

make use of them in understanding second or foreign language instruction. Among these terms, process is considered as the most general of the three concepts. Suffice it to say that all human beings engage in certain universal processes. If someone is skilled at something, we tend to think of him/her as being able to do what ever it is faster, more smoothly, and more successfully than someone who is unskilled. It is important to notice that there is no generally agreed or empirically justified analysis of what subskills or component skills actually exist in the intellectual or cognitive field. Indeed, psychologists working in the field of mental testing have been looking for most of this century for a satisfactory way of analysing such skills, often using the complicated techniques of factor analysis to decide where tests appear to be testing the same trait and where they do not. Strategies can be defined as specific steps taken by individuals to enhance their learning. Strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. Appropriate language strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence.

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"learner training", and as an explanatory principle, for example in studies of communication breakdown and individual differences in learning. It will recur many times in various guises in the test that follows. A number of questions will have to be addressed:

1. How can strategies be identified and verified?
2. Can they be isolated and empirically demonstrated?
3. Can one distinguish between strategic and non-strategic behaviour?
4. Do strategies change during development?
5. Do communication strategies become learning strategies?

### **The distinction among strategies, techniques and tactics:**

No distinction was made among strategies, substrategies, techniques, and tactics, and the lack of clarity has generated a confusion in the research literature. Cohen (1998:10) believes that the term strategy has, in fact, been used to refer both to general approaches and to specific actions or techniques used to learn a second language. For example, a general approach strategy could be that of forming concepts and hypotheses about how the target language works.

A more specific strategy could be that of improving reading comprehension in the new language. Among the substrategies aimed at improving reading comprehension could be any of the strategies for determining whether a text is coherent e.g. checking whether the direction and ordering of elements is clear,

seeing if it is consistent and complete, and so forth. An even more specific strategy would be that of attempting to summarize the text in order to see if the ordering of the points makes coherent sense. A still more specific strategy would be to fine-tune the type of summarizing—e.g. that they be short, telegraphic summaries written in the margins of the text every several paragraphs.

So the issue is one of how to refer to these various cognitive or metacognitive processes. This includes the terms strategy, technique (Stern, 1973), tactic (Seliger, 1983), and move (Saring, 1987), among other terms and also includes the split between macrostrategies on the one hand and microstrategies and tactics on the other (Larson-Freeman and Long, 1991). A solution to the problem would be to refer to all of these simply as strategies, while still acknowledging that there is a continuum from the broadest categories to the most specific or low-level. For learners and teachers as well, experience has shown that lists of suggested strategies for given tasks are useful, especially if they include strategies that are specific enough so that they can be readily used. This way the practitioners and learners can judge for themselves the level of abstraction for each strategy and so be better able to make functional use of it if so desired.

### **Conclusion:**

In fact, the literature contains conflicting views as to the meaning of sometimes rather basic terms, such that the reader is not certain what the terms actually refer to and how to

Faerch and Kasper (1983), and Bialystok (1990) have all tried to clarify the difficult problem of how learners cope with the situation where they have a meaning to transmit or receive, but lack the normal linguistic means of encoding that meaning. Bialystok (1990) devotes two chapters to "defining" and "identifying" communication strategies, reviewing in the process the arguments put forward by the other authors. She discusses various proposals for defining criteria for strategies, and their potential for separating strategic and non-strategic behaviour, showing that each is less than adequate. For example, strategies are used when there is a problem, a breakdown; but she points out, this does not mean that strategies cannot be used where there is not a problem, unless the notion of problem is so reduced in force as to mean any translation between meaning and form of language. Bialystok (1990:12) proposed three features which occur in most of the discussions about strategy use, and summarized her approach; First, strategies are affective, they are related to solutions in specific ways, and they are productive in solving the problem for reasons which theorists can articulate. Second, strategies are systematic: learners do not create the best strategy for solving a problem but uncover the strategy from their knowledge of the problem and employ it systematically. Third, strategies are finite: a limited number of strategies can be identified. Strategies are not idiosyncratic creation of learners. Larger structures provide a context for organizing strategies into more general skills that are

applicable to a range of problems. This systematicity of strategies should be kept as a guiding factor in the search for description and explanations of the strategies used by second language learners.

**4) Plans:** A fourth way of conceiving of strategies is to think of them as plans for action. In the literature of learning strategies there have been a number of attempts to set up general principles which may describe the kinds of plan that successful language learners use. This tradition goes back to the work of Sern (1975) and Rubin (1975), who attempted to specify plan of actions whose use might distinguish successful language learners from unsuccessful ones. Faerch and Kasper (1983) explicitly reject the equation of strategy and plan, talking again about communication strategies, and attempt to draw a sharp distinction between them based on the difference between a planning phase of problem-solving and execution phase: strategies operate to put into effect the decisions embodied in the plan. Bialystok (1990) points out that this distinction is difficult to maintain.

This brief discussion will most likely have given the impression that the concept of psychological strategy is a very difficult one to pin down in a clear fashion that can be accepted by a majority of scholars in the field. This impression is quite justified; and yet it does not prevent this undeniably useful notion from continuing to be used both as a programmatic principle, i.e. as a justification for certain kinds of teaching, for example in

skilled at particular kinds of performance and not others. Wide range of performances: physical: e.g. sports, psychomotor: e.g. driving a car, steering a boat, flying. 3) They are amenable to learning and possibly instruction. 4) There are individual differences in level of achievement. 5) Performance is smooth, sensitive to feedback, integrated in time. 6) Most of the time, skills lead to success. (McDonough, 1995:3).

In discussion of language skills it has long been commonplace to refer to the various modes of language performance as skills; speaking, reading, writing, and listening (the four-skills approach of Audio-Lingualism). But it is evident that such terms are very general and not quite consistent with the use of ordinary language- and the literature of skill acquisition within psychology- or "skill" in specific applications. Hence it is nowadays convenient to refer also to subskills- for example, Nuttall's (1982) use of the division between word-attack skills and text-attack skills in her discussion of teaching foreign-language reading.

Concerning language skills, Oxford (1995:6) believes that gaining new language necessarily involves developing four modalities in varying degrees and combinations: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Among language teachers, these modalities are known as the four language skills, or just the four skills. Culture and grammar are sometimes called skills, too, but they are somewhat different from the Big Four; both of these intersect and overlap with listening, reading, speaking, and writing in

particular ways. The term skill simply means ability, expertness, or proficiency. Skills are gained during the language development process.

### **Strategy:**

According to Brown (1987: 79) strategies are specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information. Strategies vary intraindividually; each of us has a whole host of possible ways to solve a particular problem and we choose one for a given problem. This term is currently enjoying a vogue in language-learning circles, with a variety of implications. There are four broad categories of meaning:

*1) An organizing principle or policy:* in this sense, strategy is an articulated plan for meeting particular types of problems, not a piece of problem-solving in itself (McDonough, 1995).

*2) An alternative to calculation by rule:* psychologists speak of strategies when referring to human mental ploys which appear to be used when alternative methods entail penalties of cognitive overload, memory or knowledge.

*3) compensation:* a large part of the literature in Second-language studies has focused on the use of strategies for overcoming communication breakdown. Tarone (1981),

## **Introduction:**

Although we often use these three terms synonymously and interchangeably, if we ask for a definition, we are frequently given a vague definition. This attention to superficial similarities among these terms, however, tends to obscure the distinctive characteristics of each, and an understanding of the distinctions among the terms is vital to comprehensive definitions.

Brown (1987: 78) argues that there has been a great deal of confusion in the use of these three terms. We can find instances of "transfer" and "interference" being referred to as "Strategies" (Taylor, 1975). Sometimes "Process" and "Strategy" are synonymous (Tarone et al. 1976). And "Skills" and "Strategies" are often similarly interchanged.

He emphasized the importance of clarification, since these three terms are used in a variety of senses in every day language and in the language-teaching literature.

## **Process:**

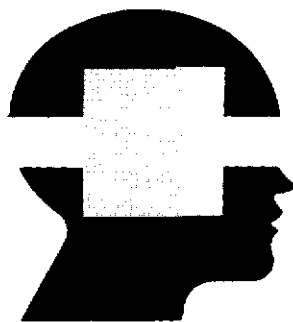
Of the three concepts, process is the simplest and yet the most overused. A process is the mechanism by which a set of information is transformed: thus the writing process is the mechanism by which ideas are transformed into characters on a page. Cognitive processes occur through time, and are subject to constraints of real time such as overload and memory; and they may occur in linear order, as in a model of writing which specifies a series of stages from thought via outline to

expression, or in parallel, as when several elements of a process occur simultaneously, for example in the activation of vocabulary and vocabulary associations such as synonyms and antonyms. (Towell and Howkins, 1994, 168).

In relation to process, Oxford (1995:5) maintains that the process orientation (building on general systems theory, in which all phenomena are part of a dynamic system) forces us to consider not just language learning process itself but also the input into this process. The general term input might include a variety of students and teachers characteristics, such as intelligence, sex, personality, general learning or teaching style, previous experience, motivation, attitudes, and so on. Input might also include many societal and institutional factors, such as unspoken and often inaccurate generalizations about particular students or about whole groups (e.g., simplistic expectations like "Girls must learn to be good wives and mothers, while boys must go out and conquer the world with their achievements"). It is important to identify the input factors in order to understand and interpret more clearly both the process and the outcome of language learning or acquisition.

## **Skill:**

If someone is skilled at something, we tend to think of him/her as being able to do whatever it is faster, more smoothly, and more successfully than someone who is unskilled. Therefore, skills have a number of general features: 1) Performance: skills are about doing things. 2) Specific application: one can be



# Some Words on Three Terms: Process, Skill, and Strategy in SLA

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مقاله حاضر تلاشی است در جهت رفع ابهاماتی که پیرامون سه واژه فرآیند، مهارت و راهبرد در فراگیری زبان دوم وجود دارد. علی رغم اینکه ما اغلب این سه واژه را به صورت مترادف و متناوب بکار می‌بریم، اگر به دنبال یک تعریف جامع از آنها باشیم، مکرراً با تعاریف مبهم و پیچیده روبه‌رو خواهیم شد. توجه به تشابهات ظاهری در هر حال منجر به پیچیده شدن خصایص متمایز کننده واژه‌های فوق‌الذکر خواهد شد و از طرف دیگر فهم این تمایزات برای ارائه تعاریف جامع ضروری به نظر می‌رسد. طرح کلی این مقاله بر اساس بسط و طرح ریزی مجدد طبقه‌بندی براون (۱۹۸۷) و لحاظ کردن دیدگاه‌های نوین پیرامون گستره (حیطه) این سه واژه استوار است. علی‌رغم وجود همپوشی میان این سه واژه، تلاش بیشتر متوجه ویژگی‌های متمایز کننده خواهد بود. بطور معمول هر تعریفی سؤالاتی را بدون پاسخ می‌گذارد و بر اساس همین اصل این مقاله سعی دارد که داوری کلی را برعهده خواننده قرار دهد.

## Abstract:

The present article is an attempt to clarify the ambiguities surrounding the terms "process", "skill", and "strategy". The framework of clarification that will be used in this study is an extension and recasting of Brown's taxonomies (1987:78), incorporating more recent views on the domains of these three terms. Although there is some degree of overlapping among them, care will be taken to focus on the distinctive features of each.