



ESTUDO BIBLIOGRÁFICO DAS DEFINIÇÕES DAS ESTRATÉGIAS DE APRENDIZAGEM A PARTIR DOS ESTUDOS DE OXFORD (2017)¹

Rai Santos²

ABSTRACT: The study of learning strategies is not new, but it is still relevant when it comes to teaching and learning languages. Understanding how the construct has been defined and the relationship of these definitions with the socio-cultural context can help teachers and learners to enhance language learning. The present work aims to understand how the conceptions of learning strategies have evolved over the years and how this appears in Oxford studies (1990; 2017). We used bibliographical research based on works in the area (Gagnoux, 2006; Oxford, 2017). We analyzed the results of the Oxford (2017) studies and organized the definitions in order to identify similarities. The result showed that the definitions of learning strategies are dynamic and emergent, as they are intertwined in the interaction with/in the context.

Keywords: Learning Strategy . Teaching language learning . Teacher training .

RESUMO: O estudo das estratégias de aprendizagens não é recente, porém ainda se mostra relevante quando tratamos do ensino e aprendizagem de línguas. A compreensão acerca de como o construto tem sido definido e a relação dessas definições com o contexto sócio-cultural podem auxiliar professores e aprendentes no ensino-aprendizagem da língua. O presente trabalho tem como objetivo compreender como as concepções de estratégias de aprendizagem evoluíram ao longo dos anos e como isso aparece nos estudos de Oxford (1990; 2017). Utilizamos uma pesquisa bibliográfica a partir de trabalhos na área (Gagnoux, 2006; Oxford, 2017). Analisamos o resultado dos estudos de Oxford (2017) e organizamos as definições com o intuito de identificar semelhanças. O resultado mostrou que as definições de estratégias de aprendizagem são dinâmicas e emergentes, pois estão imbricadas na interação com/no contexto. .

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²Discente do curso de Letras Língua Inglesa. Faculdade de Línguas Estrangeiras (FALEST). Universidade Federal do Pará, Campus Bragança. Email:

Palavras-chave: Estratégias de aprendizagem. Ensino-aprendizagem de línguas. Formação de professores.

INTRODUCTION

The research addresses learning strategies, a study that is not recent, but it is relevant when it comes to language teaching and learning. The construct establishes a relationship with the socio-cultural context, which may be relevant for language teachers and learners.

The research aims to analyze and understand the evolution of learning strategies, in the research of Oxford (1990; 2017). We decided to understand if the concept of learning strategies is still relevant to the field of language learning and teaching. To do so, the research was carried out with a qualitative approach, based on the bibliographical study of Gagnoux (2006) and

Oxford (1990; 2017). In order to identify the interrelationship among the definitions, we organized all the thirty three (33) definitions into a table, which we included a third column with the themes related to them. This organization would help us to verify if there are similarities among the definitions.

[...] prepared from previously published material, consisting mainly of: books, magazines, publications in periodicals and scientific articles, newspapers, bulletins, monographs, dissertations, theses, cartographic material, internet, with the objective of putting the researcher in direct contact with all material already written on the subject of the research. In bibliographic research, it is important that the researcher checks the veracity of the data obtained, observing possible inconsistencies or contradictions that the works may present (Prodanov; Freitas, 2013, p. 54).

The article is organized into six sections. The first one brings some reflections on the most important concepts about learning strategies. The second one approaches the influences in the studies of learning strategies. The third describes the main notions related to complexity theory. The fourth discusses the possible relationships between learning strategies and other systems. Finally, we come up with more reflections about the findings.

THE MOST RELEVANT CONCEPTS OF LEARNING STRATEGIES The study of learning strategies is not recent, but it is still relevant when it comes to teaching and learning languages. Some studies have been carried out in Brazil and pointed out the importance of the construct (Almeida; Brawerman, 2019; Ernesto, 2017). In Almeida and Brawerman (2019) it is possible to see how the perspectives of English teachers in training are being influenced by

the use of language learning strategies. Ernesto (2017) investigates the strategies used by learners with higher lower school income. Outside Brazil, we can also find other studies on learning strategies (Nazeer; Mukhtar; Azhar, 2023; Psaltou-Joycey et al, 2018; Sakinah; Degeng; Sahiruddin, 2020; Vladescu, 2020; Yildirim; Atay, 2024). Research in other countries where English is studied as a second language has mostly focused on vocabulary acquisition. To better understand how the construct has been treated over the years, we brought some Brazilian authors who can help us with this understanding. Among them, we cite the studies by Wenden (1987 apud Gagnoux, 2006), O'Malley and Chamot (1990 apud Gagnoux, 2006) and Oxford (1990 apud Gagnoux, 2006).

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From the perspective of Wenden (1987 apud Gagnoux, 2006), learning strategies can be approached within the scope of metacognition, because when the individual is learning, he/she can make use of monitoring, which might be helpful in the progress of their learning. The author also points out that strategies can be technical or specific actions, observable or not, aimed at solving problems and contributing directly and indirectly during learning. Furthermore, Wenden (1987 apud Gagnoux, 2006) adds that the learning strategies can be conscious and can undergo changes. Bringing a different perspective of Wenden (1987 apud Gagnoux, 2006), O'Malley and Chamot (1990 apud Gagnoux, 2006), supported by cognitive psychology studies from the 1980s, believe that learning strategies are mental processes helping to understand, learn and retain new information. For the mentioned scholars, therefore, individual learning is similar to information processing, a concept that comes from studies in the area of computing.

Oxford (1990 apud Gagnoux, 2006) brings a definition similar to Wenden (1987 apud Gagnoux, 2006, p. 23) and states that learning strategies are “specific actions carried out by learners to make their learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations”. Although, there is such a similarity between the conceptions of Wenden (1987 apud Gagnoux, 2006) and Oxford (1990 apud Gagnoux, 2006), in Oxford, the strategies need to be thought from an objective that aims to develop communicative competence, which means making more explicit learning. Consequently, metacognitive strategies become an integral part of the taxonomy proposed by Oxford (1990 apud Gagnoux, 2006). In this work we do not intend to present the taxonomy proposed by the author, however it is possible to consult it in Gagnoux (2006).

Comparing the three concepts of learning strategies presented, we observed that as studies progress, basing the development of learning only in one area or another is not enough to explain how language learners progress. It is important to consider both cognitive and

metacognitive aspects, but not forgetting other important aspects such as affective and social aspects. Oxford (1990 apud Gagnoux, 2006) argues in favor of the relevance of delving deeper into studies on memorization because, according to the author, learners tend to report little about this strategy. Oxford (1990 apud Gagnoux, 2006) also ponders the lack of knowledge of learners regarding practice strategies, so, according to the author, it is necessary to diversify the

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activities in the classroom so that the particularities of the learners can be achieved. What Oxford brings differently in her conception of strategies is the inclusion of affective and social strategies. For the author, learners need to learn to control their emotions and know how to react to situations such as, for example, the fear of making mistakes. Self-esteem is also an element that needs attention because in Oxford's words (1990 apud Gagnoux, 2006) the lack of motivation in language learning may be associated with the low self-esteem of learners who end up not knowing how to deal with momentary failures.

Having presented the main concepts from some initial studies on learning strategies, we will address in the following section how the concept of learning strategies evolved and how it has influenced this field of studies. To treat the evolution of the concept, we chose Oxford (2017), which presents a change based on the perspective of Complexity Theory studies.

INFLUENCES IN THE FIELD OF LEARNING STRATEGIES

After two decades, Oxford (2017) resumes the research on learning strategies with an emphasis on studies of Complexity Theory. According to the author, some elements, such as context, have been neglected when dealing with language learning. Therefore, explains the scholar, with the research advancement in the field of complexity, it was possible to carry out a retrodirective (diachronic) study to understand changes in the concepts of strategies over time. To understand the conduct of the studies carried out by Oxford (2017) in this new trajectory, we will briefly summarize the conception of Complexity Theory in the following paragraphs.

The Complexity Theory construct was first introduced to the field of Applied Linguistics by Larsen-Freeman (1997) in a seminal study. Later, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) expanded the studies and translated the concept to the area of language teaching learning. For the authors, the term refers to the study of systems that are adaptive, complex, dynamic, non-linear, self-organizing, open, emergent and, often, chaotic (Larsen-Freeman; Cameron, 2008). In this sense, Complexity Theory enables a more holistic

look at the elements involved in/through the interaction between systems.

Based on Oxford's view (2017), learning or the use of learning strategies must be seen in interaction with/in the context. In other words, these strategies are classified as a resource of the learners themselves and are mutually connected to other existing resources such as experiences, emotions and skills. Some characteristics such as motivation and persistence also influence motivation to learn a language, which can generate in the learner the desire to use learning strategies, says the author. When you are successful in using the strategies, your

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motivation may change (Oxford, 2017). This shows how much the context influences the use of learning strategies and vice versa. Beyond these aspects, there are others of a social nature that also influence this process, such as interactions with colleagues, family and school (Oxford, 2017). In relation to cultural factors, Oxford (2017) understands that they can drive change in complex systems because they act in different dimensions depending on the culture. In this case, the author explains that the way each society perceives language learning will influence the way the language is taught and learned.

Therefore, Oxford (2017) understands that Complexity Theory provides a less deterministic path to learning. In a simple, but not simplistic way, the author clarifies that learning should not be understood as a one-way street, once the experiences lived by each individual can influence this trajectory. Based on the studies of Larsen-Freeman (2017), Oxford (2017) agrees that learning strategies can be understood as complex systems, so that they present some characteristics such as: emergence, nesting, interconnectivity, bidirectionality (mutual influence), dynamism, stability, attractor state, feedback, initial, open, adaptive conditions, among others. In the next paragraphs, we will explain some of these characteristics.

In Oxford's words (2017), **emergence** is a concept that denotes a new behavior in response to stimuli generated in the environment, influencing the trajectory of a system. This path to be followed may be influenced by other systems nested within the learning strategies system. Emotions can be considered an example of this type of system, as they are part of the individual's construction. As well as all the formation of beliefs that also constitute it. These systems are interconnected and, therefore, can generate more or less energy in the continuity of the learning strategies system trajectory. Because complex systems are open, they become sensitive to initial conditions that can be understood as the initial state of any complex system. Such conditions emerge at each bifurcation, at which time systems can have their trajectory redirected. When faced with a fork in the road, the system may or may not follow a new trajectory, implying the emergence of a new behavior. When this happens, the system parks in

an attractor basin, that is, there is a temporary stop caused by attractors that interrupt the system's path until it is boosted again. This interruption in the trajectory of a complex system is not good or bad, but a state or condition that can be repeated at different times along the journey. Having clarified about the Complexity Theory, we will continue describing the study carried out by Oxford (2017) on the conceptions of learning strategies over the years.

CONCEPTIONS OF LEARNING STRATEGIES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

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When resuming the study of learning strategies, Oxford (2017) recognizes that the construct continues to be relevant and, for this reason, the researcher realized the need to compile the most relevant conceptions to show the relationship between them and how they influence the field of learning strategies. To make this compilation, Oxford (2017) adopted a research methodology that involved a prototypical study³ of definitions based on a survey carried out in books and articles that involved both theoretical and practical studies about learning strategies. In the area of L2, the researcher explains that she considered definitions from at least four decades from 1975 onwards and those definitions that were not related to learning were not included. For definitions outside the L2 area, the researcher included only six from some authors that allowed some reflections on the topic. With the aim of categorizing the definitions found and avoiding repetitions, Oxford (2017) explains that she used a prototypical list of characteristics of strategy definitions and exemplifies as follows: if a 2015 definition by researcher X included the word "action" and if its prototypical feature included words like "action," "active," or "activity," then the idea was considered only once. As a result, the researcher created a list with twenty-seven (27) definitions in the L2 area and six (6) outside the L2 area, constituting a list of thirty-three (33) definitions.

Based on the results of the research carried out by Oxford (2017) and with the aim of understanding the classification of the thirty-three (33) definitions, we carried out a simple content analysis of the definitions to identify whether there was any similarity between them. Thus, we illustrated the definitions in a table based on the words that indicated similarity between them (column 2). The Table 1 below shows this reorganization:

Table 1 – Classification of learning strategy definitions

Classificação	Palavras	Definições	Autores
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³Technique derived from cognitive psychology.

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1	Techniques, devices	Learning Strategies: “the techniques or devices that a student can use to acquire knowledge”.	Rubin (1975, p.43)
2	General trends or characteristics	Learning strategies: "general tendencies or overall characteristics of the approach employed by the language learner, leaving techniques to refer to particular forms of observable learning behavior"	Stern (1983 apud Ellis 1994 p. 531)
3	Behavior, thinking	Learning strategies: "behaviors and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning that are intended to influence the learner's encoding process."	Weinstein e Mayer (1986).
4	Strategies	Learning strategies: "strategies which contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly"	Rubin (1987 & Ellis 1994 p 531).
5	Techniques, approaches, actions	Learning strategies: "techniques, approaches or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning, recall of both linguistic and content area information."	Chamot (1987 & Ellis 1994, p. 531).
6	Operation, steps,	Learning Strategies: “operation or steps used by the student to facilitate the acquisition, storage or retrieval of information”.	Chamot e Kiiper; Impink-Hernandez (1988, p.2).
7	Techniques	Learning Strategies: techniques that students use to understand, store, and remember new information and skills.”	Chamot e Kiiper (1989, p. 13)
8	Process	Learning strategies: "processes (or sequences of processes) that, when matched to the requirements of tasks, facilitate performance"	Pressley, Goodchild, Fleet e Zajchowski (1989, p. 303)

9	Behavior, actions	Learning Strategies: “behaviors or actions that learners use to make language learning more successful, self directed, and enjoyable.”	Oxford (1989, p. 235).
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10	Actions	Learning Strategies: “specific actions taken by the student to make learning easier, faster and more enjoyable. More self-directed and more transferable to new situations”.	Oxford (1990. p. 8)
11	Thoughts, behaviors	Learning Strategies: “special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them understand, learn, or retain new information”	O’Malley e Chamot (1990).
12	Behaviors, thoughts	Learning strategies: "intentional behaviors and thoughts used by learners during learning so as to better help them understand, learn. or remember new information"	Richards e Piatt (1992, p. 209).
13	Steps, behaviors	Learning Strategies: "the often cons cious steps or behaviors used by language learners to enhance their learning. These strategies help learners take in aspects of the language, store them in long-term memory, and use them when needed.”	Okada e Oxford Abo (1996, p.107)
14	Process	“Learning strategies: "learning processes which are consciously selected by the learner"	Cohen (1998, p.4).
15	Thoughts, behaviors, beliefs, emotions	Learning strategies: "any thoughts, behaviors, beliefs, or emotions that facilitate the acquisition, understanding, or later transfer of new knowledge and skills"	Weinstein Husman e Dierking (2000, p. 727)
16	Steps, actions	“Learner strategies: " steps' or 'actions selected by learners either to improve the learning of a second language, or their use of it, or both”	Gao (2003 p, 41 citando Cohen 1998, p.2).
17	Actions	Learner strategies: "the actions that learners take in order to decode, process, store, and retrieve information"	Macaro (2003, p. 109).

18	Actions, techniques	Learning strategies: "specific actions one takes and/or techniques one uses in order to learn." "Some are consciously employed, and others are automatic. ... (Most learning styles are expressed by observable learning strategy behaviors. In a nutshell, learning strategies are: things we do; relatively easy to change: different, depending on learning styles: effective or not effective	Leaver Ehrman e Shekhtman (2005, pp 65, 82)
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		for specific situations; and frequently under some level of conscious control."	
19	Activities	Learning strategies: "activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own learning"	Griffiths (2008, p, 87). Griffiths e Oxford (2014, p. 2). See Griffith's 2013 Prototypical features
20	Deliberate attempts	Self-regulated learning strategies: "deliberate, goal directed attempts to manage and control efforts to learn:]. teachable actions that learners choose from among alternatives and employ for L2 learning purposes (e.g.. constructing, internalizing, storing. Retrieving, and using information: completing short-term tasks: and or developing L2 proficiency and self-efficacy in the long term) Not to be confused with skills: "Skills are automatic and out of awareness, whereas strategies are intentional and deliberate" (See prototypical-definitional features below)"	Oxford (2011, p. 12). & Oxford 2011 concept 1.3, p 14.
21	Thoughts, actions,	Learner strategies: "[t]houghts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalized by language learners, to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks from the very onset of learning to the most advanced levels of target- language (TL) performance"	Cohen (2011, p.7; 2012 , p.136).
22	Practices, techniques	L2 strategies: specific practices or techniques that can be employed autonomously to improve one's L2 learning and or use"	Plonsky (2011, p. 994)
23	Activity	Learning strategies: "activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning"	Griffiths (2013, p.15 also see Griffiths 2008 earlier)
24	Activities, techniques	Learning strategies: "activities or techniques that learners can use to improve or enhance their target language ability"	Horwitz (2013, p. 274)

25	Methods	Learning strategies: “the methods students use to acquire information Higher achieving students use more learning strategies than do lower achieving students (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1988). Learning strategies serve different purposes.”	Dembo & Seli (2014, p.12)
26	Intentional, targeted	Learning strategies: “Strategies, either consciously or semi-consciously chosen by a language learner, operate somewhere on a continuum between being intentionally deliberate and fully automatic, are purposeful and goal	Gregersen & MacIntyre (2014, pp. 148-149 party quoting for Cohen (2007, p. 39

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		directed and can be enhanced through instruction.” “Using effective strategies, either alone or in combination (often called strategy chains) allows learners to perform specified tasks or to solve particular problems, and, as na end result, strategies can... make learning easier, faster. And more enjoyable’ (Cohen, 2007: 39)”	citado por Oxford, 1990)
27	Metacognitive goals	Learning strategies: “Most researchers agree that strategies are goal-directed, have a metacognitive component, involve learner responsibility, and require ‘some degree of consciousness whereby the learner consciously and intentionally attends selectively to a task... (Cohen. 2007. P. 32)”	Gunning & Oxford (2014, p. 8 parte da citação de Cohen 2017. p. 32)
28	Thought, behavior	Learner strategy: “a thought or behavior used by learners to regulate SFL [second or foreign language] learning or use. ... [may be engaged either] consciously and deliberately or unconsciously and automatically to further learners processing while learning or while performing” llanguage tasks”	Purpura (2014, p. 533)
29	Actions, processes	Self-regulated learning strategies: “domain-appropriate act[ions] “purposefully” used in” na active. Constructive K process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate and control their cognition. Motivation, and behavior. Guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features of the environment (Pintrich 2000. P. 453)”	Donker, de Bôer. Kostons, Dignath Van Ewijk & Vander Werf (2014, p.2) party quoting from Pintrich (2000, p.453).
30	Actions	Strategies: “Conscious actions that learners use to help them to learn or use a language”	Williams, Mercer & Ryan(2015, p. 125)
31	Behavior	Strategic: “strategic in the strict sense. That is. Involv[ing] appropriate and purposeful behavior to enhance the effectiveness of learning” [Note This definition could be applied to learning strategies, though the authors of this definition only intended to define “strategic.]	Dörney & Ryan (2015, p.146)

32	Action, plan	Learning strategy: “the learner’s plan of Action for finding or following the desired track through experience, study, or by being taught Note: Context is clearly implied.	Based onOxford Dictionary (2016 ^a , 2016b) and derivation from Proto-Indo European sources (Harper, 2016 ^a , 2016b.)
33	Actions	Learning strategies: “actions chosen by learners (either deliberately or Automatically) for the purpose of learning or regulating the learning of language”	Griffiths (2017)

Source: Adapted from Oxford (2017, p. 36-43)

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Table 1 was organized based on the classification made by Oxford (2017), in which the researcher presents the definitions already categorized (column 3). We added the second column based on the verification we carried out when analyzing the thirty-three definitions. Thus, it is possible to observe in Table 1 that the definition of learning strategies occurs more frequently in one semantic field than in another. To illustrate, **the mental theme** that refers to the terms “thought and behavior” occurred in strategies numbered 3, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 21, 28 and 31. This indicated a total of 30% of the definitions grouped around this theme. Following this result, we have 22% of the strategies defined based on the topic of actions, 10% focused on the topic of techniques and activities and, finally, 6% related to processes. Another relevant fact concerns the term used in the definitions. Oxford (2017) classified them into the following categories: learning strategies, student strategies, self-regulated learning strategies, strategic and L2 strategies.

According to the results, Oxford (2017) explains that a good part of learning strategies occur in the mind, that is, they happen in the cognitive scope. Referring to Macaro (2006), Oxford (2017) adds that mental strategies are related to storage and are effective if based on mental schemes to organize information. These mental processes are considered complex due to interaction with/in different sociocultural contexts (Oxford, 2017). The researcher explains that it is not possible to specify exactly where such processes are located, as they establish different connections with parts of the brain, as they involve areas such as memory, located in the prefrontal cortex. Oxford (2017) also informs us that these mental processes are closely related to emotions and motivation. The scholar adds that she considers these processes important, but does not rule out the possibility of actions that are observable. Therefore, she believes that cognitive processes are intertwined with behavioral processes. The author exemplifies that when a learner is analyzing something he/she is using a mental strategy, but

when the learner draws a conceptual map to analyze a newspaper article, it turns a purely mental action into something observable.

Undoubtedly, what these definitions make clear to us is that there is no consensus in the literature regarding the construct, however, Oxford (2017) points out this is no longer something to be discussed. Nevertheless, the researcher believes what this result showed is that there is a fluctuation in relation to the concept. If context is a factor that directly influences conceptions, then they will emerge according to socio-historical and cultural interactions, which demonstrates the dynamic nature of learning strategies as a complex adaptive system.

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FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Upon completing the work, which aimed to understand the development of the study on learning strategies, analyzing the socio-cultural context, how it could contribute to the development of teachers, through the approach of the Oxford 1990;2017 studies and their results and similarities between the authors, And the studies Gagnoux, 2006; Oxford, 2017). In view of this, it was found that the strategies proved to be non-linear, dynamic and emergent as they are linked with/in the context, emphasizing the use of complex systems in the study approach.

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