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RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

The third wind of language learning strategies research

Nathan Thomas[1]*, Heath Rose[2], Andrew D. Cohen[3], Xuesong (Andy) Gao[4], Akihiko Sasaki[5] and Teresa Hernandez-Gonzalez[6]

[1]UCL (University College London), London, UK, [2]University of Oxford, Oxford, UK, [3]University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, USA, [4]University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, [5]Mukogawa Women's University, Nishinomiya-hama, Japan and [6]Concordia University, Montreal, Canada
*Corresponding author. Email: nathan.thomas.19@ucl.ac.uk

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1. Introduction

The AILA World Congress is usually held every three years and is known as the biggest event in Applied Linguistics. Its nineteenth occurrence was scheduled to take place in August 2020 but was postponed one year and moved online owing to precautions stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. With 200 + thematic symposia, the 2021 World Congress featured presentations from thousands of experienced researchers and emerging scholars. It was this broad representation that Symposium 181, *The Third Wind of Language Learning Strategies Research*, endeavored to represent.

Organized by Nathan Thomas and Heath Rose, the symposium consisted of seven talks framed by opening remarks and further discussion by the organizers. Each selected presentation focused on pushing the field of language learning strategies in new directions: theoretically, methodologically, and/or pedagogically. Here, we concentrate on the four presentations most relevant to the theme and include the first author of each of those presentations in this report.

2. What do we mean by THE THIRD WIND?

THE THIRD WIND is a term we proposed for this symposium. Defining it requires a brief discussion of the history and expansion of the field more broadly. While the increasing number of studies published each year can be easily documented, charting theoretical-conceptual evolution is a more nuanced process. In a recent synthesis, Thomas et al. (2021) identified time periods that coincide with major theoretical and methodological developments in the field: the start of language learning strategy research (1975–1990); a boom in strategy research (1991–2005); and the 'second wind' of strategy research (2006–2019), which Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) referred to as 'a new wave of serious publications dedicated to the task of reinterpreting language learning strategies' (p. 148).

As such, THE FIRST WIND can be described as approximately the first three decades of studies that began in the 1970s, often with a practical focus on what 'good' language learners did and is distinguished by its attempts to categorize and taxonomize strategies. THE SECOND WIND, as described by Dörnyei and Ryan (2015), refers to studies taking place shortly after the turn of the century (see above). THE THIRD WIND pertains to very recent work—and future work we hope to see—that goes beyond the previous first and second wind traditions, or reinterprets them in new ways, as is discussed below.

Though not an exhaustive list of themes, the third wind includes work that advances previously underexplored theoretical perspectives, challenges perpetuated notions of rigid strategy categorizations, and seeks to represent better the social influences that impact strategic behavior. Such work may be informed by, but is not limited to, complexity theory (Oxford, 2017), sociocultural (Gao &

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Hu, 2020), and sociodynamic (Hajar, 2019) approaches. It is very much in line with Atkinson's (2011) call for alternatives to mainstream second language acquisition (SLA), although the third wind does not exclude rigorous research that may, for instance, offer cognitive explanations for certain strategic behaviors. The key ingredient is rigor. Empirically, the third wind prioritizes innovative research at the level of design, method, and/or analysis. It does not get lost in intellectualization, however, never forgetting the pedagogical implications language learning strategies research was initially conceived of to offer.

3. Selected talks from the symposium

3.1. How strategies actually combine in the performance of language tasks

In the first featured talk, Cohen and Wang showed how classification of strategies by function (e.g., metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective) has evolved through their research on strategy functions and the fluctuations of those functions during use. Despite efforts to popularize the view that language learning strategies are multifunctional in nature, the view that strategies exhibit unifunctionality still prevails in most published research. Prior to Cohen and Wang's explorations, little or no empirical research has challenged the view that strategy functions are monolithic. Their presentation argued that such a view was indeed a myth.

The featured talk drew on two studies in which Cohen and Wang conducted a micro-analysis of strategies in use. In the first study, three English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and three English as a Second Language (ESL) learners completed a vocabulary fine-tuning task. The researchers noted that whereas most language learning strategies research has accounted for strategies used separately or as part of latent factors, their study participants were found to almost always use strategies in sequences, pairs, and clusters. By analyzing these strategy combinations and their moment-to-moment functions, Cohen and Wang identified six patterns: (1) linear progression in functions (e.g., from metacognitive to cognitive); (2) simultaneous occurrence of functions (e.g., social and affective); (3) linear progression in functions + simultaneous occurrence of functions; (4) bi-directional fluctuation of functions (e.g., back and forth between metacognitive and cognitive); (5) bi-directional fluctuation + simultaneous occurrence of functions; and (6) simultaneous occurrence of functions + micro-fluctuations of functions (see Cohen & Wang, 2018).

In the second study, a case study of a hyperpolyglot (Cohen) fine-tuning word meanings in Chinese, the researchers found that the participant used separate strategies only 17% of the time, in managing language resources and in processing language information. For the most part, he used strategies in combination–in sequences (49%), pairs (29%), and clusters (5%). This was consistent with findings from the first study. In addition, given his ability to access aspects of word knowledge, take advantage of material and social resources, and engage in ongoing monitoring, the participant was able to fine-tune the meanings for 57% of his target vocabulary items correctly. Perhaps surprisingly, this strategy expert was nonetheless unsuccessful in fine-tuning the other 43% of target vocabulary items (see Cohen & Wang, 2019). Overall, this study forged new paths while maintaining what we consider to be a 'classic' case-study approach to SLA.

In both studies, Cohen and Wang's unique analysis pushed the boundaries of what has been focused on in strategies research. Their presentation provided additional evidence for the need to further investigate strategies as they are used in real time, with a focus on learners' reason(s) for choosing/combining certain strategies as well as the extent to which they are aware of whether their strategizing is effective. We see similar promise for the field with other micro-level, process-oriented methods that can be combined with verbal reports such as keystroke logging (Bowen et al., 2022) and eye-tracking (Révész et al., 2021).

3.2. Advancing a sociocultural perspective on bilingual students' self-regulated strategic learning

In the second featured talk, Gao and Hu advanced a sociocultural theory view of self-regulated strategic learning. Self-regulated learning is comprised of metacognitive processes such as planning; obtaining and using resources; and orchestrating, monitoring, and evaluating strategy use. It is closely

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associated with effective learning and has been researched alongside a host of other variables. The presenters argued that most previous work in this area has taken purely cognitive perspectives. The authors of such studies are usually interested in how learners use strategies to plan, monitor, and evaluate their cognition. However, recently, there has been increased discussion about considering aspects of the learners' discourse communities in strategy research to avoid having only a partial understanding of the learning process. For this reason, Gao and Hu stated that it is necessary for researchers to reinterpret self-regulated strategic learning using sociocultural theory.

From a sociocultural perspective, the role of contextual resources is important. Artefacts are essential, and mediation is key to enable learning to occur. By having access to material and cultural artefacts such as learning materials, learners adopt strategies that are different to those they would choose in the absence of such artefacts. Similarly, discourses about learning illustrate certain values, attitudes, and beliefs associated with how learning can/should take place. These discourses influence individual learners in conjunction with the various other social agents who mediate contextual discourses and provide support that is crucial for developing linguistic competence. Consequently, Gao and Hu drew on an adapted activity system model based on earlier work by Engeström, who expanded on Vygotsky's idea of mediation (see Gao & Hu, 2020). The system has three mediating resources: community (e.g., a social group performing similar actions with similar goals), rules (e.g., time and academic requirements), and division of labor (e.g., roles and power relationships with the community). By explaining how these mediating resources interact, researchers can explore more comprehensively how self-regulated strategic learning occurs.

To demonstrate how their sociocultural perspective can be applied, Gao and Hu drew on data from a study they conducted on bilingual students' appropriation of resources for self-regulated learning after transitioning from primary school (via Chinese medium instruction) to secondary school (via English medium instruction) in Hong Kong. The participants were six high-achieving students and six underachieving students. Using a range of qualitative methods, the researchers identified a variety of strategies and categorized them into four different groups. First, artefact-mediated strategies, which included tool-mediated (e.g., textbooks, notes, dictionary/internet) and sign-mediated strategies (e.g., first language (L1), second language (L2), symbols), although these categories are not distinct. They also identified strategies that functioned as rule-mediated (e.g., evaluation criteria-mediated and time-mediated strategies), community-mediated (e.g., school, society, and family-mediated strategies), and role-mediated (as language learners and subject content learners). Interaction among the various resources and strategies was a key finding (see Hu & Gao, 2018, 2020).

Gao and Hu presented a holistic view of self-regulated strategic learning by focusing on resource-mediated strategies within four categories that do not adhere to the traditional categorization-by-function approach discussed above. Doing so enabled them to identify distinctive sub-categories within the activity system framework as well as learners' reasons for choosing certain strategies. Evaluating choice is in line with Cohen and Wang's discussion (above), as is the view from both featured presentations that methods generally associated with qualitative research are best suited for such work. Gao and Hu also noted that large-scale follow-up studies using statistical modelling could be fruitful. Pedagogically, their presentation highlighted the importance of providing adequate resources, instruction on how to use those resources, and explanation on their usefulness. These implications tie in nicely to two other presentations we would like to highlight.

3.3. The use of smartphone-based L2 learning strategies: From other-regulation to self-regulation

Sasaki and Takeuchi presented a study they conducted that sought to determine whether the e-learning strategies used by 'good' Japanese university students ($n = 10$) were self-regulated or other-regulated based on who initiated the strategic behavior. Their research design was influenced by ongoing discussions in the field about popular definitions of language learning strategies conflating the concept with self-regulated learning. Self-regulated learners are typically seen as learners who initiate and direct their own learning without requiring regulation from another source (Oxford, 2017). However, guided by recent work from Thomas and Rose (2019)—who stated that 'some [strategic]

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learners may still be other-regulated … dependent on the OTHER to choose, teach, scaffold, or monitor their use of strategies' (p. 254, emphasis in original)—Sasaki and Takeuchi explored via semi-structured interviews what strategies the participants used and coded them by function (see above) as well as whether the strategies were self-regulated or other-regulated.

The findings showed that metacognitive and cognitive strategies were most used by the learners, which is consistent with previous research. Interestingly, only three of the 13 identified strategies were considered self-regulated and two were considered other-regulated. The remaining eight strategies were first deemed to be 'technology-assisted' and then second-level coded as self-regulated ($n = 5$) or other-regulated ($n = 3$). Thus, despite the participants having been identified as 'good' e-learners from a larger sample, their source(s) of regulation were not always the SELF. Sasaki and Takeuchi argued that the findings support Thomas and Rose's (2019) claim that it may be necessary to rethink 'current conceptualizations of strategies to allow definitions to encompass both self-regulated strategy use and other-regulated strategy use' (p. 252). This proposal places strategic behavior on a continuum from one extreme to the other. The presenters described how self-regulated strategy use could be seen as a goal that is often supported by others along the way. Pedagogically, this can be realized by offering strategy workshops and focus group discussions in which students can share their strategies with others, glean ideas from others, and refine their strategy repertoires to increase their effectiveness.

It would be interesting to see what an in-depth analysis of the functions of their participants' strategies (see Cohen and Wang above) would produce if conducted in a similar way. When coding, hard and fast distinctions between self and other could also be softened to allow for students to fall somewhere in between, as per the continuum mentioned above. It may also be that co-regulation or socially shared regulation work as accurate descriptors of the learners' behavior. Such descriptors echo Gao and Hu's discussion of a sociocultural view of strategic learning above. The pedagogical implications of theoretically informed strategy training link to the final presentation we will discuss below.

3.4. Gamification of language learning strategy instruction: From other-regulated to self-regulated strategic behavior

Hernandez-Gonzalez and Gunning's presentation elucidated a 'gamified' approach to strategy instruction. They framed their talk by discussing previous research findings that support the idea that strategy instruction is important because high-performing students tend to have better control of their strategy use. Furthermore, the presenters averred that being self-regulated during strategy use can lead to better performance and higher enjoyment. Young learners and students at lower proficiency levels, especially, need to be taught how to regulate their own learning successfully. However, this requires time, effort, and engagement in the process. Gamification uses game-like elements such as having a leaderboard, badges, elements of chance, tangible rewards, and narrative structures to help students to engage in learning processes as much as they do computer games, for example. Theoretically, this could motivate behavior, turning extrinsic motivation into intrinsic motivation in the classroom, essentially moving students along the other-to-self-regulated learning continuum.

The presenters built on Gunning et al.'s (2019) strategy instruction framework, which includes: awareness raising, explaining and modelling strategy use, three types of practice, and reflection. They gamified the framework by adding four game-like elements: completion, progression, feedback loops, and a narrative structure. They did this by breaking the process into proximal subgoals for the students, framing those subgoals as manageable challenges, visually representing progression, and providing immediate feedback on performance.

Hernandez-Gonzalez and Gunning then presented a detailed description of this process enacted in an L2 reading intervention with primary school students in Spain. As a result, the presenters reported higher levels of student engagement in classroom activities and increased motivation for both the students and their teacher. The gamified approach was also able to give more saliency to the reflection stage of Gunning et al.'s (2019) framework, which the presenters believe is often overlooked yet key in moving students from other-regulated to self-regulated learning. They caution that there may be a

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novelty effect at play and question whether the positive results they found could be sustained or transferred to other learning experiences. These are questions for further research, which could also work to determine what game-like elements are most effective in certain contexts and/or for certain tasks. Pedagogically, we see incredible promise for this line of work in the low-tech form described by Hernandez-Gonzalez and Gunning as well as high-tech variations afforded by the increasing use of immersive virtual reality and game-based language learning (e.g., Taguchi, 2021).

4. Conclusion

Overall, *The Third Wind of Language Learning Strategies Research* endeavored to showcase innovation in research by wedding scholarship from the past with theories and methodologies that are pioneering new paths for research in the field. The third wind builds on the strong exploratory foundations of the first wind, expands on the 'wave of serious publications' (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015, p. 148) in the second wind, and further prioritizes academic rigor in theorization, design, method, and analysis.

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