were several other students who were unwilling to accept advice on study skills and learning strategies, for various reasons, possibly cultural, possibly related to previous educational experience. Examples of the learning behaviour observed in these students include:

- Using bilingual dictionaries to translate word for word

- Asking teachers for answers, rather than guessing or taking responsibility themselves
- Speaking with other students in L1 during and after class
- Missing classes to practise for and take external language tests

3.3. Some observations

Both the survey and the classroom observations indicate the use or potential use of LLSs in this group of students. At the same time, there is some resistance to the advice already given in class about language learning. The two students described in more detail (students A and B) seem to show that there is no typical GLL and that students can choose LLSs that are the most suitable for them, while remaining open to other new strategies. For the other students, there is some evidence of contradiction between classroom observation and the survey findings. The survey suggests that these students have the potential to use self regulation to enhance their language learning, but their actions in class suggest otherwise.

Our students are expected to develop their own skills and strategies to take advantage of computer-based and online resources, and a more independent style of learning is vital for them in their future in higher education, setting the teachers the challenge of how to help them to become better learners, both in their language studies and also in their chosen subject. My conclusion from these observations is that it would be beneficial for all the students to undertake some analysis of their styles and strategies, to reflect on the results and for me to implement a more structured and integrated form of LLS instruction with them.

4. Discussion

This section attempts to relate some of the findings from my observations with the literature, and to find some assistance from the literature in trying to help my students to become better language

learners. While there may be some variations in describing a GLL, I can see how some of the students in my class match up to some of the characteristics in the literature, for example in Rubin's (1975) list. Likewise, when looking at student use of LLSs, the survey and the individual observations bear some resemblance to descriptions in the literature, for example from Oxford's (1990) lists of direct and indirect strategies.

To work in more detail on helping the students to become better learners, two quite different books seem to offer the best practical assistance. Oxford (1990) has a wealth of advice, describing details and broad strategy, analysing what students do and using that analysis to inform the planning and implementation of LLS instruction.

The second book, aimed at students but also useful for teachers, is Rubin and Thompson (1994), a very practical guide to help students to understand how they work, in style and strategy, and how they can change.

Both books, despite the differences in approach and style, seem to agree that the essential elements in identifying GLLs and helping the good and the less good to become better at learning a language are early awareness raising, some analysis of style and strategy, reflection by both learner and teacher, and an embedding of LLS use into classroom practice.

5. Conclusion

This essay has attempted to define the GLL and to discover if it is possible to become better at language learning. From the literature and observations, it can be seen that the concept of a GLL does exist, but that there are many individual variations of that concept. The most effective way for a student to become a better learner seems to be through the use of LLSs; the definitions of LLSs, from detailed

descriptions to more generalised personal traits or abilities, give us yet more individual variations.

In order to find the best way to help students to become better language learners, teachers need to discover more about these variations in the makeup of their students. There may be some elements of a language learner's makeup which are susceptible to change and others which are unchangeable. Equally, the use of LLS will vary from one student to another, and the teaching and learning of a list of strategies will not guarantee success. It is the ability of a good language learner to choose the appropriate strategy that makes LLS work and the ability of a good language teacher to be aware of student differences and to accommodate them in teaching style, tasks and materials, while at the same time suggesting modifications in style and strategy which may benefit the student.

Beyond that, however, as a large component of LLS success depends on learner independence and self-regulation (Tseng, Dornyei et al. 2006), there must be a limit to what teachers can do to help the student in this respect. They believe that LLS instruction "will only be effective if it is supported by an adequate foundation of self regulatory capacity in the learners" (p.96) and we can use instruments such as the SRCvoc to discover this capacity.

However, they express a more optimistic view in stating that "the most important aspect of strategic learning is not the exact nature of the specific techniques that students employ but rather the fact that they choose to exert creative effort in trying to improve their own learning." (p.95). It is this choice and this creativity that most teachers are identifying when they attempt to define a good language learner.

Where this self-regulation and creativity do not appear, teachers must rely on Rubin's (1975) belief that keeping ourselves informed about the GLL and using that knowledge in our teaching will help all our students to become better language learners.

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Appendix 1 - System of self regulatory strategies – five facets

 Commitment control, which helps to preserve or increase the learners' original goal commitment (e.g. keeping in mind favourable expectations or positive incentives and rewards; focusing on what would happen if the original intention failed).

 Metacognitive control, which involves the monitoring and controlling of concentration, and the curtailing of any unnecessary procrastination (e.g. identifying recurring distractions and developing defensive routines; focusing on the first steps to take when getting down to an activity).

 Satiation control, which helps to eliminate boredom and to add extra attraction or interest to the task (e.g. adding a twist to the task; using one's fantasy to liven up the task).

 Emotion control, which concerns the management of disruptive emotional states or moods, and the generation of emotions that will be conducive to implementing one's intentions (e.g. self-encouragement; using relaxation and meditation techniques).

 Environmental control, which helps to eliminate negative environmental influences and to exploit positive environmental influences by making the environment an ally in the pursuit of a difficult goal (e.g. eliminating distractions; asking friends to help and not to allow one to do something).

(Tseng, Dornyei et al. 2006)

Appendix 2 – SRCvoc survey form (Tseng, Dornyei et al. 2006)

Item	Learning experience	Strongly agree	Agree	Partly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	Once the novelty of learning vocabulary is gone, I easily become impatient with it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.	When I feel stressed about vocabulary learning, I know how to reduce this stress.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.	When I am studying vocabulary and the learning environment becomes unsuitable, I try to sort out the problem.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.	When learning vocabulary, I have special techniques to achieve my learning goals.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.	When learning vocabulary, I have special techniques to keep my concentration focused.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6.	I feel satisfied with the methods I use to reduce the stress of vocabulary learning.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7.	When learning vocabulary, I believe I can achieve my goals more quickly than expected.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8.	During the process of learning vocabulary, I feel satisfied with the ways I eliminate boredom.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9.	When learning vocabulary, I think my methods of controlling my concentration are effective.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.	When learning vocabulary, I persist until I reach the goals that I make for myself.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11.	When it comes to learning vocabulary, I have my special techniques to prevent procrastination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12.	When I feel stressed about vocabulary learning, I simply want to give up.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13.	I believe I can overcome all the difficulties related to achieving my vocabulary learning goals.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

14.	When learning vocabulary, I know how to arrange the environment to make learning more efficient.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15.	When I feel stressed about my vocabulary learning, I cope with this problem immediately.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16.	When it comes to learning vocabulary, I think my methods of controlling procrastination are effective.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17.	When learning vocabulary, I am aware that the learning environment matters.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18.	During the process of learning vocabulary, I am confident that I can overcome any sense of boredom.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19.	When feeling bored with learning vocabulary, I know how to regulate my mood in order to invigorate the learning process.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20.	When I study vocabulary, I look for a good learning environment.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Note: Commitment control: items 4, 7, 10, 13; metacognative control: items 5, 9, 11, 16; satiation control: items 1, 8, 18, 19; emotion control: items 2, 6, 12, 15; environmental control: items 3, 14, 17, 20.

Appendix 3 - Personal details sheet

Personal details sheet, completed by student at the same time as completing the survey. (Devised by the author)

Learner strategies action research June 2009

Reference number			
Age			
Gender			
Nationality			
Length of time learning English	In your country __ years __ months	In the UK __ years __ months	Total __ years __ months
Language Level	A1 / A2 / B1 / B2 / C1 / C2		
Education	What qualifications do you have? Please circle **High school graduate / Bachelors / Masters / PhD / Other**		
	What are you planning to do in the future? Please circle **Foundation / Bachelors / Master / PhD / Other**		
	What subject are you going to study?		

Appendix 4 – CEF descriptors

Internal document – English for International Students Unit, University of Birmingham

Descriptors for EISU Selly Oak English levels with reference to the Council of Europe Framework

OVERALL LEVELS OF PROFICIENCY

C2 (Proficient user – Very Advanced) Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations. **C1 (Proficient user – Advanced)** Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices. **B2 (Independent user – Upper Intermediate)** Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain	**B1 (Independent user – Intermediate)** Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences, events, dreams, hopes, ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. **A2 (Basic user – Lower Intermediate)** Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need. **A1 (Basic user – Elementary)** Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and

for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Appendix 5 – Survey Analysis

Comparisons:

- Gender
- Language level
- Nationality
    - Two main nationalities: Kazakh and Saudi Arabian
- Educational background

I decided not to undertake any detailed analysis relating to:

- age, as the range is not wide enough to yield anything useful
- length of time learning English, as this mostly mirrors language level

Gender

Overall Comparison[1]				
	Total score	Number of Respondents	Average score	Range of scores
Male	478	6	79.7	75 - 95
Female	492	6	82.0	75 - 88

Control facet comparison[2]					
	satiation 1,8,18,19	emotion 2,6,12,15	environment 3,14,17,20	commitment 4,7,10,13	metacognitive 5,9,11,16
Male average	14.0	13.8	19.3	15.5	17.0
Female average	14.8	14.5	18.3	18.3	16.0

NB – rounding to one decimal place results in a slight difference between the overall averages and the sum of the five elements

[1] Maximum possible **overall** score for each respondent is 120

[2] Maximum possible **facet** score for each respondent is 24

Language level

Overall Comparison[1]				
	Total score	Number of Respondents	Average score	Range of scores
C1	470	6	78.3	72 - 87
B1	500	6	83.3	73 - 93

Control facet comparison[2]					
	satiation 1,8,18,19	emotion 2,6,12,15	environment 3,14,17,20	commitment 4,7,10,13	metacognitive 5,9,11,16
C1 average	15.2	14.2	17.3	16.5	15.2
B1 average	13.7	14.2	20.3	17.3	17.8

NB – rounding to one decimal place results in a slight difference between the overall averages and the sum of the five elements

[1] Maximum possible **overall** score for each respondent is 120

[2] Maximum possible **facet** score for each respondent is 24

Nationality

Overall Comparison[1]				
	Total score	Number of Respondents	Average score	Range of scores
Kazakh	230	3	76.7	72 - 83
Saudi	501	6	83.5	74 - 93

Control facet comparison[2]					
	satiation 1,8,18,19	emotion 2,6,12,15	environment 3,14,17,20	commitment 4,7,10,13	metacognitive 5,9,11,16
Kazakh average	14.7	13.0	16.0	17.3	15.7
Saudi average	13.7	14.3	20.7	17.5	17.3

[1] Maximum possible **overall** score for each respondent is 120

[2] Maximum possible **facet** score for each respondent is 24

Educational background

Overall Comparison[1]				
	Total score	Number of Respondents	Average score	Range of scores
HSG	247	3	82.3	74 - 93
BD	561	7	80.1	72 - 86
MD	162	2	81.0	75 - 87

Control facet comparison[2]					
	satiation 1,8,18,19	emotion 2,6,12,15	environment 3,14,17,20	commitment 4,7,10,13	metacognitive 5,9,11,16
HSG	14.7	13.7	21.7	15.0	17.3
BD	13.9	14.6	18.0	17.3	16.4
MD	16.0	13.5	17.5	18.5	15.5

NB – rounding to one decimal place results in a slight difference between the overall averages and the sum of the five elements

[1] Maximum possible **overall** score for each respondent is 120

[2] Maximum possible **facet** score for each respondent is 24