Language Learning Strategies in Independent Language Learning: an Overview

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Introduction

The notions of independence, autonomy, and control in learning experiences have come to play an increasingly important role in language education. A number of principles underpin independent language learning – optimising or extending learner choice, focusing on the needs of individual learners, not the interests of a teacher or an institution, and the diffusion of decision-making to learners. Independent language learning (ILL) reflects a move towards more learner-centred approaches viewing learners as individuals with needs and rights, who can develop and exercise responsibility for their learning. An important outgrowth of this perspective has been the range of means developed to raise learners' awareness and knowledge of themselves, their learning needs and preferences, their beliefs and motivation and the strategies they use to develop target language (TL) competence. In this chapter I begin with an overview of the concept of independent language learning, and of the particular contribution of language learning strategies to this domain. I argue that a fundamental challenge of independent language learning is for learners to develop the ability to engage with, interact with, and derive benefit from learning environments which are not directly mediated by a teacher. Drawing on learner conceptualisations of distance language learning I argue that learners develop this ability largely by constructing a personally meaningful interface with the learning context, and that strategies play a key role in this regard. In the latter half of the chapter I focus on a series of landmark studies, identifying how they illuminate important aspects of independent language learning, extend our understanding of strategies and strategy development, and provide insights into how students use strategies within independent learning contexts. The following three sections provide historical and theoretical background, while the two main sections in the remainder of the chapter provide a state of the art overview of language learning strategies in ILL.

The emergence of independent language learning

Concern for the individual learner and for learner choice, control and responsibility has been a pervasive influence on language learning and teaching for more than three decades (Brindley, 1989; Holec 1981, 1987; Holec *et al.*, 1996; Nunan, 1988; Rubin, 1975; Tudor, 1996), and is

central to the idea and practice of independent language learning. The expectation that language learners can be independent, and that this is an important attribute and goal, underlies much of the writing on learner autonomy (Benson, 2001; Broady & Kenning, 1996; Little, 1991; Wenden, 1991), self-access learning (Sheerin, 1997), distance learning (Hurd, 2005; Murphy, 2005; Vanijdee, 2003; White, 2003), resource-based learning (Guillot, 1996), self-directed learning (Carver, 1984) and different forms of online learning such as tandem partnerships (Lewis & Walker, 2003). But independent in what sense? Here I explore three broad interpretations of independent language learning, the first concerning the learning context, the second outlining a philosophy of learning and the third based on learner attributes.

< Figure 1 near here >

Independent language learning can refer to a context or setting for language learning (Benson & Voller, 1997; Wright, 2005) in which learners develop skills in the TL often, though not always, individually. The emphasis here is on independence from the mediating presence of a teacher during the course of learning. In addition, the degree of freedom learners have to make choices (Anderson & Garrison, 1998), to select learning opportunities and to use resources according to need is highlighted. Self-access learning (Gardner, 2007), distance learning (White, 2007) and language advising (Gremmo & Castillo, represent ways of organising learning aligned to this interpretation, each of which has its own strong tradition in cultures as diverse as those of Scandinavia, the People's Republic of China, New Zealand and France.

A second dimension of independent language learning refers to a philosophy or approach to learning which aims to develop and foster independence in learners, who may or may not be in independent learning settings. Dickinson (1994), for example, argues that the most effective way of developing favourable attitudes towards independence is for teachers to prepare language learners to think about their needs and objectives and then to learn how to structure their learning. From another perspective, Candy (1991) argues that independent learning can be both a goal and a process and that the two are intertwined. Paul (1990: 37) captures both goal and process aspects suggesting that the most important criterion for success in distance education should relate to learner independence and that 'the ultimate challenge ... is to develop each individual's capacity to look after his or her own learning needs'. This approach, promoting learner independence, has been highly influential within the learner autonomy movement (Benson, 2001). I shall shortly return to examining the relationship between learner autonomy and learner independence.

The third dimension of ILL refers to learner attributes and skills which can be acquired and used in self-directed learning, and it is here that the link with strategies and strategy instruction is most commonly drawn; independence involves developing the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and strategies needed by learners to take actions dealing with their own learning. Independent learning in this sense is based on students' understanding of their own needs and interests and is fostered by creating the opportunities and experiences which encourage student choice and self-reliance and which promote the development of learning strategies and metacognitive knowledge. Many learner support initiatives (see for example Dreyer *et al.*, 2005) are focused on developing this dimension of learner independence. A further distinction is important here, namely the difference between disposition and ability highlighted by Sheerin (1997: 57): 'Learner independence is a complex construct, a cluster of dispositions and abilities to undertake certain activities. It is important to distinguish between disposition and ability because a learner may be disposed to be

independent in an activity such as setting objectives, but lack the technical ability – may be an independent learner in intention but not in practice…' While ILL as a philosophy and as an attribute may both be significant aspects of particular language learning arrangements, it is useful to maintain the distinction between the two: the former emphasises the ways in which learning is configured to promote independence in learners, while the latter focuses on the contribution learners themselves make to ILL

Within the research literature, the relationship between independence and autonomy is both diverse and contested: Little (1991) writing on learner autonomy emphasises 'interdependence' over 'independence' in learning; Dickinson (1994), associates independence with active responsibility for one's learning and autonomy with the idea of learning alone; and Littlewood (1997) sees autonomy in the context of language acquisition as involving 'an ability to operate independently with the language and use it to communicate personal meanings in real, unpredictable situations' (p. 81). More recently Lamb and Reinders (2006) in the introduction to their edited volume on supporting independent language learning use autonomy suggest there are 'two strands of independence/autonomy' (p. viii), one concerned with language learning as essentially an independent process, the other concerned with ways of organising learning to take place independently of teacher control. They highlight the 'contextual nature of autonomy, and indeed independence' (p. vii) and argue that given the complexity of the field, it is impossible to arrive at a definitive definition of either independent language learning or autonomy, echoing Aoki's (2003) argument that there are only multiple views of autonomy rather than a single authoritative characterisation. It is not unusual for learner autonomy and learner independence to be used interchangeably, as synonyms, or near synonyms (see for example Fisher *et al.*, 2007; Mozzon-McPherson, 2007). Further perspectives on individual difference and learner autonomy are to be found in Chapters 2 and 3.

There have also been a number of critiques of the notion of independence and the way it has been conceptualised and applied within learning contexts. Arguing that independence implies 'an unavoidable dependence on one level on authorities for information and guidance' Boud (1988: 29) sees interdependence as a stage of development that transcends independence and as an essential component of autonomy. In a similar vein, Anderson and Garrison (1998) critique the emphasis placed on learner independence in distance contexts, noting that a concern with independence has not been sufficiently matched with a concern for the demands placed on learners in independent learning contexts. They posit that the goal should not be learner independence, but developing control of learning experiences by the learners themselves; this requires a combination of independence (the opportunity to explore and make choices), proficiency (the ability and competence to engage in learning experiences) and support (resources that facilitate personally meaningful learning). An important question arising from this perspective is the extent to which, in any form of independent language learning, learners can participate in and control their learning experiences, whether in terms of opportunity, disposition or ability. This question will be examined and revisited at different points in the chapter, alongside the related contribution of learning strategies.

Conceptualising independent language learning: learner perspectives

As we have just seen, researchers and theorists have conceptualised independent learning as a particular context for learning, and as a philosophy or approach to learning including as a goal of

education. It has also been interpreted as referring to qualities or attributes of learners: as skills and abilities which can be learned, developed and used in working independently and as individuals taking responsibility for their learning. These ways of thinking about independent learning tell us little, however, about how learners conceptualise independent learning and the meanings and significance it holds for them. While a substantial body of research into learner beliefs about language learning exists (Abraham & Vann, 1987; Barcelos, 2003; Benson & Lor, 1989; Kalaja, 1995; Wenden, 1986), including beliefs about strategy use (Riley, 1997; Victori, 1995; Yang, 1999), learner beliefs and representations of independent language learning remain relatively unexplored. Such a gap in our understanding is rather curious given that the purpose of independent language learning, however defined, is to enhance the learning experiences and opportunities of the key participants, the learners.

One framework for understanding the essentials of independent language learning and the critical contribution of language learning strategies comes from the learner-context interface theory (White 2003, 2005) based on a phenomenographic study into how students perceive, experience, and conceptualise their learning in an independent setting (for details see White 1999). Within the reports of learners independent language learning was not defined as a specific setting, or philosophy, or set of learner attributes. Rather, the essence of independent language learning involved constructing and assuming control of a personally meaningful and effective interface between themselves, their attributes and needs, and the features of the learning context. Independent language learning according to this view is based around learners as active agents who evaluate the potential affordances within their environments and then create, select and make use of tasks, experiences, and interlocutors in keeping with their needs, preferences, and goals as learners. The ways in which learners do this, and the composition of each interface is likely to differ between learners and over time. The constructed interface then guides and informs learning and develops with new learning experiences. Establishing an interface requires knowledge of self and of the environments and the skills to establish congruence between those two dimensions. The construction of the interface is also closely related to the use of learning strategies and the development of metacognitive knowledge and this is discussed in the next section.

The contribution of language learning strategies

Until the mid-1970s, a major focus of applied linguistics research was classroom-based language teaching methodology with the possible significance of alternative learning contexts or learner contributions such as motivation, learning styles, and language learning strategies largely overlooked. From the mid-1970s the emphasis moved from a concern with the methods and products of language teaching to a focus on the learner, with growing inquiry into how language learners process, store, retrieve and use TL material. One dimension of this research involved attempts to find out how language learners manage their learning and the strategies they use as a means of improving TL competence. Various lists and taxonomies of strategy use have been developed as a result of these enquiries the two most influential being O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) distinction between metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies, and Oxford's (1990) *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL) comprising direct strategies (memory, cognitive and compensation strategies) and indirect strategies (metacognitive, affective and social). More recently, specific taxonomies have been produced for particular areas of language use, such as listening (Vandergrift *et al.,* 2005) - the topic of Chapter 5 in this volume - and reading (Sheory &

Mokhtari, 2001), which Chapter 4 addresses. As research in this field developed, researchers quickly established the link between strategy use and learner independence: Holec (1981), for example, argued that learners need methodological preparation for self-directed learning and this includes facility in the use of learning strategies. 'Learning how to learn' then came to be seen as a critical and necessary component of the language learning process, from which the idea of learner training and strategy instruction emerged. (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Weaver & Cohen, 1997). Learning strategy research and strategy instruction are central to developing understanding of how to tackle learning a language in a range of contexts, including independent settings. In addition, the distinctive contribution of metacognitive strategies and metacognitive knowledge to independent language learning has been a recurrent theme in the literature (Hurd, 2001; Victori & Lockart, 1995; Wenden, 1999; White, 1995, 1997, 1999).

The lack of consensus in defining the term strategy first noted by Wenden (1991) has been echoed by other researchers (Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 1994; McDonough, 1995). Strategy researchers have addressed this criticism (Grenfell & Macaro, in press), and have also explored the ways in which second language acquisition researchers conceptualise, define, operationalise and use the term strategy (Cohen, in press). Language learning strategies are commonly defined as the operations or processes which are consciously selected and employed by the learner to learn the TL or facilitate a language task. Strategies offer a set of options from which learners consciously select in real time, taking into account changes occurring in the environment, in order to optimise their chances of success in achieving their goals in learning and using the TL. As such the term strategy characterises the relationship between intention and action, and is based on a view of learners as responsible agents who are aware of their needs, preferences, goals and problems.

Students must draw on knowledge of themselves as learners, of the learning task and of appropriate strategies to use in a given context, in order to develop a meaningful interface with the learning environment. An example of the key contribution of strategy use to the development of a productive learner-context interface in independent language learning comes from the work of Harris (1995). In a study of successful learning among adult distance learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) in the Adult Migrant English Programme in Australia Harris noted that while students were highly motivated they found it hard to accept the role of being a distance student and struggled to develop for themselves the conditions and characteristics associated with being a distance learner. Interviews with the students revealed that for many this was a painful process of adjustment as they held on to the view that the ideal learning environment is provided by face-to-face teacher-mediated language classes with immediate support from the teacher, opportunities for regular commitment to study, language practice in a non-threatening situation and the opportunity to make social contacts. Those adult distance learners of English who may have resisted this form of learning but succeeded 'had found ways to re-create for themselves the "study-nurturing" environment needed for success' (Harris 1995: 52). Strategies were central to this process and distance learning only became a viable option for those students who were able to 'match the level of the course and teacher support with their own self-supporting strategies' (Harris 1995: 88).
For example, successful students actively created for themselves a study-nurturing environment, in ways which approximated their idea of the kind of learning environment a teacher develops in face-to-face language classes.

The sustained popularity of language learner strategy research lies in the potential it holds for affecting learning, both in and outside of the classroom, offering information that clearly is useful to both teachers and learners, and that can enhance the processes of language learning (Grenfell & Macaro, in press). Exploring learning strategies is an important way of gaining insights into independent learning given that researchers and teachers are generally remote from the sites of learning in those contexts. Independent language learning is also particularly challenging for learners (Bown, 2006; Jones, 1994; White 1995, 1997), and an ongoing concern has been to provide learners with insights into those challenges and the ways they can respond to them through strategy use. Within the field of ILL it is possible to identify a number of landmark studies which have extended our understanding of learning strategies in a range of forms and settings for independent learning; they are also significant in marking out the field of strategy research in independent learning. The studies have focused on two broad domains: the strategies learners use, and ways of enhancing independent language learning through strategy training and strategy development. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to an overview of learning strategies in ILL, seen in terms of these two domains.

Strategy use in independent language learning

For studies within the first domain (see Table 1) the focus has been not only on strategy use, but on how those strategies contribute to learners' progress, how strategy use changes over time and how it relates to the learning environment and individual differences. A hallmark of these studies has been the largely contextual approach they take to view strategy use as the result of not only learners' cognitive choices but also of the mediation of their particular communities (White *et al.*, in press). The value of a contextual approach is to reveal the extent to which language learning strategies are part of students' experiences, interrelated with their environment, and also to reveal how strategies function in different aspects of language learning. Methodologies used include diaries, case studies, and interviews, all of which aim to access students' strategies through their own interpretative meanings and perspectives.

< Table 1 near here >

 The studies reviewed here reveal how learners develop creative language use strategies to build a rich interface with the learning context (Rowsell & Libben, 1994), how strategy use functions as a means of matching learning needs with affordances of the context (Carson & Longhini, 2002; Jones, 1994), and changes in strategy use over time (Carson & Longhini, 2002; Jones, 1994). The studies also reveal how metacognitive strategy use, in particular self-management strategies, enables learners to respond to the demands of an independent learning context (White 1995, 1997). Affective strategies are also seen to assist learners in managing the isolated aspects of independent learning and to contribute to the development of an effective interface with the features of those contexts (Bown, 2006; White, 1995, 1997).

A landmark study, focusing explicitly on independent language learning comes from Rowsell and Libben (1994) with the intriguing title of 'The sound of one hand clapping: How to succeed in independent language learning'. It deals with the behaviours of high- achieving independent learners. While in the body of the article the researchers largely eschew the use of the term strategy since they claim it is strongly associated with classroom procedures, the abstract begins with: 'This paper describes the self-reported strategies of thirty adults who were independent

language learners for a period of six months' (Rowsell & Libben, 1994: 668). The term they prefer to use is autonomously controlled task (ACT) to represent independent learning behaviour which takes place outside the classroom environment. The undergraduate students in the study were assigned the task of choosing a foreign language to study on their own for six months without the aid of a teacher; they kept diaries of how they carried out their learning and how they approached the issue of being communicative in isolation. The significant differences between high and low achievers were not in how they treated the learning materials they chose, but rather in their meaningful use of language. High achievers showed more instances of what they termed 'communication-making' and 'context-making' activities (p. 668); they often created imaginary partners in imaginary settings to converse with and they treated language as functional, as a medium of communication rather than content to be memorised. The learners used ACTs which required creative language use in context, and this ability was not developed by the low achievers who used more restricted strategies such as memorising phrases. Functional ACTs were a powerful acquisition technique in Rowsell and Libben's study enabling learners to develop a rich interface with the learning context; by bringing into play imagined contextualised communication successful learners participated in a form of practice which developed a positive affective relationship to the task, and which treated language as a medium to be used creatively.

Another early study comes from Jones (1994) who explores his own self-study of Hungarian as a 'lone language learner' over a period of eleven months. Analysing his diary entries, he notes his reliance on intensive vocabulary learning strategies for the first few months; once his goal of about 2000 word-families had been reached, there was a 'radical paradigm shift' (p. 441) in his strategies. This was made possible by the crossing of two linguistic thresholds: sufficient knowledge of word roots to support the guessing of meaning of many compound lexical items, and the ability to read authentic texts. Jones argues that both types of strategies – studial strategies (textbook-centred strategies) and strategies related to comprehensible input - were equally valuable but at different stages of his independent language learning trajectory. Jones' study is illuminating not only in terms of strategy use and the nature of independent learning, but in terms of how strategy use functions as a key means of matching individual needs with the opportunities and constraints of the learning environment. Strategies for developing writing skills and for vocabulary and grammatical development are explored in Chapters 6, 8 and 9 of this volume.

Relatively few studies have focused on naturalistic independent learning in an immersion context where learners have no access to formal instruction. An important piece of research in this area comes from Carson and Longhini (2002) who provide a longitudinal account of the learning styles and strategies of an adult learner of Spanish, Joan, immersed in the TL in Argentina over a period of eight weeks. A distinctive feature of the diary study is the attention given to the learning context-described as 'a rich target language environment with continuous communicative demands' (p. 432). Carson and Longhini also focus on the contribution of the interlocutors and what they afford in terms of learning opportunities and explanations of language phenomena, especially pragmatics and nuances in the semantic lexicon. Key factors in the development of the learner-context interface in this study are Joan's preferences as a learner and the continuous need to communicate in an immersion context. An important finding was that while learning style remained relatively constant throughout the study, strategy use was variable. In the initial stages the primary strategy reported was 'compensating for missing knowledge' attributed to the communicative demands of an immersion context and Joan's lack of effective memory strategies. In later stages Joan's cognitive strategies had increased and her command of the TL had improved meaning she

was less reliant on compensation strategies. The study provides clear evidence that strategy choice was influenced by learning in a naturalistic environment, with much less use of studial strategies associated with classroom learning contexts. Within the diary entries by far the most recurrent strategies were in the metacognitive group (examples include organising and evaluating strategies), comprising 40% of total reported strategy use. The high frequency of metacognitive strategies is attributed to individual learner characteristics, namely Joan's interests as a learner and her understanding of the contribution of metacognitive strategies to her experience as a language learner. The study provides a fascinating look into the world of the independent language learner in a TL immersion context. It reveals the learner's awareness of the affordances of the learning context, and of the ways particular speakers can contribute to her growing expertise in the language. It also reveals the learner's awareness of her strategy preferences, the gaps in the repertoire of strategies she was prepared to use, and the overriding influence of learning style on strategy choice and use.

The influence of an independent learning context on strategy use was the focus of a large-scale study carried out by White (1995, 1997) in a dual-mode university, offering language courses to both distance and face-to-face students. Using both quantitative and qualitative measures White compared the strategy use of distance (N=274) and face-to-face (N=143) language learners enrolled in the same foreign language courses. Results revealed a highly significant difference between the two groups in terms of metacognitive strategy use on a number of measures. Distance learners reported four times the use of metacognitive strategies compared to classroom learners. This is aligned with Hurd's (2001) observation that metacognitive strategies have special significance for students in open and distance contexts. There were also differences in the kinds of metacognitive strategies used by the two groups: self-management was the metacognitive strategy most frequently used by distance learners, but accounted for a low proportion of the metacognitive strategy use of classroom learners. In order to deploy self-management strategies, learners need to know how they learn best, and need to have the necessary procedural skills to set up optimal learning conditions. Distance learners made significantly greater use of self-management strategies which involved working out how they learned best, then incorporating these conditions into their interactions with the TL. This was also very evident in the verbal reports produced by distance learners. The wider and increased use of metacognitive control by distance learners found in this study can be seen as a response to the demands placed on those learners by the independent learning context and as an important means for them to set up and manage an effective interface with the learning context. White (1999) extended this study to gain further insights into the kinds of metacognitive knowledge novice distance learners use, or attempt to gain, to ensure their learning processes are effective in the relatively unfamiliar self-instruction context.

The final study in this section highlights the importance of self-regulation of affect through the use of affective strategies in independent language learning. Writing from the context of a university individualised instruction programme in Russian, Bown (2006) explores the affective strategies students use and the contribution of those strategies to their learning experiences. She uses Richards and Renandya's (2002: 121) definition of affective strategies as those that 'serve to regulate emotions, attitude and motivation' including, for example, positive self-talk. Within the Russian programme, students receive course materials and a specially prepared handbook to guide them through the course, they work on their own at their own pace and have a set number of meetings with instructors for conversational practice and assessment. Noting Knowles' (1975) observation that students often feel angry, confused or disoriented when beginning to work in a

self-directed environment, Bown focuses on how students use affective strategies to cope with emotional states they may experience in the programme. Bown's study provides rich insights into how students regulate affect in self-instruction, and the aspects of self-instruction which give rise to negative emotions. Isolation from a learning group meant many students struggled to maintain motivation and the absence of self-referencing opportunities to assess progress. In that isolation some students developed negative beliefs about their own abilities, comparing themselves unfavorably to imagined 'idealised' learners who proceed with few difficulties. Interestingly Bown notes that all students experienced ambiguity and demotivation as a result of isolation from their peers, but it was the more successful students who reported use of strategies to help them cope with negative emotions, including the uncertainty that arose from the lack of benchmarks. So control and management of affect were critical to students developing an effective interface with the self-instruction learning context. Specifically they did this through such strategies as self-encouragement and self-talk strategies that evaluated and adjusted their expectations of themselves. Bown provides insights into the way affective strategies contributed to the development of an effective interface between learners and the self-instruction context: they provided encouragement and reduced anxiety; they gave students a sense that they could do the work, and enhanced their motivation and enjoyment of learning. Her findings are congruent with those of Harris (1995), namely that independent language learning presents significant challenges to learners and that the ability to manage affective responses to these challenges is crucial for persistence, satisfaction and success. For Ushioda (1996), the experience of success, the ability to minimise the impact of negative experiences, to reflect and to take personal control of `affective conditions and experiences'(p.54) are all keys to the development of motivational autonomy in L2 learners. Chapter 12 on affective strategies develops and extends many of these points.

The findings from these studies reveal much about strategy use in independent learning contexts, and the ways in which learners use strategies to respond to the particular features and demands of those settings. Another important research avenue has also been pursued focusing on providing learners with opportunities to raise their awareness of and involvement in their learning and to develop their strategic repertoires. Identifying optimal ways of learner development in and for independent learning runs through these studies to which I now turn.

Strategy development and independent language learning

I now want to turn to the second domain of studies (see Table 2) concerned with ways of enhancing ILL through strategy training and strategy development. In these studies researchers have explored ways of best providing strategy instruction for particular independent language learning environments, the role of the teacher in that process and the relationship between feedback and strategy development. The issue of implicit learner training in strategies was touched on in the work of Hyland (2001) as part of a study of feedback provided to distance learners of English in Hong Kong. She sees feedback as relating to two broad categories: the product and the learning process. In an independent learning context the need for learners to establish effective ways of working to develop TL skills means that feedback relating to process (that is the strategies and actions students should take to improve their language) is particularly important. In spite of the fact that tutors in the study had been encouraged to focus on feedback relating to the learning process less than 17% of teacher comments addressed this area. When teachers did focus on this area Hyland notes they provided encouragement and suggested specific learning strategies and, as a best practice, related this feedback to specific parts of the learning materials. Hyland (2001:

246) concludes that 'learning a language through the distance-learning mode is a challenging task and the feedback we offer students … may be crucial to them … in terms of helping them to improve their learning strategies'.

To date few further studies have focused on the relationship between learner feedback and strategy development, despite this being a promising avenue for research and practice. For an extended discussion of the role of self-correction strategies in ILL see Chapter 14.

< Table 2 near here >

Hurd *et al.* (2001) address the issue of providing strategy development opportunities to distance language learners, in the context of the Open University, UK's language courses. They argue that in recognition of the level of strategic competence required for distance study, strategy development and a reflective approach to learning need to be incorporated into the course materials. The overall aim is to scaffold opportunities for learners to manage their independence in optimal ways, by acquiring 'a series of strategies and skills that will enable them to work individually' (Hurd *et al.* 2001: 341). Hurd *et al.* provide a range of approaches to strategy development and learner training: a learning strategies guide[1], a contextualised approach to strategy instruction distributed throughout the course, and opportunities for students to think about how they learn – in the form of a learning diary. In addition there is an emphasis on self-evaluation and self-assessment, together with language awareness activities requiring students to relate what they are learning to what they already know. The approach aims to initiate students into a more independent form of learning focusing on learners' ability to organise and reflect on learning, monitor progress, identify gaps and solve problems. To do this students are encouraged to learn about themselves as language learners and to use this individualised self-knowledge to enhance the interface they develop with the learning context. This approach relates closely to the findings of White (1995) that distance language learners need to be able to manage the process of language learning based on their understandings of how they learn best; they then draw on this understanding to set up learning experiences which are favourable, though not necessarily ideal.

A different approach to learner training comes from Harris (2003) who explores the interesting question of how best to provide strategy instruction for adult distance learners in Europe. The situation is still more complex than in the work of Hurd *et al.* (2001) in that the audience are learners in diverse distance contexts, learning different languages at different levels of proficiency and with different needs, expectations and prior experiences. Under the aegis of the European Commission's Grundtvig Programme, Harris and her INSTAL project partners decided to develop a stand-alone handbook and CD-Rom to develop the ability of adult learners to work more effectively with the distance learning resources available to them.[2] As Harris reflects critically on the process of adapting classroom-based models of strategy instruction she explores central dilemmas that arise: strategy instruction could not be contextualised and it was to take place without the mediating presence of a teacher or of a learning group; the instruction was 'stand alone' in that it did not relate to a particular language or level of proficiency; it was not embedded in a specific language course; it was to be accessed by learners working independently of a teacher or peers. In terms of approach, the first two parts of the handbook aim to raise learners' awareness of themselves as learners, including their motivation, beliefs, learning style, prior experiences and the affective dimension of learning. The third section focusing directly on strategy instruction allows students to navigate their own paths through the handbook, according to their needs. Still, a number of important questions remained which had to be resolved in developing the content: What

level of language learner to focus on, elementary, intermediate or advanced? How encompassing should the strategy training be? Is it possible to include enough not to be overwhelming but also enough to allow most students to extend their strategic repertoire? What sort of language should the handbook be couched in – so that it is transparent, clear and also translatable to other languages? These issues are highlighted as crucial because of the absence of teacher mediation to make the bridge between students' needs, abilities and preferences and strategy instruction, and to scaffold ongoing strategy development. Viewing Harris' approach in terms of the learner-context interface model, it is the students who have to create a meaningful interface between themselves and the strategy instruction modalities, and then use this to enhance their own interactions with the TL, improving that interface. Harris concludes that while initially she identified ways of contextualising strategy instruction as the key issue, as experience within the project developed this was less problematic than the absence of teacher mediation to scaffold learner self-management. This conclusion lends support to an interface-based model of independent language learning, of the roles and requirements placed on learners, and of how strategy instruction can be directed at enhancing the learner-context interface.

The final chapter of this volume, Chapter 16, deals with the integration of strategy instruction into learning materials for independent users.

The relationship between computer-based language learning and strategy development has been the subject of a number of studies (Meskill, 1991; Pujola, 2002; Ulitsky, 2000). Pujola (2002) explores the use of strategy help facilities within a Web-based programme for English language learners intended for self-study. ImPRESSions is a multimedia programme consisting of video, audio and written text using multimedia – TV, radio and newspapers – as a source of language input. Pujola notes that the design of ImPRESSions makes it a powerful tool for independent language learning in terms of the combination of media which support learners in working on TL tasks. Of particular interest for independent learning are the help facilities including a learner training facility called Ask-the-Experts the main purpose of which is to develop learners' metacognitive knowledge regarding comprehension strategies. The form that the advice takes is an interesting feature of the study. Pujola observes that, based on experience, learners pay more attention to tutors' advice in class rather than advice in handbooks or texts, so in ImPRESSions a video format was chosen. Two experienced teachers gave unscripted responses to such questions for reading as: 'What can I do when unfamiliar information is given?' and for listening: 'How can I improve listening to news on the radio?' Students were free to Ask-the Experts at any point within a module. Students' computer movements were digital-video screen recorded, and this together with direct observation and retrospective questions provided detailed insights into students' learning strategies. Pujola notes the challenge of providing appropriate strategy training for all users: while most students found the facility interesting, providing strategic information they were not aware of, more strategically knowledgeable students reported it was of little use. The study also demonstrates the tensions students experience in distributing attention optimally to language practice and learner training: those students who never accessed the Ask-the –Experts facility cited time constraints and were concerned to devote enough time to the comprehension tasks. For a fuller discussion of strategies for online environments, see Chapter 15.

A further development in independent language learning has been the growth in study abroad learning opportunities. Paige *et al.* (2004) assess the impact of a strategy-based curriculum on language and culture learning when students are on study abroad. Students were required twice a week to reflect on assigned sections of a self-study guide which included a strategies-based

approach to language and culture learning. In addition, they were asked to reflect online on their own experiences, and their experiences in relation to the assigned reading using e-journals. The e-journals were complemented by another qualitative method, interviews, and quantitative measures such as questionnaires and profiles. Preliminary analysis of the e-journals suggests that students valued the way in which the journaling enabled them to make links between the world of learning in the guide, and their lived experiences during study abroad; e-journaling was useful not only as a means of accessing students' reflections in the field, but also of structuring their reflections and use of the guide. Based on the students' qualitative reports Paige *et al.* provide examples of how language and culture learning strategies helped students better understand differences in communication styles, gave students a perspective on their experiences, and on ways of improving their language skills, and encouraged them to seek out native speakers to support them. A discussion of strategies for intercultural learning is given in Chapter 10.

An innovative approach to learner development comes from Cohen & White (in press) who focus on learners as they exercise choice in independent language learning. As background to the study twenty-first century language learners are positioned as 'informed consumers' facing multiple options, both real and virtual, for learning languages. Central to the idea of the informed consumer is that making choices places demands on language learners, and needs to be underpinned by knowledge and abilities which cannot be assumed. Cohen and White explore the idea that learners can become skilled in choosing appropriate learning environments, and then within those elected environments can also become more skilled in learning how to make best use of them. A pilot undergraduate course was developed by Cohen to develop student expertise and know-how about language learning in both in-class and out-of-class contexts. As part of the course students conducted explorations of different language learning opportunities in their immediate environment – many of which involved independent language learning. One component of the course concerns strategies and how they contribute to different aspects of language learning processes in different environments. Cohen and White's study provides a broadened sense of what is required of learners in independent language learning, in selecting particular learning environments, in combining them with other learning opportunities, in critically reflecting on what those environments afford them, and in finding ways to add value to their experiences. Through the reports of students we have insights into the means by which they actively construct, fashion and enhance a way of learning for themselves based on the alternatives available. This view of language learners as individuals who actively seek out and evaluate the possibilities for language learning in their context, characterises many of the key processes required of students in independent language learning.

Conclusion

The theory and practice of independent language learning has focused on particular contexts or settings for learning, particular philosophies or approaches, and particular attributes of learners, whether these be dispositions, skills or goals. The nature of independent learning requires learners to develop the ability to engage with and derive benefit from TL sources and contexts which are not directly mediated by a teacher. Within applied linguistics there has been a sustained commitment to find out how learners succeed in ILL and to find ways of enabling learners to manage the challenges of language learning in those contexts through the decisions they make and the actions they take as learners. In this chapter I have provided an overview of landmark studies in learning strategies in ILL, focusing on both the strategies learners use and on ways of enhancing ILL

through strategy development. Investigating how learners develop their abilities to direct and derive benefit from independent learning experiences is a particularly illuminating approach to understanding such diverse opportunities for language learning as immersion contexts, self-access settings and virtual learning environments. The studies reviewed here provide insights into the operations or processes used by learners, and into the nature of independent language learning itself, providing a solid basis for future enquiry. As contexts for language learning, both real and virtual, continue to expand and diversify, continued research and reflection on how learners develop the ability to engage with independent learning contexts deserves to remain high on emerging research agendas.

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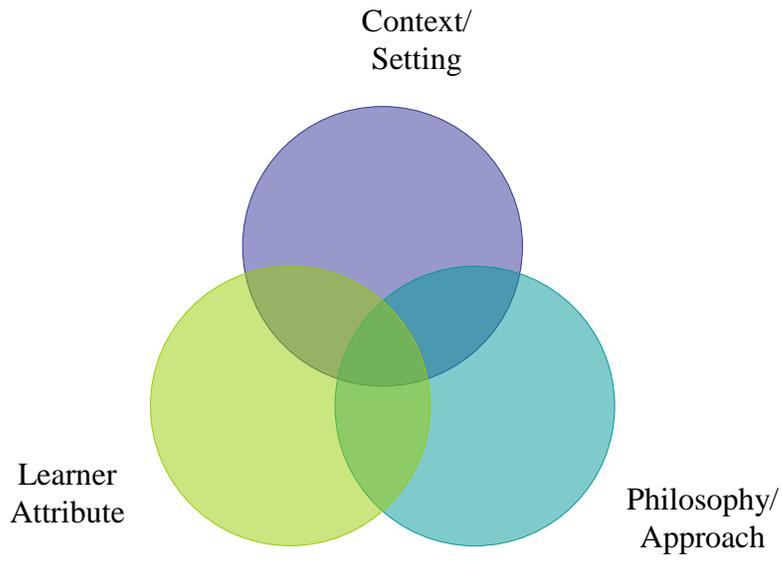Figure 1: Interrelated dimensions of independent language learning

Context/
Setting

Learner
Attribute

Philosophy/
Approach

Table 1: Language learning strategies in independent language learning: research context and focus

Researcher (s)	Context	Focus
Bown 2006	Self-instructed university language learning	Locus of learning and affective strategy use
Carson & Longhini 2002	Immersion language learning	Strategy use in a naturalistic, immersion setting
Jones 1994	Self-study of Hungarian	Diary study focusing on learning strategies
Rowsell & Libben 1994	Independent language learning over six months in a university course	Strategy use of high- and low-achievers
White 1995	Dual-mode university foreign language learning	Comparative study of strategy use of classroom and distance language learners

Table 2: Strategy development in independent language learning: research context and focus

Researcher (s)	Context	Focus
Cohen & White, in press	Self-selected language learning contexts	Fostering learner awareness and choice, including strategic awareness
Harris 2003	Independent language learning at a distance	Strategy instruction to support adults at diverse levels of competence learning a range of languages
Hurd, Beaven & Ortega 2001	Distance foreign language learning	Learner support, course development and strategy training
Hyland, 2001	Distance learning of English	Feedback to distance learners linked to learning strategies
Paige, Cohen & Shively 2004	Study abroad	A strategy-based curriculum on language and culture learning
Rowsell & Libben 1994	Independent language learning over six months in a university course	Strategy use of high- and low-achievers
Pujola 2002	Independent language learning in ImPRESSions, a web-based multimedia CALL programme	Strategy use and use of online help facilities with learner training components

[1] This has now been replaced with *Success with languages* (Hurd & Murphy, 2005), a set book for language students at beginner level and recommended to language students at all other levels.
[2] Grundtvig project no. 87400-CP-1-2000-1-AT-GRUNDTVIG-ADU ran from 2000 to 2002. Its acronym, INSTAL, stood for Individualising Strategies for Adult Learners in Language and ICT Learning. For a statement of aims and details of the project partners see
<http://www.isoc.siu.no/isocii.nsf/projectlist/87400>

Language learning strategies in independent language learning: an overview.

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