

Towards an Individualized Language Classroom: Identifying Language Learning Strategies of Young Language Learners by Means of Diagnostic Interviews

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Abstract

The article provides the theoretical background to an ongoing project carried out in the context of teacher training at a university college of education in Austria. It describes the preparatory steps which are taken in order to successfully determine young language learners' language learning strategies by means of diagnostic interviews. The discussion evolves around the importance of strategies for both learners and teachers as defined in various national and international documents. The literature review shows that especially young learners need to be encouraged to employ memory and affective strategies so that their language learning is successful.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategies, English as a Foreign Language, Individualization, Diagnostic Interview, Young Learner

1. Introduction

The ongoing project 'Towards an Individualized Language Classroom: Identifying Language Learning Strategies of Young Language Learners by Means of Diagnostic Interviews' was planned and is run at the Private University College of Education, Diocese of Linz, Austria. It is set in the context of the professional development of student teachers of English in initial teacher training. Those students are training to teach pupils aged 10 to 15 in lower secondary schools in Austria. The overall aim of the project is, on the one hand, to familiarize student teachers of English with subject-specific development models and the diagnostic interview as a tool to identify strategies which are used by the learners and, on the other, to help the educators to adopt measures which are aimed at supporting pupils in their individual learning processes.

The article describes the origin and aims of the project and gives a short introduction to teaching English as a foreign language in primary and lower secondary education in Austria including a brief discussion of how the ability to identify and foster language learning strategies can contribute to the professional knowledge which language teachers are supposed to demonstrate. Moreover, the importance of the development of language learning strategies as part of the foreign language learning¹ process is discussed and examined in detail. Finally, the outline of the project is given together with a description of the applied research method, the 'diagnostic interview', and an outlook on further steps.

2. Origin and Aims of the Project

The interest in exploring language learning strategies of young and adolescent learners in more detail was sparked by two publications which were quite different in nature. First, by an article (Katzenbach et al., 2014) which summed up a project carried out in Germany that aimed at developing the knowledge of junior class teachers to better understand pupils' number strategies, knowledge, and their stages of development from using less sophisticated to using more advanced strategies when solving mathematical tasks. Ultimately, it was hoped that this improvement in teacher knowledge would lead to an improvement in the number achievement of junior class students.

¹The term 'language learning' is used in this article to refer to formal instruction, as distinct from the term 'language acquisition' which is used to describe incidental and informal development of language proficiency (cf. Ministry of Education, 2008a, p. 2).

The project was based on Count Me In Too (CMIT), a preceding study conducted by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand. The idea that this improved knowledge of strategies used in order to reach an educational aim could also be beneficial in the context of foreign language teaching and learning seemed worth exploring further and has ever since then grown into the project outline which will be given on the following pages.

Second, the strong interest in exploring language learning strategies of young and young adult learners in order to better enable future language teachers to cater for the individual needs of their pupils was further generated by some of the latest findings presented in a recently published report by the Bundesinstitut für Bildungsforschung, Innovation & Entwicklung des österreichischen Schulwesens² (BIFIE) (Breit et al., 2016), in which the results of the standard testing which took place in 2015 were summarized. The results showed that pupils with a migrant background who attended the fourth year of primary school showed a significantly lower proficiency in German than their classmates who were born and had grown up in Austria. These findings are in line with what is described in another programme which has its origin in the 'Land of the Long White Cloud', 'The English Language Learning Progressions (ELLP)' (Ministry of Education, 2008a). This programme aims at helping language teachers to support their learners in the linguistically diverse classroom. In this programme, a strong plea for the development of 'met cognition' is made. Referring to Biggs & Moore (1993, as cited in Ministry of Education 2008a, p. 17), three different types of met cognitive knowledge, which is regarded as being conducive to the language learning process, are identified:

- *knowing what*, or having knowledge about your own learning processes (declarative knowledge);
- *knowing how*, or having knowledge about what skills and strategies to use (procedural knowledge);
- *knowing when*, or having knowledge about when and why to use various strategies (conditional knowledge).

Despite the fact that the programmes and projects which have been described so far were developed in subject areas other than English as a Foreign Language, cross connections could be established fairly easily and used as starting points for 'Supplying Strategy and Support' in a lower secondary EFL-classroom, in which teaching procedures are orientated towards fostering individual learning processes. The primary reference to CMIT and ELLP can be found in the intention to identify regularities in the development of learning and problem solving strategies of the language learners and passing on this knowledge to language teachers, secondarily, the project explores potential differences in the use of strategies between bilingual and multilingual language learners.

One of the tools used in order to provide a detailed description of strategies employed by the participants in this study is the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) inventory, which was established by Rebecca L. Oxford (1986) and has been investigated and validated in numerous studies (please refer to Saks et al., 2015, pp. 244f. for an overview). Additionally, communication strategies as described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF) (Council of Europe 2001, pp. 57ff.) will be used in the analysis together with matrices provided by 'The English Language Learning Progression' programme (Ministry of Education, 2008a), all of which will be explained in more detail in subsequent chapters of this article.

In the first phase of the study, language learning of pupils undergoing the transition phase from primary (age 6 to 10) to lower secondary education (age 10 to 15) is in the focus of attention. In a second phase of the project, the transition from lower to upper secondary (age 15 to 19), and in a third, the one from secondary to tertiary education will be explored further.

The following research questions will be examined in the various stages of the project:

1. Which language learning strategies are employed by pupils at the beginning of their first year in lower secondary school?
2. How do the language learning strategies of pupils who learn English as an L2³ differ from those who learn it as an L3.
3. What do language teachers know about language learning strategies in general?
4. What do language teachers know about their pupils' language learning strategies?
5. In which way(s) do language teachers support their pupils in the process of developing language learning strategies?

² Federal Institute for Educational Research, Innovation & Development of the Austrian School System (author's translation)

³ L2 is here used to describe the second language pupils learn, as distinct from L1 which would refer to their first language or mother tongue. In the Austrian context, pupils with a migrant background are very likely to have learned German as an L2, in which case English is their L3.

As the project's overall aim is to provide help and guidance for future English teachers in Austrian schools, the following chapter briefly outlines the context in which it is set up and run. Moreover, it shows the importance of the teaching of language learning strategies for the professional language teacher.

3. Teaching English in Austria and the Professional Language Teacher

The Austrian curriculum for primary schools (BMB, 2016) prescribes the teaching and learning of one foreign language only in the form of a "Verbindliche Übung "Lebende Fremdsprache""⁴ and does not provide detailed attainment aims. However, the Österreichische Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum⁵ (ÖSZ)(2016) recently published a list of core-competences for Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, which are based on the CEF and will be included in the new primary curriculum in 2017. In addition, the BMB had a curriculum for multilingualism developed in 2011 (Krumm & Reich, 2011). In this curriculum, the development of a repertoire of language learning strategies is listed among the competences language learners are supposed to acquire. Moreover, in the document entitled "Lehrplanbezüge Unterrichtsprinzip Sprachliche Bildung"⁶ (BMB, 2011, pp. 3-4), the development of language learning strategies is highlighted in various passages referring to teaching in the third and fourth year of primary school and in lower secondary schools.

Additionally, in their recently published study which attempts to define ways in which teachers can act more successfully in a heterogeneous classroom, Miriam Vock and Anna Gronostaj (2017, p. 109) point out the importance of an orientation towards standards and core-competences. They argue that both differentiation and individualization can be better provided if there are guidelines concerning the minimal and average learning outcomes in the subject areas. This is why in this project a clear reference to the core-competences is made.

Teaching a foreign language in what has been characterized as a "post-method era" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 16) in which the teachers' decisions are based on various previously dominating approaches and methods, allows multiple ways in which language learning strategies can "operate comfortably alongside with contemporary language learning and teaching theories" (Griffith, 2004, p. 10). This is particularly true considering the fact that over the last decade more and more attention has been directed from how teachers teach to how learners learn. This recent development is reflected in the development and promotion of learner portfolios such as the "European Language Portfolio (ELP)" (cf. Felberbauer, 2010, Abuja et al., 2004). Hence, the teacher's role is no longer only that of the "language teacher", the "classroom manager", and the "researcher and learner", but also of the "expert in learning" (Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-v. Ditfurth, 2014, p. 27).

In the international discussion about the professional learning and development of teachers (cf. Timperley, 2007, 2008), it is pointed out that "the cycle of professional inquiry and knowledge-building begins with a question about students' learning needs" (Timperley, 2008, p. 28). Among the ways in which teachers can identify their students' needs, "interviews with students about their learning" (ibid., p. 13) are listed. Again, these needs are defined as being determined by the relation between the expected learning outcomes and the actual performance of the learners.

As this project aims to contribute to the professional development of student teachers undergoing initial teacher education, another document which was developed to help prospective English teachers to assess their own didactic competence, The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) (Newby et al., 2007) was looked at regarding references to language learning strategies. Numerous descriptors in the "Methodology"-section (ibid., pp. 20-29) focus on communication strategies as described in the CEF (pp. 22/9; 23/7; 25/3,6,7; 26/3,6; 27/2,3), e.g. "I can help learners to apply strategies to cope with difficult or unknown vocabulary of a text" (p. 25). Other references can be found in the section about "lesson planning" (pp. 33-37), "conducting a lesson" (pp. 38-43), and "independent learning" (pp. 44-50). In the context of learner autonomy, the following descriptor is included, "I can evaluate and select tasks which help learners to reflect on and develop specific learning strategies and study skills" (p. 45).

All things considered, there seems to be ample evidence for the claim that language teachers are expected to "give [their language learners] that sense of control so that they are not constantly reliant on the teacher" (Harris, 2001, p. 12).

⁴For this additional compulsory lesson, schools can choose to offer English, French, Italian, Croatian, Slovakian, Slovenian, Czech or Hungarian.

⁵The Austrian Centre for Competence Regarding Language Learning and Teaching (author's translation)

⁶References to the Curricular Principle of Language Education (author's translation)

4. Language Learning Strategies and the Nature of Second Language Acquisition

After having established the context in which student teachers of languages are expected to identify and teach language learning strategies, this chapter focuses on the language learning process and on the language learner.

The importance of the development of language learning strategies in the process of increasing language proficiency has been emphasized by numerous researchers over the last thirty years (cf. Abhakorn, 2008, Anderson, 2005, Chen, 2009, Cohen, 2011, Harris, 2001, Hu, 2012, Kormos & Csizér, 2014, Oxford, 2011, Urlaub, 2013, Yeldham & Jen, 2014). Hedge (2000, p. 76) summarizes the main characteristics of the good language learner as follows:

[The learner should have] an ability to define one's own objectives; awareness of how to use language materials effectively; careful organization of time for learning, and active development of learning strategies.

Therefore, among other capacities such as age, intelligence, aptitude, personality, motivation, and learner preferences, which seem to be decisive in becoming what would be considered a competent language learner (cf. Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-v. Ditfurth, 2014, p. 34), learning strategies have proved to have a considerable impact on the success of the language learner.

Whereas it seems to be possible to allocate specific learning strategies to a distinct phase in the development of skills in other subject areas such as maths (cf. Ministry of Education 2008c), the process of language learning and acquisition is too complex to be described in a similar manner. Ever since Stephen Krashen (1982) developed his Theory of Second Language Acquisition in the 1980s, linguists have further examined his hypotheses extensively. As stated in "the natural order hypothesis" (Krashen as cited in Hong, 2008, p. 65), some grammatical structures appear to be acquired earlier than others. Accordingly, linguists could identify "developmental sequences" (Van Patten & Benati, 2015, p. 28) regarding the acquisition of particular structures, e.g. negation, relative clauses, and "acquisition orders" (ibid., p.30), which are concerned with the relative order in which different structures are acquired over time, e.g. progressive -ing followed by regular past tense, irregular past tense, and third-person -s. However, in the context of formal language learning in which pupils are exposed to the foreign language under intentional learning conditions (cf. Leow & Zamora, 2017), a natural environment can only be provided to a limited extent. In general, two of Krashen's hypotheses seem of importance in the context of identifying language learning strategies in the ongoing project, namely the "monitor hypothesis" and the "affective filter hypothesis". The former suggests that the language learner edits his utterances consciously and appropriately to communicate successfully. Moreover, Hong (2008, p. 65) has established a direct connection between "monitor use" and the learners' psychological traits, pointing out that extroverts tend to under-use monitoring, whereas introverts and perfectionists tend to over-use editing and self-correcting (ibid.). Similarly, affective variables have been found to relate to success in second language acquisition. Krashen (1982, p. 30) lists "motivation", "self-confidence", and "anxiety" as the ones which could be determined in various studies. In sum, despite the fact that in formal language teaching and learning the acquisition of language will only partly take place in what could be described as a natural order, some strategies which are employed in informal language acquisition can also be considered relevant in the development of language proficiency at schools.

5. The Classification of Language Learning Strategies

In this project, the classification of language learning strategies was based on three main sources and will be outlined in the following sections.

5.1. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

Despite the fact that Rebecca Oxford developed her Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) as "Research accomplished under contract for the Department of the [U. S.] Army" (Oxford, 1986, n.p.) with the aim "to determine the status of skills of Army linguists after formal language training is over" (ibid.), the tool has proved to be of highly practical use when assessing the use of strategies, determining whether the chosen strategies are appropriate for particular learning goals and requirements, and heightening awareness among instructors.

Even though Oxford's classification has been discussed widely by numerous linguistics, it has prevailed as one of the most useful bases for understanding language learning strategies (cf. Griffiths, 2004, pp. 1-5). Oxford (2003, p. 12) distinguishes six main categories of language learning strategies, 'cognitive', 'meta cognitive', 'memory-related', 'compensatory', 'affective', and 'social'. Research has revealed that cognitive, meta cognitive strategies, and social strategies correlate with proficiency in the foreign language (ibid.).

However, memory-related and affective strategies seem to become less important the more proficient the learner becomes. This may be due to the fact that advanced learners tend to employ other strategies more than beginners. In this project, in which many learners are expected to have reached only CEF A1, these types of strategies are, therefore, expected to still be of high relevance. The strategies which are listed among compensatory strategies are the ones where a connection to the other two classification systems chosen for this project can be most easily drawn. The learner applies these when practising their listening, reading, and speaking skills, e.g. when using cues in listening or when circumscribing a word which they do not know in speaking. These strategies and how they are related to the 'communicative' strategies described in the CEF will be examined further in the following section about the CEF.

5.2. Communicative Strategies According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF)

The Council of Europe (2001, p. 57) provides the following definition of 'strategies' in the CEF:

Strategies are a means the language user exploits to mobilise and balance his or her resources, to activate skills and procedures, in order to fulfil the demands of communication in context and successfully complete the task in question in the most comprehensive or most economical way feasible depending on his or her precise purpose.

This definition illustrates one of the major problems the researchers have been facing when dealing with strategies in the context of language learning ever since Rebecca Oxford defined her categories, i.e. the fact that it is not always possible to clearly attribute strategies to either the area of 'learning' or 'communication'. This has caused particular concern when trying to classify 'compensation strategies', e.g. looking for synonyms when the exact word is unknown, which could be considered both a learning and a communication strategy (Griffith, 2004, p. 4). In this project, in which any language performances take place in a formal setting, we have decided to subsume compensation strategies under the term 'communicative strategies'.

The CEF divides communicative strategies into four broad categories, "productive" and "receptive", "interactive", and "mediating", corresponding to the basic distinction into the activities of speaking and writing, and listening to and reading of a text (Council of Europe, 2001, p.57). All in all, the ability to operate strategies is seen as being closely connected to language ability in general, which is in line with what was said about cognitive strategies in chapter 5.1..This type of strategy is considered as a means that is used to communicate successfully.

The relation between cognition and meta cognition is defined in the CEF as follows: Communication strategies are described as applications of four meta cognitive principles, "Pre-planning, Execution, Monitoring, and Repair Action" (ibid.), each of which can be mastered by application of various strategies. In the context of speaking and writing, the learners may decide to rehearse, they may try to anticipate the reaction of their audience, they will look up words and phrases they need to express themselves or ask someone for help, or they may adjust the task, scale it up or down according to their abilities. In general, if language users try to accomplish the task using all their resources, they are employing what is described as 'achievement strategies' in the CEF, if they scale down the task in order to fit their resources, they use 'avoidance strategies'. In the actual speaking or writing process, the learners who adopt a positive approach is likely to use strategies such as foreignizing of expressions from their mother tongue, paraphrasing, or simply trying out things which they think might work, even though they never learned them before.

A descriptor for compensating strategies on level CEF A2 (ibid., p. 64) says that learners "can use an inadequate word from his/her repertoire and use gesture to clarify what he/she wants to say". Moreover, the learners will try to evaluate while speaking how well their audience receive the information given by trying to read facial expressions or gestures. Additionally, learners may employ repair strategies such as spotting slips and correcting them. In listening and reading learners employ a number of strategies ranging from anticipating the content of the message to come, looking for cues, matching the expectations to the cues, and revising the expectations in case they don't fit. When using receptive strategies, the process of inferring is described as being of particular importance, as the reader and listeners regularly have to fill gaps which may exist in the information given in order to fully understand the message (ibid., p. 72ff.).

Interaction strategies involve both productive and receptive strategies, but both spoken and written interaction require the usage of strategies which are unique to this particular type of language use. Language learners will have to ask the audience for attention and will have to use strategies to maintain it.

In the role of the listener, it will be necessary to tell the speaker in case one cannot follow, or to be able to indicate that one has fully understood (*ibid.*, p. 84ff.). These examples illustrate that in the description of strategies provided by the CEF, drawing on cognitive, meta cognitive, and social strategies (cf. chapter 5.1.) seems to be of particular importance. Mediation strategies are employed when acting as a means to bridge the information gap between two people who do not understand each other directly. In real life this usually involves translation, which is of minor importance in the lower secondary EFL-classroom and will, therefore, not be included in the analysis (*ibid.*, p. 87).

5.3. The English Language Learning Progression

The English Language Learning Progression was developed by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand in the context of teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) with the aim to “explain what ESOL specialists and mainstream teachers need to know about the English language learners in order to maximise their learning and participation” (Ministry of Education, 2008a, p.2). The importance of being taught how to learn is highlighted and is regarded as being conducive to the effectiveness of learning, the authors go so far as to say that knowledge which has been acquired regarding one’s own learning processes should also be transferred “into a range of curriculum areas” and applied “to new learning tasks” (*ibid.*, p.10).

In the actual description of strategies, the authors choose a skill-based approach like the one in the CEF. However, their distinction only includes the areas of ‘Oral language’, ‘Reading’, ‘Writing’, and ‘Thinking about learning’ (Ministry of Education 2008b, p.63). Moreover, ‘text processing strategies’ for becoming a strategic reader are suggested, which are further subdivided into ‘comprehension strategies’ and ‘processing strategies’ (Ministry of Education 2016, n.p.), a division which reflects a similar approach as the one taken in the description of the meta cognitive principles in the CEF. Text processing strategies are used to describe

- attending and searching - looking purposefully for particular information, known words, familiar text features, patterns of syntax, and information in pictures and diagrams;
- predicting - forming expectations or anticipating what will come next by drawing on prior knowledge and experience of language;
- cross-checking and confirming - checking to ensure that the reading makes sense and fits with all the information already processed;
- self-correcting - detecting or suspecting that an error has been made and searching for additional information in order to arrive at the right meaning.

Comprehension strategies involve activities such as

- making connections between prior knowledge and the text;
- forming and testing hypotheses about texts;
- asking questions;
- creating mental images, or visualising;
- inferring;
- identifying the author’s purpose and point of view;
- identifying and summarising main ideas;
- analysing and synthesising ideas and information;
- evaluating ideas and information.

The particular value of the materials provided in the various documents which were published in the ‘Language Learning Progressions’-series for this study is that the authors provide prompts for the language learners which encourage them to consider the way in which they try to approach a task. The examples given range from simple prompts such as “Am I easy to hear?” and the suggested strategy, “Say your question (or idea) to yourself in your head before you talk” (*ibid.*, p.63), to more sophisticated strategies to answer the question “How can I get better at reading?”, namely “Use different ways (charts, mind maps) to make notes about the main ideas. This can help you to notice and understand what you read” (*ibid.*). Moreover, pupils are encouraged to try different strategies, for example in the context of learning new words, “Practise different ways of learning new words and decide which ones work best for you, e.g. look, say, spell, cover, write, check” (*ibid.*).

5.4. Bringing it All Together

Looking at different classification systems and a programme which was developed in order to foster literacy has helped to identify the strategies which seem of particular relevance in foreign language learning of young

learners. These are summed up in the following table. The abbreviations used stand for PP= Pre-planning, E= Execution, M= Monitoring, and RA= Repair Action.

Table 1: Chart for Recording and Analysing Strategies

| | Receptive | | | | Productive | | | | Interactive | | | |
|---------------|-----------|---|---|----|------------|---|---|----|-------------|---|---|----|
| | PP | E | M | RA | PP | E | M | RA | PP | E | M | RA |
| Memory | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Affective | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cognitive | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Metacognitive | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Social | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Avoidance | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Achievement | | | | | | | | | | | | |

This classification system is used for the analysis of the data derived from this project. It is supposed to help teachers develop a detailed profile of the individual learners' language learning strategies which can be used when supporting them in the development of language proficiency.

6. Methodology

In this section, the project timeline and a detailed description of the research method is provided.

6.1. Project Timeline

2016: literature review, preliminary discussions with prospective participants in the study at various partner schools

2017: selection of participants, contacting head teachers at various schools, development of tasks which allow the identification of language learning strategies

May 2017: meeting teachers who will be teaching a first-year class lower secondary starting in September 2017, defining the workload for teachers involved, piloting tasks used in the interviews

October/ November 2017: conducting diagnostic interviews and analysis of the results 2018: feedback to teachers, further development into Learning Study

6.2. Diagnostic Interviews

The main characteristic of the diagnostic interview is to combine the identification of cognition and meta cognition, in other words, to focus both on thinking and learning and *thinking about* thinking and learning. In order to achieve this, each of the tasks the interviewee is confronted with is followed by questions about the way(s) in which it was carried out. This very clearly structured conversation lasts for ten to 25 minutes, depending on the language proficiency of the interviewees (cf. Katzenbach et al., 2014).

In second language acquisition research, the use of verbal reports, both concurrent and retrospective, has proved to yield valuable results with regard to enriching our knowledge of how learners process language input and attend to tasks (cf. Camps, 2003).

In this project, the interviews are videotaped, so that the researchers can compare the pupils' description to what can be observed.

6.2.1. Knowledge questions

The tasks for the diagnostic interviews are taken from a set of exercises which was compiled and developed further under the guidance of the ÖSZ. The learning activities are allocated to two different learning levels, GS1 and GS2, referring to year 1 and 2, and year 3 and 4 of compulsory schooling in Austria. Each task consists of notes for the teacher and all the materials needed for use in class.

On level GS1, English is taught adopting a CLIL⁷ approach, this is why there is always a reference to the subject in which the task can be included is given. Moreover, teachers are given advice concerning the instructions they can give when carrying out the task in class. The following figure shows tasks in which English and Maths and English and General Studies are combined:

⁷Content and Language Integrated Learning

Figure 1: BMBF, ÖSZ (2015). Grundkompetenzen Lebende Fremdsprache: Methodisch-didaktisches Praxisbeispiel 070 and 038.

070

Adding and taking away

Do the sums and draw.

How many? ? $2 + 4 = \square$

How many? ? $8 + 2 = \square$

How many? ? $7 + 1 = \square$

038

Fashion Show

Listen and find the right numbers.

| | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

The tasks cover all skills, Spoken Interaction, Spoken Production, Listening Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, and Writing and were compiled in order to help primary school teachers reach a standard which helps smooth the transition from English in primary to lower secondary school. Generally speaking, the exercises reflect levels CEF A1 and CEF A2.

These tasks seemed suitable for the interviews in which learning strategies were in the focus of attention because they seemed to allow the interviewer to establish a comfortable but also challenging environment for the interviewee. Moreover, the learning activities are generally not too time-consuming to be dealt with in the limited time available for each interview.

6.2.2. Strategy questions

After completion of the task, the interviewee is asked about the way(s) in which he accomplished the task. In general, the interviewer makes sure that all meta cognitive principles are referred to (cf. chapter 5.2.). Depending on the type of task and the predominant skill used, the interviewees are invited to describe in as much detail as possible which cues were important for them in the process of solving the task. These answers of the interviewees are then analysed according to the table presented in 5.4.. Individual learner profiles are developed.

7. Conclusion and Outlook

In the first phase of the project 'Towards an Individualized Language Classroom: Identifying Language Learning Strategies of Young Language Learners by Means of Diagnostic Interviews', which is the subject matter of this article, the context and the development of the research tool were described in detail. The study attempts to involve findings from various educational contexts aiming at adapting tools to the specific needs in the Austrian lower secondary classroom.

It was shown how the use of various language learning strategies can be conducive to learning a language at an early stage of the language learning process. As a result of the literature review, a classification system of strategies which can be used to analyse the data obtained in interviews and video recordings was developed.

The next steps in the process involve the adaptation of tasks used in the interviews, the conducting of interviews, and piloting of the assessment tool. In 2017, the main focus will be on conducting interviews with pupils in the first year of lower secondary school. This will be done by student teachers of English in their final year of teacher training. By the end of 2017, the data obtained in about 100 interviews will be available, and answers to two research questions will have been found. In 2018, the focus will shift from the learner to the teacher, this is when interviews with teachers will be conducted and their perspective on language learning strategies will be explored in detail.

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