The Learners’ Strategies and Speaking Task in One Japanese EFL Classroom

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to confirm the relationship between the learners’ strategies and the learner’s proficiency in speaking task. The research consists of three studies. The first study is to identify what kind of strategies the Japanese learners use in speaking tasks. The second is to see how higher proficiency language learners use strategies differently in order to aid communication. The third is to compare the strategy use between Japanese learners and other nationalities.

The results confirmed that there is a close relationship between the proficiency and strategies, and the proficient learners who use Metacognitive strategy most employ a wider variety of strategies than less proficient learners. Also Japanese strategy use is not very different from that of Hispanic nationalities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The literature on learning strategies in second language acquisition emerged from a concern for identifying the characteristics of effective learners. Research efforts concentrating on the “good language learner” (Naiman et al. 1978; Rubin 1975) had identified strategies reported by students or observed in language learning situations that appear to contribute to learning. These efforts demonstrated that students do apply learning strategies while learning a second language and that these strategies can be described and classified.

Now the focus has shifted from just identifying strategies to finding the relationship between strategies and language development. Many researchers (O’Malley and Chamot 1990; Phillips 1990, 1991; Park 1994; Oxford 1996; Anderson and Vandergrift 1996) believe that there is a close relationship between proficiency and strategy use, and many of
them agree that the most important factors among many strategies are 1) active, naturalistic language use, 2) Metacognitive (planning the schedule, looking for reading opportunities, having clear goals, thinking about progress, reviewing often, making summaries, looking for conversation partners, trying to find better ways to learn English, and noticing mistakes to learn better) and 3) sensory memory strategies. These three factors appear repeatedly across data sets. These researchers also started to compare the strategy use among different nationalities believing that cultural background effects strategy choice (Oxford 1996). Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995), for example reported that the use of Metacognitive strategy ranks low among Japanese students.

Research on the learning strategies of Japanese students is increasing little by little these days. However, the studies are still limited in number, and most data were collected using only structured questionnaire. If verbal report or think-aloud protocol were used, data were collected mainly in the field of reading or listening. However, this kind of research should deal with richer data collected through many techniques so that more detailed strategies are investigated. This should be done especially in speaking, the development of which is catching a lot of attention in Japan these days. Learning strategies are keys to greater autonomy and more meaningful learning (Oxford 1990). Therefore, I am going to attempt to analyze strategies in the field of speaking by applying multiple techniques and shed light on a teachers' role in helping students develop and use strategies in more effective ways.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Definition of Learners Strategies

The following list characterizes how the term ‘strategies’ has been used in the studies to be considered (O’Malley and Chamot 1990, Oxford 1990, Bialystok 1990).

1. Strategies refer to both general approaches and specific actions or techniques used to learn an L2.
2. Strategies are problem-oriented — the learner deploys a strategy to overcome some particular learning problem.
3. Learners are generally aware of the strategies they use and can identify what they consist of if they are asked to pay attention to what they are doing/thinking.
4. Strategies involve linguistic behavior (such as requesting the name of an object) and
non-linguistic (such as pointing at an object so as to be told its name).
5. Some strategies are behavioral while other are mental. Thus some strategies are
directly observable, while others are not.
6. In the main, strategies contribute indirectly to learning by providing learners with data
about the L2 which they can then process. However, some strategies may also
contribute directly (for example, memorization, strategies directed at specific lexical
items or grammatical rules).

In O’Malley and Chamot’s framework, three major types of strategy are distinguished
in accordance with the information-processing model on which their research is based;
cognitive strategies, Metacognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies. Perhaps the
most comprehensive classification of learning strategies to date (Ellis 1994) is that provided
by Oxford. Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford 1986) contains items
tapping sixty-four individual strategies. A new taxonomy is presented (1990), in which a
general distinction is drawn between direct strategies (memory, cognitive, compensation)
and indirect strategies (Metacognitive, affective, social). Please refer to Appendix C for the
definition of these strategies.

O’Malley and Chamot (1990) refer to Metacognitive strategies as ‘higher order
executive skills that may entail planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of a
learning activity’. Cognitive strategies, ‘operate directly on incoming information,
manipulating it in ways that enhance learning’. Social/affective strategies cover ‘either
interaction with another person’ or exercising control over emotional or affective responses
to learning. It seems that Metacognitive strategies that allow students to plan, control and
evaluate their learning, have the most central role to play in determining the effectiveness of
learning.

2.2. Some previous research findings

Oxford (1990) found that beginning level students identified almost twice as many
cognitive strategies as students with intermediate level proficiency, and that about 73
percent of strategy uses by beginning students were cognitive, as compared to about 65
percent of strategy uses for intermediate level students.

In the book called Language Learning Strategies around the World: Cross-Cultural
Perspectives edited by Oxford (1996), Anderson and Vandergrift write “Increasing
Metacognitive awareness in the L2 classroom by using think-aloud protocols and other
verbal report formats” and introduces effective use of protocols in L2 research. Their results show that the mean number (and percentage) of Metacognitive strategies increased at each course level. They also show that planning strategies were by far the most popular of the Metacognitive strategies and that cognitive strategies were the most widely used for all course levels. They also found that the biggest difference between successful and less successful learners seemed to lie in the use of Metacognitive strategies and the most notable differences occurred in the use of comprehension, monitoring and problem identification. A linear relationship was shown between strategy use and language proficiency by Park (1994). Phillips (1990, 1991) also found strong relationships between ESL/EFL strategy frequencies and English proficiency levels. Competent learners often use compensation strategies and memory strategies.

Oxford says (1996) that each culture has its own approach to learning and thus to learning strategies. Cultural background affects strategy choice. It is claimed that Hispanics have a global field dependent style preference (Reid 1995), and because of this many Hispanic ESL/EFL students choose particular learning strategies. Some of these include predicting, inferring (guessing from context), avoiding details, working with others rather than alone, and basing judgments on personal relationships rather than logic. In contrast, it appears that many Japanese ESL/EFL students reflectively use analytic strategies aimed at precision and accuracy, search for small details, work alone, and base judgments more on logic than on personal interactions.

strategies including starting a conversation, looking for people to talk with, writing in English, reading for pleasure, finding reading opportunities, asking questions, using TV/radio, finding ways to use the language, learning about the culture, encouraging oneself, avoiding translation, asking for help, using familiar words differently, imitating speech, reading without looking up words, anticipating the speaker, finding a different way to say something, and using gestures and the native language temporarily.

So far, it could be summarized from the previous research findings the characteristics of Japanese learners are as follows: Reflectively use analytic strategies for accuracy and small details, are not interested in pair or group work and personal interaction and use memory strategies and cognitive strategies often and Metacognitive strategy infrequently.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research question and hypotheses

Based on the previous literature review, the following research question and two hypotheses are addressed.

Research question: Does any relationship exist between the language learning strategy and proficiency?

In this research I would like to focus on speaking, therefore, I made the following two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: The L2 learners with higher oral communication proficiency use more strategies in number and variety than low proficiency learners.

Hypothesis 2: The L2 learners with higher oral communication proficiency use Metacognitive strategies more than other strategies.

3.2. Operational definitions

Higher oral communication proficiency refers to high ability in speaking skills. It was tested by an oral interview by recording the answers on audio cassette. Responses were evaluated in three categories (ranges from 1 to 5 points); Intelligibility: vocabulary, grammar, and word usage, Responsiveness; organization, length of responses, Fluency: pronunciation, intonation, rhythm. The highest score was 15 and the lowest was 3. Please
There are many definitions of learning strategies, however, I would like to settle for a general definition: A strategy consists of mental or observable activity related to some specific stage in the overall process of language learning and acquisition or language use. 

For a taxonomy or classifications I will basically follow Oxford's (cf. Appendix C). I would like to check strategies at each of four different stages of speaking development; 1) general study at home, 2) test preparation, 3) task preparation with a partner, and 4) task performance (cf. Appendix B).

Metacognitive strategies consists of three main strategies: 1) Centering your learning, 2) Arranging and planning your learning, and 3) Evaluating your learning. These strategies are, more precisely, over viewing and linking with what is already known, paying attention, finding out about language learning, organizing, setting goals and objectives, identifying the purpose of a language task, planning for a language task, seeking practice opportunities, self-monitoring, and self-evaluating. Oxford insists that this strategy is essential for successful language learning.

3.3. Sample

The sample is sophomore female students of two different classes majoring in English at a junior college. The population of the sample is 75.

3.4. Task: Conversation at the restaurant made by two learners

Students had three lessons of conversation at a restaurant with a video material. In the first lesson they recorded all conversation on the audio cassette tape for their own study or preparation at home, and were encouraged to memorize the conversation for their future use. They were also told that there would be a test on it in the fourth week. In the fourth lesson, students were asked to make up their own conversation at a restaurant with their partner. This task was given as a type of test to see if they acquired conversation patterns and formulaic expressions in various situations at the restaurant.

Before the test they were given 10 minutes to prepare together for a conversation between a waitress and a customer and they explained the whole process of preparation and production of conversation into the cassette tape so that strategies they used could be retrieved later.

3.5. Data collection technique and procedure
Miles and Huberman (1994) stated in their book, *The Study Designs of Linking Qualitative and Quantitative Data*, that the questionnaire finding can be further deepened and tested systematically with the next round of qualitative work. Therefore, I collected both quantitative and qualitative data for the purpose of elaborating or developing analysis and getting richer detail and new insight. Quantitative data were collected from an oral communication proficiency tests. Qualitative data, consisting of learning strategies, were collected by three different techniques.

Let me explain oral communication proficiency first. Students were asked 5 questions in English concerning themselves and their families. Initial questions were selected to be easy and dealing with familiar topics so that students would not feel nervous and get panicked (cf, Appendix A). All responses were recorded onto the audio cassette tapes for the evaluation.

As for strategies collection, I used several assessment methods or techniques, because no single assessment technique is perfect. Objectivity and reliability is a very important issue in this body of research on language learning strategies.

**Think-aloud protocols** is a verbal report procedure and used to gain insights into performance strategies by asking the participants to verbalize what they are doing or thinking. It reveals in detail what information is attended to while performing tasks—information that is otherwise lost to the investigator (Ericsson 1988). However, Japanese students' reaction to this approach is skeptical or mocking, because passivity and silence is the norm in the learning process in this culture. Therefore, I selected the task of conversation, so that the participants felt natural in telling what they were thinking to communicate with each other for task preparation.

**Highly structured questionnaires** are a specific set of questions prepared in a set order by a researcher and respondents just mark each item yes or no. This was used to collect afterthoughts in this research. **Semi-structured questionnaires** asked respondents to describe or discuss language learning strategies and behavior in their own style. Therefore, the respondents had more control over the information and in their answer. This was used to investigate learning strategies at all four stages: General study at home, Preparing for the test, Planning for the task, and Production.

Before and immediately after the test, students were asked to write retrospective reports (Semi-structured questionnaire) on how they prepared for this test, what strategies they used during the task performance and their afterthoughts. Students sat in the language laboratory room in pairs with a microphone, and all their conversations were recorded on an
audio tape. Recorded preparation talks and conversations were transcribed and coded together with responses from other questionnaire sheets for the statistical analysis.

All data were coded by the 45 types using the checking list, frequencies were tallied, and they were summarized as the Strategies Employed by learners (Appendix B). They are organized into four stages and two specific features to investigate: 1. General study at home, 2. Test preparation at home, 3. Task preparation with a partner in class, 4. Performance of a task, 5. Memorization and 6. How learners associated with their partners during the performance. "Memorization" is a critical factor for a test, and "How learners associated with their partners" is another important factor for an interactive task.

3.6. Scoring and Inter-rater reliability

A communication proficiency test was graded by three examiners including myself, and students were divided into three groups by the mean score to compare the differences among groups. The two other examiners were: an American conversation school teacher who majored in journalism and had been teaching English in Japan for four years, and another American university instructor who has been teaching English in Japan for more than 10 years. Inter-rater reliability taken among the three was 0.9129, which indicates fairly high correlation.

All tape-recorded verbal reports were transcribed, and 45 types of strategies were collected as a Strategy Checking List. Together with another researcher who is a doctoral student in Temple University working in this field, I went through transcripts to code strategies using the checking list. We went through 853 items and the inter-rater reliability was 0.821 which is acceptable correlation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Study 1

First of all, overall strategy use was analyzed by frequencies and types. ‘Types’ means which kind of strategies they used. Some learners used only one type of strategy repeatedly and other learners used various types of strategies. (Please refer to Appendix B for all details of collected strategies and frequencies). Since data collected in this research do not show normal distribution, a non-parametric test was tried. For the statistical procedure, SPSS 8.01 for Windows was used throughout the whole analysis.

Overall frequencies of strategies and types are calculated and summarized in Table 1.
The table has three categories: 4 learning stages, how students memorized for the test, and how they associated with their partner to perform the task at the test. The four learning stages are divided into General Study at home, Test Preparation at home, Task Preparation with a partner at the test, and Task Performance (the test).

Table 1. Total strategy use by three groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Stage1 Study at home</th>
<th>Stage2 Test Prep. At home</th>
<th>Stage3 Task Prep. With a partner</th>
<th>Stage4 Task Performance</th>
<th>Memorization</th>
<th>Partner</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1 (a)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 (a)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>568</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 (a)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1,028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>1643</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>2,449</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, looking at the relationship between the overall strategy use and the proficiency, the figure of total strategies (1,028) in Table 1 shows very clearly that group 3 (higher proficiency group) used far more strategies than the other two (Low proficiency group: 629, middle proficiency group: 792) groups. The same things can be said for strategy type. Group 3 used 429 types, group 2 used 337 types and group 1 used 282 types. However, it is necessary to run a chi-square test to confirm if the differences are statistically significant or not. Table 2 and 3 summarizes the results.

Table 2. Chi-square test of total strategy use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency group</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average rank</td>
<td>28.71</td>
<td>38.48</td>
<td>47.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>10.348</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Df</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymptotic Sig.</td>
<td>.006**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Chi-square test of total strategy type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency group</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average rank</td>
<td>27.20</td>
<td>36.80</td>
<td>47.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>8.948</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Df</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymptotic Sig.</td>
<td>.011*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 and 3 showed significant differences in total strategy \( (X^2=0.006) \) and total type \( (X^2=0.011) \) among 3 groups. Therefore, strategy uses among three groups are significantly different both in number and in variety. This relationship can be seen from a different point of view by testing Kendall's tau b and Spearman rho to see if there is correlation between learners' proficiency and the strategy use. The result is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Correlation between proficiency and strategy use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kendall tau b</th>
<th>Spearman rho</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total strategy</td>
<td>.416**</td>
<td>.555**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total type</td>
<td>.317**</td>
<td>.430**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both test results prove that there is a strong relationship between proficiency and strategy. In other words, the higher the proficiency, the more strategies the learners use. Therefore, with the statistical results of Table 2, 3, and 4, we can conclude that Hypothesis 1: The L2 learners with higher oral communication proficiency use more strategies in number and variety than low proficiency learners, is proven.

Next details of the relationship between the strategy use and the proficiency, by each category of Table 1 are shown in the results of a Chi-square test. In Table 6 specific strategies are listed, which show significant differences between the higher proficiency group and the low proficiency group.

Table 5. Chi-square test of each category of Table 1 by 3 groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>Statistical Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chi-Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Study at home</td>
<td>1.545</td>
<td>1.491</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>9.808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Preparation</td>
<td>5.272</td>
<td>25.902</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>4.961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Preparation</td>
<td>29.909</td>
<td>53.303</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>10.701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Performance</td>
<td>5.740</td>
<td>26.267</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>.589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorization</td>
<td>8.545</td>
<td>34.817</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>.5489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>1.533</td>
<td>1.044</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. Strategies with significant differences between Group 1 and 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies with significant differences between Group 1 and 3</th>
<th>Asymptotic Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Study at Home</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listened to all tapes they recorded in class</td>
<td>.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listened to the tape and dictated conversation</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Test Preparation at Home</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorized some dictated sentences.</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation for the Task with a Partner</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed organization first</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used more than three different model conversation patterns</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used model/useful sentences learned in class</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used sentence patterns learned in the past</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Memorization</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Said aloud</td>
<td>.048</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stage 1: General Study at home shows a significant difference in strategy use among three groups, and it gives an idea that the higher proficiency learners study diligently daily. Students were not told how to learn at home for the lesson but more than half of group 3 learners listened to all tapes, dictated the conversation, and memorized them for the test. They seem to know how to plan their learning, and the low proficiency group did not. At Stage 3: Task Preparation, most of the higher proficiency learners discussed organization of the conversation first before they actually wrote down conversation sentences. However, the low proficiency learners immediately started writing down conversation sentences without thinking about the situation or setting. They also did not use a variety of conversation patterns and just copied the one model which they had just learned in class. On the other hand, the higher proficiency group discussed well how to organized the conversation and tried to make it as rich as possible by utilizing many useful sentences and expressions acquired in the past and present lessons. In both preparation stage 2 and 3, big differences seem to lie in Metacognitive strategies: planning and cognitive strategy: using resources. For Memorization, the higher proficiency group learners repeated English sentences aloud to memorize the conversation, while the most popular memorization technique of the low proficiency group was reading the text silently. Their study method does not fit the purpose of the lesson and the test, and naturally it would not help them improve communicative competence.
4.2. Study 2

This study investigated how Strategy Categories are used. All strategies in Appendix B were re-coded according to the Strategy Category Classification List (Appendix C) and Table 7 presents the outcome of the frequencies. Table 8 displays how each strategy category is used differently by groups. They are arranged in order of the most frequently used to the least.

Table 7. Total of Strategy Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Mini.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>4.226</td>
<td>13.057</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>15.600</td>
<td>6.476</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>1.573</td>
<td>3.373</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>33.706</td>
<td>20.348</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>2.240</td>
<td>.785</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>1.533</td>
<td>1.044</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>58.88</td>
<td>27.366</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. Kruskal-Wallis test of Strategy Category use across proficiency groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy category</th>
<th>Group 1 (N=27)</th>
<th>Group 2 (N=23)</th>
<th>Group 3 (N=25)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean ranking</td>
<td>Mean ranking</td>
<td>Mean ranking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>38.28</td>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>42.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>35.74</td>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>40.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>34.70</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>40.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>29.76</td>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>40.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>29.68</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>38.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>24.48</td>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>34.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7, above, clearly shows that Metacognitive strategies are used most among all strategy categories and Cognitive strategies are second. However, Table 8 indicates that there is a big differences in strategy use across groups. The most used strategy categories vary from group to group. The low proficiency group (Group 1) used Social and Compensation often and Cognitive least. Since it is an interactive task, the frequent use of social strategy is understandable. However, the fact that they used Cognitive strategy least shows that Group 1 students are not so conscious of learning. Their high use of Compensation strategy reveals that they often faced communication problems, because Cognitive strategy influences the language development directly, and this is an essential strategy for test taking. Similar things can be said of the middle proficiency group (Group 2). They should have used Cognitive and memory strategies more considering that the task was a test. On the other hand, that the higher proficiency group (Group 3) used Cognitive...
and Metacognitive strategy most and Social strategy least gives the impression that they were very conscious of being tested and studied hard. Therefore, from the statistic results of Table 8, Hypothesis 2: The L2 learners with higher oral communication proficiency use Metacognitive most of all strategies, is not proven.

The next question is whether the frequent use of strategies automatically means that many types of strategies are used. Below Table 9 shows this is not necessarily true.

Table 9. Number of strategy type used in each category across groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Asymptotic Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing the above figures with those of Table 7 shows some differences. The total number of strategy categories ranks in the order of Metacognitive, cognitive, Memory, Affective, and Social. However, the total number of types of strategy category were used in the order of Cognitive, Metacognitive, Memory, Social, and Affective. This means that the learners used more varieties of Cognitive strategy than Metacognitive. And there are significant differences in the number of strategy types used among groups especially in Metacognitive, and Cognitive and Social. Table 10 shows what popular strategies are among the learners.

Table 10. Re-coding of Strategies by Strategy Classification List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy category</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
<th>Typology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Group 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating mental linkages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing well</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employing action</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the above table, it could be said that Metacognitive strategy, especially Arranging and planning learning, was used most frequently, and this accords with findings by many previous researchers.

Lastly, the differences in strategy use are tested for statistical significance. Table 11 shows the result of chi-square among three groups.
The Learners’ Strategies and Speaking Task in One Japanese EFL Classroom

**Table 11. A. Chi-square Test of Strategy Category use across 3 groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Affectiv</th>
<th>Cognitiv</th>
<th>Compensa</th>
<th>Memory</th>
<th>Metacog</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asymptotic Sig.</td>
<td>.540</td>
<td>.0001**</td>
<td>.745</td>
<td>.004**</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.590</td>
<td>.009**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 11. B. Chi-square Test of Strategy Category use across 2 groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Affectiv</th>
<th>Cognitiv</th>
<th>Compensa</th>
<th>Memory</th>
<th>Metacog</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square Df.</td>
<td>.565</td>
<td>17.051</td>
<td>.205</td>
<td>9.545</td>
<td>3.188</td>
<td>.327</td>
<td>6.513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymptotic Sig.</td>
<td>.477</td>
<td>.0001**</td>
<td>.650</td>
<td>.002**</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>.567</td>
<td>.011*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the above table, students overall strategy category use is significantly different especially in Cognitive and Memory. As shown before in Table 10, Metacognitive strategy is popularly used by all groups. Therefore statistical analysis does not show a significant difference among groups. However, it was proved that the higher proficiency group used the widest variety of Metacognitive strategies.

### 4.3. Study 3

Relating to the relationship between proficiency and strategy use, Table 11. A shows the correlation of Strategy category and proficiency and Table B lists the strategies with strong correlation with proficiency.

**Table 11: A. Correlation between Strategy category and proficiency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Memory</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Compensa</th>
<th>Metacognitive</th>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kendall tau b</td>
<td>.341*</td>
<td>.449**</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.203</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>-.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymptotic Sig.</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>.835</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>.825</td>
<td>.896</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 11: B. Strategy category strongly correlated with proficiency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy Category</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Asymptotic Sig. (2tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>Reviewing well: Structured reviewing</td>
<td>.367**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employing action: Using mechanical techniques</td>
<td>.347**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Practicing: Formally practicing with sounds and writings</td>
<td>.208*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practicing: Recognizing and using formulas and patterns</td>
<td>.534**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using resources for receiving and sending messages</td>
<td>.340**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyzing &amp; reasoning: Transferring</td>
<td>.208*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creating structure for input and output: Taking notes</td>
<td>.293*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11.A indicates that proficiency and Cognitive and Memory strategy are significantly correlated. This result was opposite of the expectation that Metacognitive would show a significant correlation with proficiency. However, it coincided with the result of Table 8. This does not mean the higher proficiency group used Metacognitive strategy infrequently, but the middle proficiency group used Metacognitive strategy quite frequently and it led to an insignificant difference in Metacognitive strategy use among groups. Table 11 B. also support this with the number of correlated strategies: 5 strategies were proven significant in the Cognitive strategy category. Although the Metacognitive category was not correlated with proficiency, three Metacognitive strategies show significant correlation, and they are an essential part of the Metacognitive category.

All of the strategies listed in Table 11 play a central role for the language development, and they summarize the qualification to be a good learner. Students wanting to improve communication proficiency, review well daily, memorize formulas and patterns using action, practice talking aloud and check with the reference books whenever necessary. They are conscious of language tasks, prepare well, seek opportunities to practice speaking, and ask that their mistakes be corrected.

In section 3.2; Previous findings (PP.153 – 155), there were many opinions about strategy use among many different nationalities. Oxford (1990) stated that beginning level students use almost twice as many cognitive strategies as students with intermediate level proficiency. However, in my research higher proficiency students used Cognitive strategy most. Oxford also mentioned that many Japanese ESL/EFL students reflectively use analytic strategies aimed at precision, work alone, and base judgments more on logic than on personal interactions. However, in my research, students reflected this conversation task and commented as follows:
Table 12. Preference Comparison between individual work and pair work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More relaxed</th>
<th>More enjoyable</th>
<th>Learned more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above figures show that they liked pair work, and they are very positive about it by saying that they learned more by pair work than individual work.

Anderson and Vandergrift (1996) mentioned Planning strategies as the most popular of the Metacognitive strategies and Cognitive strategies are the most widely used for all course levels. This is confirmed in Table 7, 9 and 10 that both are true with the middle and higher proficiency groups but not with the low proficiency group in this research. They also found that the biggest difference between successful and less successful learners lie in the use of Metacognitive strategies. However, it is not the case in the research shown in Table 9 and 10. (Metacognitive $X^2= 0.063$). There is not a significant difference between them. However, this result does not agree with the report from Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) that the use of Metacognitive strategy ranks low among Japanese students. Phillips (1990, 1991) said that competent learners often use Compensation strategies and Memory strategies. This seems true of Memory strategies, however, as for Compensation strategies his opinion is a little bit questionable. Compensation strategies consist of passive strategies, which just help overcome communication breakdown. Some examples are switching to the mother tongue, getting help, using mime or gesture, avoiding communication partially or totally, using circumlocution or synonym. Frequent use of these strategies does not seem to enhance language learning and rather encourages the use of interlanguage to escape from the problem.

5. CONCLUSION

In this research, 6 items related with strategies were statistically proven. First, proficiency and strategy use is closely related. Second, higher proficiency groups use more strategies in number and in variety. Third, Cognitive and Memory strategy higher significantly correlated with proficiency, and fourth, higher proficiency groups use Cognitive and Memory strategy most of all strategies. Fifth, although Metacognitive did not rank the top in the higher proficiency group's strategy use, the variety in use is the greatest among the groups and it was proved to be significantly different. Lastly, the higher
proficiency group was outstanding in the use of strategies especially in the preparation stages.

During Test preparation the learners have to plan and arrange their learning, and during Task preparation, they overview and link with what they already know, and practice for the language use. These involve Metacognitive, Cognitive and Memory strategy. Metacognitive strategies are quite highly used. However, the most frequently used strategy throughout the task by the higher proficiency group was Cognitive strategy. Memory strategy ranked the second. Cognitive strategy and Memory strategy directly affect the language use, therefore, it is understandable that frequent use of these strategies would contribute to the learning. On the other hand, I have a mixed opinion about the frequent use of Metacognitive strategies. It is generally highly used, however it does not always ranks the first, and does not rank lowest either. I think it depends on the task.

In this research I confirmed what Oxford (1990) and O’Malley and Chamot (1990)and many other researchers stated: There is a close relationship between proficiency and strategy use and the most important factors are Cognitive strategy, Metacognitive and Memory strategies. However, findings by Oxford, Anderson and Vandergrift (1996) in Language Learning Strategies around the World: Cross-Cultural Perspectives were not in agreement with my findings. Of course, my research is limited in sample number and variety, therefore I cannot conclude that my finding is generally true of Japanese students. My next research will be to see if strategy use always shows the same tendency with any kind of task with any Japanese learners, and to find ways to train strategy use to make our Japanese students better language learners.
The Learners' Strategies and Speaking Task in One Japanese EFL Classroom

Reference

Anderson, N.J. 1993. ‘Data on adult ESL strategy use’. Unpublished manuscript, Ohio University, Athens, OH.


Appendix A: Oral Communication Proficiency Check Test

Speaking Test

Objectives are: participating in conversations on topics beyond the most immediate needs and can deliver short speech in a short impromptu speech.

**Oral Interview**

1. Pick up one of your family members and explain what he/she is like.
2. Tell me why you chose this college to enter.
3. What is your happiest memory in college life.
4. What kind of job would you like get in the future?
## Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsiveness, Organization, Volume</th>
<th>Pronunciation, Intonation, Rhythm, Fluency</th>
<th>Vocabulary Grammar, Word Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Be capable of making lengthy and complex contributions as appropriate.</td>
<td>Pronunciation is easily intelligible. Speak very naturally and fluently.</td>
<td>A wide range of language is available to the speaker. Almost no grammatical errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Generally good control in all constructions. But needs to expand and develop ideas a little bit more.</td>
<td>Occasional non-native pronunciation errors, but speaker is always intelligible. Only in complex utterances is there a need to search for words.</td>
<td>A fair range of language is available to the speaker. Some grammatical errors but do not interfere with overall intelligibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Be capable of delivering the outline of a speech topic. Responding with more than short-form answers where appropriate but there are many simple utterances.</td>
<td>Have to pause once in a while, but does not interfere with intelligibility.</td>
<td>Have a satisfactory range of expression. Some control of basic grammatical constructions with several errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Not be capable of expressing even the outline of a speech. Contributions are limited to one or two simple utterances.</td>
<td>Have to pause many times and frequent phonemic errors, foreign stress and intonation patterns.</td>
<td>Some control of basic grammatical constructions but with major and/or repeated errors that interfere with intelligibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Simple one or two sentences or only a few words. The content of a speech is unintelligible.</td>
<td>Pause most of the time. Too many phonemic errors, foreign accent and intonation.</td>
<td>Have a severely limited range of expression and virtually no grammatical or syntactical control.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Appendix B: Students' strategy reported

### General Study at Home
1. Listened to all tapes they recorded in class.
2. Listened to some tape they recorded in class
3. Listened to the tape and dictated conversation
4. Listened to the tape and wrote down useful patterns and vocabulary

### Test Preparation at Home
5. Memorized all dictated sentences.
6. Memorized some dictated sentences.
7. Memorized model sentences & useful expressions
8. Made a glossary
9. Listed up model sentences, useful expressions
10. Studied other textbook and consulted with a dictionary
11. Listened to the tape several times
12. Checked accent and pronunciation
13. Wrote down possible conversation
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14 Memorized prepared conversation
15 Saying sentences aloud

**Preparation for the Task with a Partner**
16 Discussed organization first
17 Just copied one model conversation pattern
18 Used more than three different model conversation patterns
19 Added own knowledge and experience together with model conversation pattern
20 Discussed contents in Japanese
21 Checked outline of the conversation
22 Thought about (discussed) sentences in Japanese first and translated into Japanese
23 Used model/useful sentences learned in class
24 Used sentence patterns learned in the past
25 Checked English usage and mistakes
26 Rehearsed before recording
27 Pronounced consciously
28 Tried to speak with pause and natural intonation

**Task Performance**
29 Asked friends English expressions
30 Gave up to say something
31 Changed to an easy/different topic
32 Explained in easier and simpler way
33 Used not exact but a similar word/expression
34 Used Japanese English

**Memorization**
35 Listened to the tape many times
36 Listen and repeat after the tape
37 Read text silently
38 Memorized in Japanese meaning
39 Wrote down English sentences
40 Said aloud
41 Asked someone to practice together
42 Fill in mark for accent, intonation, & pronunciation.

**Association with their partners**
43 Care about her partner’s feeling
44 Encouraged each other
45 Cooperated with each other
Appendix C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy category</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Typology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>Creating mental linkages</td>
<td>Placing new words into context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>Applying images and sounds</td>
<td>Representing sounds in memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>Reviewing well</td>
<td>Structured reviewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Practicing</td>
<td>Repeating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Practicing</td>
<td>Formally practicing with sounds and writing systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Receiving and sending message</td>
<td>Using resources for receiving and sending messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Analyzing and reasoning</td>
<td>Reasoning deductively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Analyzing and reasoning</td>
<td>Translating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Analyzing and reasoning</td>
<td>Transferring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing</td>
<td>Switching to the mother tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing</td>
<td>Getting help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing</td>
<td>Using mime or gesture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing</td>
<td>Avoiding communication partially or totally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing</td>
<td>Selecting the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing</td>
<td>Adjusting or approximating the message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing</td>
<td>Coining words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing</td>
<td>Using a circumlocution or synonym</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>Centering your learning</td>
<td>Overviewing and linking with already known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>Centering your learning</td>
<td>Paying attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>Centering your learning</td>
<td>Delaying speech production to focus on listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>Arranging and planning your learning</td>
<td>Finding out about language learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>Arranging and planning your learning</td>
<td>Organizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>Arranging and planning your learning</td>
<td>Setting goals and objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>Arranging and planning your learning</td>
<td>Identifying the purpose of a language task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>Arranging and planning your learning</td>
<td>Planning for a language task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>Arranging and planning your learning</td>
<td>Seeking practice opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>Evaluating your learning</td>
<td>Self-monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>Evaluating your learning</td>
<td>Self-evaluating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Lowering your anxiety</td>
<td>Using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Lowering your anxiety</td>
<td>Using music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Lowering your anxiety</td>
<td>Using laughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Encouraging yourself</td>
<td>Making positive statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Encouraging yourself</td>
<td>Taking risks wisely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Encouraging yourself</td>
<td>Rewarding yourself</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Taking your emotional temperature, Listening to your body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Taking your emotional temperature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Writing a language learning diary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Discussing your feelings with someone else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Asking questions, Asking for correction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Emphasizing the social situation, Showing socio-linguistic understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Cooperating with others, Cooperating with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Cooperating with others, Cooperating with proficient users of the new language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Empathizing with others, Developing cultural understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Empathizing with others, Becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>