



The Relationship between Metacognition and Business English Learning

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Abstract

This research aims to present metacognitive strategies used by foreign language learners. The research involves the second year Business English students at the intermediate level of knowledge (N=50). We use the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), by Rebecca Oxford in order to present the extent to which metacognitive strategies are used by Business English learners. The theoretical significance of this research is in an attempt to highlight metacognitive strategies as a useful way of learning a foreign language. The social significance of this study is to examine metacognitive strategies used by the second year Business English students at the intermediate level of knowledge, based on the results obtained by means of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The research results showed that the students use metacognitive strategies in learning Business English.

Keywords: metacognitive strategies, metacognition, Business English, learning foreign languages

Apstrakt

Ovo istraživanje ima za cilj da predstavi metakognitivne strategije koje se koriste od strane studenata stranih jezika. Istraživanje obuhvata studente poslovnog engleskog jezika na drugoj godini studija na srednjem nivou znanja engleskog jezika (N = 50). U istraživanju koristimo Inventar strategija za učenje jezika (ISUJ) dizajniran od strane Rebeke Oksford kako bismo predstavili u kojoj meri studenti poslovnog engleskog jezika koriste metakognitivne strategije. Teorijski značaj ovog istraživanja je u pokušaju da se istaknu metakognitivne strategije kao koristan način učenja stranog jezika. Društveni značaj ovog istraživanja je da se, na osnovu rezultata dobijenih putem kvantitativnih i kvalitativnih metoda istraživanja, ispituju metakognitivne strategije koje koriste studenti poslovnog engleskog jezika na drugoj godini studija na srednjem nivou znanja engleskog jezika. Rezultati istraživanja su pokazali da studenti koriste metakognitivne strategije u učenju poslovnog engleskog jezika.

Ključne reči: metakognitivne strategije, metakognicija, poslovni engleski, učenje stranih jezika

1. Introduction

Metacognition connects medicine and psychology; linguistics and philosophy. Metacognition is used as a form of treatment in mental health. The usage of

metacognition in learning is a “philosophical” approach to learning Business English or foreign languages in general. Namely, philosophy requires a lot of thinking and self-reflection

(introspection), and precisely *thinking* and *self-reflection* (introspection) are the two determinants of metacognitive strategies. This paper deals with Segment D of the *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL) and presents the usage of metacognitive strategies in learning English by Business English students at the intermediate level of knowledge.

In what follows, we will first define language learning strategies in general and afterwards, we will present the specificity, definitions and research results on metacognitive strategies, in particular. There are many definitions of language learning strategies. Cameron (2001) gave perhaps the simplest definition of language learning strategies: “the actions that learners take to help themselves understand and remember vocabulary items” (Cameron, 2001: 92 in Boonkongaen, 2012: 46). In this definition, the accent is on the learners and the importance of using language learning strategies in learning new lexemes. To put it simply, “Learning begins with the learner” is a *leitmotiv* in using language learning strategies (Nyikos & Oxford, 1993: 11 in Kameli et al., 2012: 24). Metacognitive strategies are particularly useful because, by using them, students can evaluate the success of a language task, monitor errors and identify the needs and preferences related to the language learning strategies (Oxford,

2003: 13). This self-reflection is an important part of learning foreign languages.

2. Metacognitive strategies – definitions

Metacognitive strategies represent the ways of thinking about the learning process (“thinking about thinking”), planning, evaluation of understanding and the development of language production and finally, self-reflection (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990: 8). Self-reflection also includes identifying the learning style, organization and collection of learning material, monitoring mistakes etc. (Oxford, 2003: 12). The usage of metacognitive strategies is an indicator of advanced foreign language knowledge (Dreyer & Oxford, 1996; Oxford, Judd, & Giesen, 1998 in Oxford, 2003: 12-13). The factors that influence the choice of metacognitive strategies are: motivation, learning style, affective filter, anxiety, critical thinking and years of learning a foreign language. Examples of metacognitive strategies are: directed attention towards the learning task, self-evaluation, or acknowledging success and difficulties in learning attempts (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990: 99).

3. Research on Metacognitive strategies

Research results have shown that metacognitive strategies are helpful in reading and understanding the text. Furthermore, they are helpful in developing all four language skills, both receptive skills: reading, listening and productive skills: writing, speaking (Mijušković, 2014:105). There are three phases that are used in reading by more advanced students: pre-reading, during reading and post reading (Ibid.). Metacognitive strategies are applicable to all these phases. For example, in the first, *pre-reading phase* there is “a conversation about a text based on a photograph or questions”; then, in the second, *during reading phase*, learners “identify main ideas, make conclusions, focus on the specific information in a text” and the third phase, *post reading phase*, includes summarizing and paraphrasing a text by foreign language learners (Ibid: 108).

McKeown & Gentilucci (2007) in their paper entitled the „Think-Aloud Strategy: Metacognitive development and monitoring comprehension in the middle school second-language classroom“ dealt with the so-called the *think-aloud* metacognitive strategy used by high school students who are learning English as a second language. The authors describe metacognition as “thinking about our own thinking”. They highlight the

importance of mastering the strategies for successful text-reading. The *think-aloud* strategy means that students say aloud what they are thinking about while, for example, reading a text. It is believed that students of foreign languages benefit from *think-aloud* strategy, because it requires from a reader “to stop and explore the text - a simple recipe to involve the reader” (Loxterman, Beck & McKeown, 1994 in McKeown & Gentilucci, 2007: 136).

At the beginning of their paper they provide us with a great observation regarding the use of learning strategies in the classroom. Namely, the teachers should not make a mistake and consider all the teaching strategies good enough and applicable to all the levels of English language knowledge (McKeown & Gentilucci, 2007: 136). As a natural continuation of the previous statement: an effective student or a good user of language learning strategies knows when to use a certain strategy, as well as when to leave the chosen strategy and choose another one (Jones et al. 1987: 15 in Peñuelas, 2012: 79).

4. Rebecca Oxford’s taxonomy of language learning strategies

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) by Rebecca Oxford contains a total of 50 statements related to the strategies for learning English (foreign) language,

which are a part of the taxonomy of strategies, i.e. their division into six groups. Namely, Rebecca Oxford (1990) classified the strategies of teaching English into six groups, more precisely, six segments A-F, which represent the taxonomy of strategies for language learning.

These are, as follows:

1. Segment A: Memory strategies
2. Segment B: Cognitive strategies
3. Segment C: Compensatory strategies
4. Segment D: Metacognitive strategies
5. Segment E: Affective strategies
6. Segment F: Social Strategies

This is the most detailed classification of language learning strategies. The frequency of the strategy use can be observed through the *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning*.

5. Methodology of research

In this chapter, we will describe the research sample and data collection methods used in conducting a research on metacognitive strategies. The participants of this research are the students of Business English at the intermediate level (N=50).

5.1. The choice of the research sample

In order to obtain the data in this study, we used the *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* by Rebecca Oxford (Oxford 1990). We focused on the survey

which was conducted on a sample that consists of 50 second-year students of Novi Sad Business School. This research is done as a pilot sample size and as a basis for further research to make data more reliable.

5.2. The description of the research sample

First, at the beginning of this research, the students of Novi Sad Business School (N=50) completed the initial questionnaire, whose aim was to collect demographic data of the respondents. It included general information about the students such as: academic year, study programme, knowledge of other foreign language(s) apart from English etc. Male respondents comprise 44% of the sample, while female respondents comprise 56% of the sample.

5.3. Data collection methods

In this study we used quantitative methods of data collection by using the questionnaire designed by Rebecca Oxford. Fifty students of Business English completed the questionnaire – a Likert scale as an assessment strategy designed by Rebecca Oxford, *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL).

**6. Analysis of Research Results:
Metacognitive strategies used by
Business English students**

In Table 1, given below we can observe minimal and maximal results, the arithmetic mean (AM) and standard deviation (SD) of the participants' answers on the statements about the use of metacognitive strategies found in the *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL). Segment D (metacognitive strategy) of the *SILL* deals with the use of metacognitive strategies in paying attention to our own mistakes in learning, finding ways to learn successfully, i.e. thinking about learning, but also looking for people one can talk to in English.

Many studies have shown that the use of metacognitive strategies is an important indicator of advanced foreign language knowledge (Dreyer & Oxford, 1996; Oxford, Judd, & Giesen, 1998 in Oxford, 2003: 12-13). The results of the research on the use of metacognitive strategies highlight the fact that the second year students at Novi Sad Business School are on the advanced level of Business English knowledge. In Segment D (metacognitive strategies) students scored an average of about 28 points from possible 45 points, meaning that the use of metacognitive strategies is at a satisfactory level (see Table 1).

Our results were similar to the research results in the United States, which refer to the tendency of foreign language students to think about learning a foreign language by using a variety of metacognitive strategies (Fitzgerald, 1995 in McKeown & Gentilucci, 2007: 137). Business English students from Serbia (Novi Sad Business School, second year of studies) express the highest agreement with the following statements found in Segment D (metacognitive strategy): „I pay attention when someone is speaking English” (AM=3,9), „I try to find out how to be a better learner of English” (AM=3,72), „I think about my progress in learning English” (AM=3,56) and „I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better” (AM=3,42). Frequent use of metacognitive strategies by students is reflected in all language skills (both receptive and productive). Metacognitive strategies are important for successful foreign language learning, learning native languages and the development of all language skills: listening, reading (receptive) and speaking, writing (productive) (Mijušković, 2014: 105). In addition, Business English students set the clear objectives for learning Business English: „I have clear goals for improving my English skills” (AM=2,94). Equally, they „try to find as many ways as possible to use their English”(AM=2,94).

In analysing data and thinking about findings, we should take into account the statements that belong to metacognitive strategies and for which the participants demonstrate lower agreement. These are, as follows: “I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English” (AM=2,43); “I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English” (AM=2,52); “I look for people I can talk to in English” (AM=2,54). There is a discrepancy between the statement with the highest frequency of use „I pay

attention when someone is speaking English” (AM=3,9) and the lowest frequency of use “I look for people I can talk to in English” (AM=2,54). Students are eager to hear someone who is speaking English, but are reluctant to start a conversation with that person. The research may imply that communicative activities should be an integral part of teaching, to motivate students and teach them **how to** speak more in English, not just to listen to a reliable input.

	Minimum	Maximum	Arithmetic Mean (AM)	Standard Deviation (SD)
D-METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES	15.00	45.00	28.3333	7.95822

Table 1. Minimal and maximal results, the arithmetic mean and standard deviation (summation) of the participants' answers on the use of metacognitive strategies (Segment D)

	Minimum	Maximum	Arithmetic Mean (AM)	Standard Deviation (SD)
D1. I try to find as many ways as possible to use my English.	1.00	5.00	2.9388	1.23167
D2. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	1.00	5.00	3.4200	1.08965
D3. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	2.00	5.00	3.9000	1.01519
D4. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	2.00	5.00	3.7200	.90441
D5. I plan my schedule so I will have	1.00	5.00	2.4286	1.15470

enough time to study English.				
D6. I look for people I can talk to in English.	1.00	5.00	2.5400	1.21571
D7. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	1.00	5.00	2.5200	1.09246
D8. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	1.00	5.00	2.9400	1.16776
D9. I think about my progress in learning English.	1.00	5.00	3.5600	1.14571

Table 2. Minimal and maximal results, the arithmetic mean and standard deviation of the participants' answers on the statements about the use metacognitive strategies (Segment D)

7. Conclusion

The use of metacognitive strategies should be applied to the problems of practice, since too often, we teach students what to think but not *how to think*. This paper presented the theoretical views and research results on metacognitive strategies. Furthermore, the paper presented the metacognitive strategies for learning Business English through the research in which the participants were second year Business English students at the intermediate level (N=50). The paper highlighted the types of metacognitive strategies that are used with the highest,

as well as with the lowest frequency. Overall, the research results showed that the respondents in this research are led by metacognition in learning Business English. This research is done on a pilot sample size. The results in future should be based on a larger sample size to make data more reliable.

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