

Focus on Language Learning Strategies of Advanced Learners in Japan and Sri Lanka

Kusumi Vasantha DHANAPALA

Graduate Student

Graduate School for International Development and Cooperation,

Hiroshima University

1-5-1 Kagamiyama, Higashi-Hiroshima, 739-8529, Japan

E-mail: kvasandha@hotmail.com

Abstract

Recent research on language learning strategies (LLS) has witnessed a considerable growth in both second and foreign language contexts. The research has heightened the awareness of language learning strategy use and of the factors affecting learners' strategy choice. Though some studies have attempted to explore the strategies of learners in either EFL (English as a Foreign Language) or ESL (English as a Second Language) contexts, little research has been undertaken on strategy use by advanced learners in both EFL and ESL settings. This article describes an investigation of learning strategy profiles of 101 Japanese and Sri Lankan advanced learners of English using a 60-item strategy questionnaire, a background questionnaire, and an English proficiency test. The relationship between strategy use and contexts was investigated using SPSS Version 13.0 and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The findings indicate significant differences of strategy use in both contexts which could be attributed to different cultural factors in two countries.

1. Introduction

Learning strategies are procedures that facilitate a learning task. Researchers such as Oxford (1990), O'Malley & Chamot (1990), and Cohen (1998), along with many others, have investigated a wide variety of factors related to LLS. Among such factors, the language being learned, level of proficiency, gender and motivation were definitely shown to be strongly related to learners' strategy choice. Language teachers now consider the learners' strategies and motivation as integral elements in the design and implementation of effective language instruction. According to Cohen (2005), LLS are important in language learning and teaching for two major reasons: (a) researchers can identify the metacognitive, cognitive, social and affective processes involved in language learning by investigating the strategy use of second language learners, (b) less successful language learners can be assisted to be better language learners through effective strategy instruction. The second reason is more important for classroom pedagogy and some researchers (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Ozeki, 2002; Ikeda & Takeuchi, 2003) have claimed that language learners can improve their language performance by using instructed learning strategies.

2. Research Literature

2.1. The relationship between English proficiency and LLS

There is a growing literature on the relationship between proficiency and strategy use. Researchers have found that conscious use of appropriate learning strategies typifies good language learners (Stern, 1975; Rubin, 1975; Wenden, 1985; Bialystok, 1981; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). Researchers have also found that quality and appropriateness of strategy use are associated with successful completion of language tasks and with higher overall language achievement and proficiency (O'Malley et al., 1985; Chamot & Küpper, 1989; Watanabe, 1990; Green & Oxford, 1995; Dreyer & Oxford, 1996; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Park, 1997; Chamot et al., 1999; Oxford, 2001; Lan & Oxford, 2003).

The early studies on 'good language learners' (Rubin, 1975; Naiman et al., 1978 and Rees-Miller, 1985), revealed five major features of successful language learning: (a) a concern for language form, (b) a concern for communication, (c) an active task approach, (d) an awareness of the learning process, and (e) a capacity to use strategies flexibly in accordance with task requirements. Some other studies (Huang & Vann, 1987; Rees-Miller, 1985) refer to the importance of learners' attention to meaning. Good language learners also show active involvement in language learning and are aware of the learning processes. They also make use of metacognitive knowledge which helps them assess their needs, evaluate their progress and give direction to their learning, and such knowledge gives learners control over their own learning. Moreover, good language learners also employ flexible and appropriate use of learning strategies; advanced learners are generally reported to frequently use a greater number of strategies and to employ higher levels of overall strategy use (Green & Oxford, 1995). Some Taiwanese studies (Yang, 1996; Lin, 1999; Wang, 2002 and Lan & Oxford, 2003) have revealed that advanced learners in Taiwan tended to use strategies more frequently than low and intermediate level learners.

Takeuchi (2003), in an attempt to ascertain the specific strategies preferred by Japanese good language learners through learners' biographies, identified that good language learners had paid much attention to the use of metacognitive strategies and some strategies seemed to be closely connected to a certain stage of learning. On the contrary, Politzer & McGroarty (1985) found that good language learners' language proficiency did not relate to categories of their strategy use as a whole, but, that there were certain individual strategy items which showed significant association with their proficiency measures. Also, some research have revealed that both successful and less successful learners had used a larger number of strategies more frequently while less successful learners were deficient in selecting and orchestrating strategies appropriate to the task at hand (Abraham & Vann, 1987; Vann & Abraham, 1990). McIntyre (1994) stresses that either proficiency influences the choice of strategies or that the strategy choice is simply a sign of proficiency level. In line with McIntyre's view, Green & Oxford (1995) claim that active use of strategies helps learners attain higher proficiency, which, in turn, makes it more likely that proficient learners select active use of strategies.

3. Research Questions

Recent studies on language learning strategies in different language learning contexts has gained increasing popularity among researchers and teachers who are interested in understanding how languages are learned. However, there is a little research done on cross-cultural differences in the use of language learning strategies. Among the many factors which might influence language learners' choice of strategies are the learners' educational and social environments. Therefore, this study has two major purposes: (a) to recognize different or similar patterns of strategy use by Japanese and Sri Lankan advanced English learners; and (b) to recognize particular educational and social environments in both countries which contribute to possible differences of strategy use even though they are considered to be in the same language proficiency level. For these purposes,

three research questions were addressed in this study:

1. Is there any relationship between overall strategy use and contexts?
2. For Japanese and Sri Lankan learners, what are the most and the least frequently used broad strategy categories?
3. How do Sri Lankan learners differ from Japanese learners in the use of individual strategy items of six broad strategy categories?

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

A total of 101 Japanese and Sri Lankan advanced learners of English participated in this study. These participants consisted of 45 (44%) Sri Lankan (SL) learners and 56 (55%) Japanese (JP) learners. The SL group was learning English as a subject in the first year in the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. Their mean score on the Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT) was 85.00 ($SD = 8.11$). The JP learners were majoring in English in the 3rd and 4th years in Hiroshima University, Japan and were expecting to be English teachers. Their mean of CELT score was 84.68 ($SD = 5.84$). They used English in most classes they took though they did not use English as extensively as SL learners.

4.2 Instrumentation for data collection procedure

Three instruments were used in this study: (a) a background questionnaire, (b) the CELT which consisted of 75 grammatical items and (c) a modified version of Oxford's SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) with 60 strategy items adapted to be better transferable between two sociocultural contexts of Sri Lanka and Japan. The SILL consists of six broad strategy categories: memory strategies for storing and retrieving new information of the target language; cognitive strategies for understanding and producing the target language; compensation strategies for overcoming limitations of knowledge in the target language; metacognitive strategies for coordinating the learning process; affective strategies for regulating emotions, motivations and attitudes and social strategies for learning through interaction with others. The strategy items were measured using 5-point Likert scaled responses from 'never' to 'always'. The internal consistency reliability of the modified version of the questionnaire was satisfactorily high at .91 on Cronbach alpha.

4.3. Data analysis procedure

To analyze the data, descriptive and inferential statistics were obtained using the SPSS version 13.0 and ANOVA 4 on the web (Copyright © 2002, Kiriki Kenshi). A 2X6 way ANOVA was conducted with overall strategy use (six broad categories of memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensation, affective and social strategies) as the dependent variable and context (Japan and Sri Lanka) as the independent variable to identify any significant differences in the use of strategies. Ryan's post hoc test was used to identify specific differences. To determine the significance throughout the study, a standard of $p < .05$ was used.

5. Results

5.1 Results for Research Question 1

Is there any relationship between overall strategy use and contexts?

ANOVA results revealed that there were significant differences between JP and SL contexts with regard to overall strategy use, [$F(1,99) = 33.587, p = .001$]. Also a significant difference was demonstrated among strategies, [$F(5,495) = 19.502, p = .001$]. Moreover, an interaction between contexts and strategy use, [$F(5,495)$

= 12.311, $p = .001$] was also observed according to the results. (See Table 1.)

Table 1 - Significance between Strategy Use and SL and JP Contexts

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	P	
A: Contexts	46.054	1	46.054	33.587	0.0000	****
Error [S(A)]	135.748	99	1.371			
B: Strategy	21.438	5	4.287	19.502	0.0000	****
AB	13.533	5	2.706	12.311	0.0000	****
Error [BS(A)]	108.831	495	0.219			

+ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .005$, **** $p < .001$

Since there was an interaction between contexts and strategies as shown in Table 1, further clarification was needed to see where the differences lay between JP and SL contexts in the use of six strategy items. The results are shown in Table 2. Significant differences were identified between SL and JP contexts in the use of cognitive strategies, [$F(1,594) = 23.622$, $p = .001$], metacognitive strategies, [$F(1,594) = 34.125$, $p = .001$], affective strategies, [$F(1,594) = 44.094$, $p = .001$], social strategies, [$F(1,594) = 36.599$, $p = .001$] and compensation strategies, [$F(1,594) = 6.279$, $p = .10$]. However, no significant difference in the use of memory strategies was observed between these two contexts. And an interaction between strategy use and SL context, [$F(5,495) = 17.698$, $p = .001$] and between strategy use and JP context [$F(5,495) = 14.115$, $p = .001$] was also observed.

Table 2 - Interaction between Strategies and SL and JP Contexts

Effect	SS	Df	MS	F	P	
Contexts (Memory)	0.000	1	0.000	0.000	0.9936	
Contexts (Cognitive)	9.726	1	9.726	23.622	0.0000	****
Contexts (Compensation)	2.585	1	2.585	6.279	0.0125	*
Contexts (Metacognitive)	14.050	1	14.050	34.125	0.0000	****
Contexts (Affective)	18.155	1	18.155	44.094	0.0000	****
Contexts (Social)	15.069	1	15.069	36.599	0.0000	****
Error		594	0.4117			
Strategy and SL Context	19.455	5	3.891	17.698	0.0000	****
Strategy and JP Context	15.516	5	3.103	14.115	0.0000	****
Error		495	0.2198			

+ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .005$, **** $p < .001$

5.2. Results for Research Question 2

For Japanese and Sri Lankan learners, what are the most and the least frequently used broad strategy categories?

In reporting frequency use of learning strategies, Oxford's (1990) key to understanding mean scores on SILL based instruments was employed. Its scale ranges from 1 to 5: high use = 4.5 to 5.0 (always or almost always used) and 3.5 to 4.4 (usually used); medium use = 2.5 to 3.5 (sometimes used); low use = 1.5 to 2.4 (usually not used) or 1.0 to 1.4 (never or almost never used).

Table 3 reveals the mean scores for six broad strategy categories in the two contexts. For the SL learners, the mean score for overall strategy use was 3.22 on the 5-point Likert scale. This indicates the higher end of medium use range (sometimes used). Of the six categories, the most frequently used category was metacognitive strategies which were in the high use (usually used) range with a mean score of 3.60, followed by cognitive

strategies ($M: 3.39$). Social ($M: 3.21$), compensation ($M: 3.19$) and affective strategies ($M: 3.11$) were also used by SL learners more frequently than Japanese learners while memory strategies ($M: 2.76$) were the least used among all six categories.

In contrast, the mean score of overall strategy use for JP learners was 2.66 with the medium use (sometimes used) range. Of the six categories, the most frequently used strategy category for JP learners was compensation strategies ($M: 2.88$), followed by metacognitive strategies ($M: 2.85$), with a minor difference of these two categories; cognitive ($M: 2.77$) and memory strategies ($M: 2.77$) which ranked next in the order were equally used by JP learners. The least frequently used strategy category for this group was affective strategies ($M: 2.27$) followed by social strategies ($M: 2.44$). In sum, mean scores indicated that SL learners used strategies much more frequently than JP learners, except memory strategies.

Table 3 - Mean Scores of Strategy Use by SL & JP Learners

Strategies	Japan		Sri Lanka	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Test Scores	84.68	5.84	85.00	8.11
No. of Years of learning English	10.74	2.80	13.62	0.58
Memory Strategies	2.77	0.57	2.76	0.59
Cognitive Strategies	2.77	0.52	3.39	0.49
Compensation Strategies	2.88	0.48	3.19	0.60
Metacognitive Strategies	2.85	0.64	3.60	0.63
Affective Strategies	2.27	0.53	3.11	1.02
Social Strategies	2.44	0.54	3.21	0.89
Total Strategies	2.66	0.41	3.22	0.55

SL = Metacognitive>Cognitive>Social>Compensation>Affective>Memory

JP = Compensation>Metacognitive>Cognitive=Memory>Social>Affective

5.3 Results for Research Question 2

How do Sri Lankan learners differ from Japanese learners in the use of individual strategy items of six broad strategy categories?

5.3.1. Memory Strategies

Memory strategies were used equally by both JP and SL learners, yet, they were the least frequently used strategies by SL learners ($M: 2.76$) while it was the third least frequently used category for JP learners. ($M: 2.77$). SL learners' use of memory strategies was rather low compared to that of other strategy categories. However, they used some memory strategies more frequently than JP learners such as creating associations between new material and what they already know ($M: 3.51 > 3.38$) and using new English words in a sentence so that they could remember them ($M: 3.31 > 2.96$), reviewing all new English lessons often ($M: 2.89 > 2.63$) and remembering new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on street sign ($M: 2.96 > 1.95$). On the other hand, JP learners used a few memory strategies more frequently than SL learners such as creating an image or picture of the new word to help them remember that word ($M: 2.89 > 2.78$), and using rhymes ($M: 2.77 > 2.36$) and flash cards ($M: 2.75 > 2.07$) to remember new English words.

5.3.2. Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies were the second most frequently used category for SL learners (M: 3.39) and the third most frequently used category for JP learners (M: 2.77). SL learners used some cognitive strategies more frequently than JP learners such as writing notes, messages, letters or reports in English (M: 4.07 > 2.64), reading for pleasure in English (M: 4.11 > 2.62), participating in out-of class events where the new language is spoken (M: 3.84 > 2.15), reading a story or dialogue several times until they can understand it (M: 3.07 > 2.79), using English words in different ways (M: 3.78 > 2.79), starting conversations in English where there are people who can speak in English (M: 4.07 > 3.15) and first skimming an English passage (reading over the passage quickly), then going back and reading carefully (M: 3.64 > 3.10). In contrast, JP learners used some strategies more frequently than SL learners such as saying or writing new English words several times to practice them (M: 3.74 > 2.87), trying to imitate the way native English speakers talk (M: 3.90 > 2.33), practicing the sounds of English (M: 3.79 > 3.27), using reference materials such as glossaries or dictionaries to help them use the new language (M: 4.13 > 3.42) and practicing (talking to themselves) in English in their room or in a quiet place (M: 3.46 > 3.29). Both JP and SL learners understood the meaning without translating word for word into their own languages (M: 3.44 = 3.44).

5.3.3. Compensation Strategies

These strategies were the most frequently used category by JP learners (M: 2.88) while it was the fourth least frequently used category by SL learners (M: 3.19). However, SL learners' use of compensation strategies was rather higher than that of JP learners. The two more frequently used compensation strategies by SL learners were asking the other person to tell them the right word if they could not think of it in a conversation (M: 3.04 > 2.38), and using a word or phrase that means the same thing if they could not think of an English word (M: 3.53 > 2.95). On the other hand, JP learners used strategies more frequently than SL learners such as guessing to understand unfamiliar words (M: 3.90 > 3.56), using gestures or switching back to their own language momentarily when they could think of a word during a conversation (M: 3.54 > 3.11), and making up new words if they did not know the right ones in English (M: 3.36 > 2.53).

5.3.4. Metacognitive Strategies

These strategies were the most frequently used category by SL learners (M: 3.60) and the second most frequently used category by JP learners (M: 2.85). The more frequently used metacognitive strategies by SL learners were planning their schedules so that they will have enough time to study English (M: 3.49 > 3.13), looking for opportunities to read as much as possible in English (M: 3.62 > 2.69), trying to look for or associate with good speakers of English (M: 3.60 > 2.77), arranging their physical environment to promote learning (M: 3.56 > 3.03), and trying to find all they could about how to be better language learners, by reading books or articles or by talking with others about how to learn (M: 3.42 > 3.05). In contrast, JP learners used some metacognitive strategies more frequently, such as noticing their English mistakes and using that information to help them improve (M: 3.97 > 3.67), trying out how to be better learners in English (M: 3.77 > 3.64), and evaluating their progress in learning English by taking national and international exams (M: 3.52 > 3.42).

5.3.5. Affective Strategies

This category was the least frequently used strategy category by JP learners (M: 2.64) and the second least frequently used strategy category by SL learners (M: 3.11). However, SL learners used these strategies much more frequently than JP learners. The more frequently used affective strategies by Sri Lankan learners were (a)

trying to relax whenever they felt anxious of using English (M: 3.38 > 2.98), (b) giving themselves rewards or treating when they did well in English (M: 3.02 > 3.00), (c) keeping a diary or journal to write down their feelings in the English language (M: 3.00 > 2.11) and (d) talking to somebody they trusted about their attitudes and feelings concerning the English language learning process (M: 2.98 > 1.82). In contrast, the most used affective strategies by JP learners was encouraging themselves to speak in English even when they were afraid of making mistakes (M: 3.70 > 3.33) and noticing if they were tense or nervous when they were using English (M: 2.54 > 2.15).

5.3.6. Social Strategies

Social strategies were the second-least frequently used category by JP learners (M: 2.44) while it was the third-most frequently used category by SL learners (M: 3.21). SL learners used all social strategies much more frequently than JP learners. These strategies were asking questions in English in order to be involved as much as possible in conversation with others in English (M: 3.40 > 2.38), practicing English with others (M: 3.33 > 2.69), asking the other person to slow down or repeat or clarify what was said if they did not understand something in English (M: 3.29 > 1.43), asking English speakers to correct them while talking (M: 3.07 > 2.86), trying to learn about the culture of the English speakers (M: 3.00 > 1.91), and talking with their colleagues about their feelings and thoughts in English (M: 3.20 > 2.08).

6. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the average frequency of overall strategy use in both countries was similar to most studies conducted in foreign language (FL) situations (Oh, 1992; Yang, 1993; Green & Oxford, 1995; Park, 1997), but it was lower than that of studies done in second language (L2) contexts (Phillips, 1991; Rossie-Le, 1995) and these studies show that L2 learners tend to report high frequencies of strategy use on SILL. In this study, with regard to SL learners, only metacognitive strategies were reported in the high use range while the other five strategy categories (cognitive, compensation, memory, affective and social strategies) were in the medium use range. The most frequently used strategy category for SL learners was metacognitive strategies followed by cognitive strategies, (metacognitive > cognitive). This held true with other studies (Davis & Abas, 1991; Oh, 1992; Fleming & Walls, 1998; Takeuchi, 2003). In Sri Lanka, there were minute differences among social, affective and compensation strategies, while the least-used category was memory strategies.

SL learners of English used memory strategies least frequently. The questionnaire items used in this study consisted of strategies used by all the learners at different levels of proficiency. This may be due to the reason that they are advanced learners who prefer to use only the memory strategies suited to their level of learning, such as activating prior knowledge in their learning, and constructing sentences with new words in order to remember them. It is also interesting to find that SL learners and JP learners used memory strategies evenly in the same range.

On the other hand, the findings of this study indicate why metacognitive strategies were more often used than other strategies, considering the critical roles of metacognitive involvement in L2 acquisition in general and in LLS in particular. SL learners' use of these strategies was in the high use range while these strategies were the second-highest frequently used category by JP learners. The implication may be that both groups, SL learners in particular, were well aware of their own learning processes and of the strategies which assist them to achieve learning outcomes. The analysis of individual metacognitive strategy items revealed that both groups, especially SL learners, exerted themselves to be better language learners by orchestrating clusters of metacognitive strategies. This finding is consistent with that of Takeuchi (2003) who revealed that metacognitive strategies related to

maximizing input and the opportunities to use a FL were the most preferred strategies by Japanese good language learners. Gass (1993) also indicates that metacognitive awareness is of particular value to second language learners because it facilitates comparisons between L1 and L2, encourages self-correction and may even play a role in self-monitoring.

In contrast, it is interesting to find that JP learners used compensation strategies most frequently and affective strategies least frequently, followed by social strategies. This held true with JP learners (Watanabe, 1990; Dhanapala, 2006), with Chinese learners (Chang, 1990), with Taiwanese learners (Yang, 1993) and with Thai learners (Mullins, 1992). Why JP learners used compensation strategies most frequently may be attributed to their cultural backgrounds. In Japan, English is taught and learned as a FL, and therefore their knowledge is limited in the target language. Thus, it appears that Japanese learners use the target language for either comprehension or production despite their limitations in knowledge. Guessing to understand unfamiliar words was the most popular strategy for JP learners. This is true with Chinese learners – both mainland and Taiwan – who learn English as an FL (Yang, 1993). Takeuchi (2003) also found in his study that good language learners engaged in guessing the meaning but noting down those unknown words and subsequently checking their meanings in dictionaries.

The fact that Japanese learners used affective strategies least frequently and social strategies less frequently may confirm the belief that FL learners generally avoid social interaction to learn an L2. The JP learners' less frequent use of affective and social strategies may be attributed to their grammar-oriented language learning experience in the classroom, limited opportunities to use English with other people both in and outside the classroom, or their particular belief about language learning that is related to strategy choice. The affective side of the learners – their attitudes, emotions, self-esteem, anxiety, risk taking, and tolerance for ambiguity, and so forth. – is one of the biggest influences on language learning success or failure. In the FL situation, language learners seem to have negative emotions and attitudes in learning which may hinder their progress in the target language. In addition, considering that social strategy use may require affective demands, the fact that JP learners used affective strategies least frequently may be related to their less frequent use of social strategies.

However, it is interesting to find that SL learners used strategies more frequently than JP learners though both groups are advanced learners. This fact, which was more obviously observed in the use of cognitive and social individual strategy items, could be explained through cultural differences in both countries. In Sri Lanka as a commonwealth country, English plays a major role in her social, political, economic and educational spheres, and hence it gives much stimulus and abundant visual and auditory input for SL learners to use specific strategies relevant to the SL context, such as participating in out-of class events where English is spoken, practicing English with friends, reading for pleasure in English, starting conversations in English where there are people who can speak in English and so forth. Conversely, this richer linguistic environment cannot be observed in Japan since English is taught and learned as a FL, and there is no authentic input available for JP learners. On the other hand, SL learners are highly motivated in learning English since higher proficiency in the language is essential for social mobility and also authentic interaction opportunities are readily available, especially in urban areas. Therefore, advanced learners, in particular, are more motivated intrinsically than JP advanced learners who are only extrinsically motivated in learning English (Dhanapala, 2006). In addition, with regard to the length of time, SL learners have much more exposure in learning English in the school system than JP learners: SL learners are taught English from grade one in elementary schools whereas JP learners formally start learning English from grade one in junior high schools.

The results of this study do not support the findings that learners in higher language proficiency generally report higher levels of overall strategy use and frequent use of strategies. (Green & Oxford, 1995). However,

consistent with the findings of the study by Politzer & McGroarty (1985), we could infer that language proficiency do not relate to the learners' use of broad strategy categories as a whole, but, there are certain individual strategy items which showed significant association with their proficiency measures. Moreover, the learners' strategy choices and preferences differ according to the different cultural contexts in which they are in.

7. Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study suggest a number of implications and extensions for the classroom. In Japan, English is taught and learned as an FL, whereas in Sri Lanka it is contrasted with that of the SL. Generally, foreign language learners receive input in the target language in the classroom and have to go out of their way to find stimulation and input in the target language. This suggests that JP learners experience a degree of linguistic and social deprivation concerning English. Often the classroom is the only opportunity for these learners to come into contact with the language and culture. Therefore, teachers should go beyond their traditional role of instruction to help learners learn English more effectively, and are recommended to create a learner-centered classroom in which learners are assigned to work on different tasks, in pairs or groups, which can promote maximum communicative interaction.

The study found that the Japanese learners used affective strategies least frequently. Therefore, teachers should try to exert an influence over the emotional atmosphere of the classroom. According to Oxford (1990), the classroom can be arranged in three different ways: by changing the social structure of the classroom to give learners more responsibility, by providing increased amounts of naturalistic communication, and by teaching learners to use affective strategies. Thus, teachers could allocate time in the language classroom for practice time that reduces their anxiety and also inculcate positive attitudes into learners in studying the language and using it in different social contexts. Teachers' encouragement with positive statements can make learners feel more confident in learning English and even self-encouragement via positive statement can change learners' feelings and attitudes and can indirectly reduce performance anxiety, including tension. Teachers could also push learners to take risks tempered with good judgment in a language learning situation, even though there is a chance of making a mistake or looking foolish. In addition, one of the best remedies is incorporating cooperative language learning activities into the language classroom that will enhance learners' motivation and their self-esteem through altruistic and mutual concern towards each other, and increase their confidence and enjoyment. This approach is more appropriate for the non-competitive Japanese classroom, since it reduces the need for competitiveness; it is less threatening for many learners; it increases the amount of learners' participation in the assigned tasks, and it reduces the teachers' dominance in the classroom.

The study also found that both Japanese learners and Sri Lankan learners used memory strategies evenly and it was the least used strategy category by Sri Lankan learners. Memory strategies help language learners to cope with remembering the large amounts of vocabulary necessary to achieve fluency; they also enable learners to store verbal material and then retrieve it when needed for communication. Thus, memory strategies can be powerful contributors for language learning. Therefore, teachers both in Japan and Sri Lanka should give appropriate instruction in employing these powerful mental tools which come to the aid of the learner in language performance.

This study reveals a number of limitations and opens some avenues for further research. One of the limitations is that the proficiency test used in this study to measure the language proficiency of the participants consisted of only 75 grammatical items, and therefore it was not a strong predictor of the participants' actual proficiency level regarding all skills. The other limitation is that it used a modified questionnaire to find out the relationship between LLS and contexts. The modified SILL alone does not give a full picture of what these

strategies represent for advanced learners, though it has intended to tap strategies for general language learning purposes. Therefore, advanced learners' strategy use distinguished from specific skills (speaking, reading, writing, listening as well as grammar and vocabulary), their learning styles and different tasks at hand should be investigated in future research, using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

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