



Grenfell, M. J., & Harris, V. (2017). *Language learner strategies: Contexts, issues and applications in second language learning and teaching*. Bloomsbury Academic.

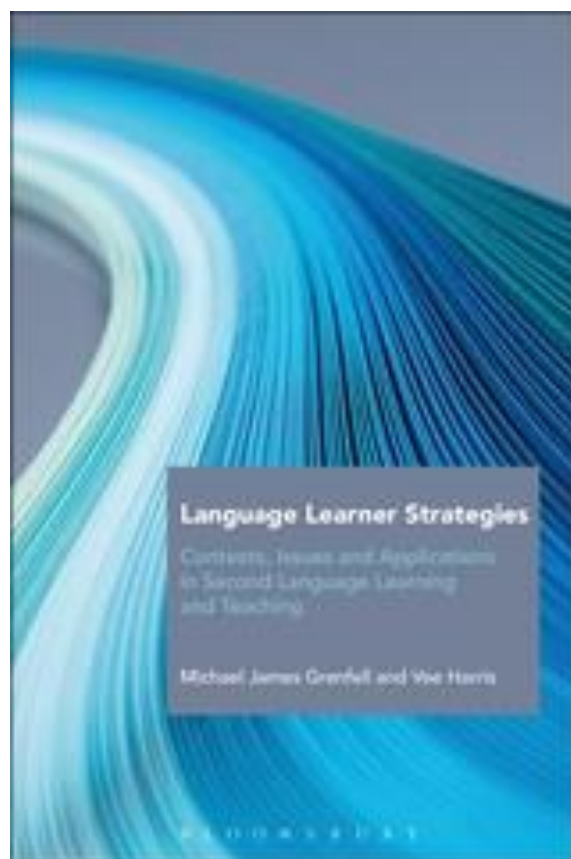
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Grenfell and Harris's *Language Learner Strategies* is a theoretical and practical overview of an approach to teaching and learning language. The book is divided into three parts. The authors first place the study of language learner strategies (LLS) within the history of second language learning research, then discuss how theories of LLS inform practice, and finally, set an agenda for future LLS research. These three parts move from highly theoretical to firmly rooted in practice, suggesting the range of readers for whom this book is intended. The sections could be three separate books in their own right, yet each one clearly speaks to the authors' intentions of exploring and reflecting on LLS. Importantly, while recent research in education has increasingly focused on the development of greater student autonomy in the classroom (see Akbari et al., 2015; Melville et al., 2018), the work of Grenfell and Harris elevates LLS as a way to achieve that autonomy.

This book extends the authors' previous collaborations that draw on their distinct research backgrounds. Grenfell applies his



expertise in Bourdieusian sociology (Grenfell, 2004, 2014) to highlight the importance of considering context when researching language teaching. Harris's practice-focused research (Grenfell & Harris, 2015; Harris, 1998) bridges the theoretical and functional aspects of the topic. Together, they articulate the unique practices of teaching non-monolingual students and non-European languages. Furthermore, whereas most second language research centers on individuals learning English as a second language (see Celce-Murcia et al.) This book illuminates the experiences of K-12 students learning non-English languages in English-speaking contexts, often referred to as "foreign" or "modern" languages.

Although the authors clearly state that they intend to present theory and research in a way that explicitly informs practice, this book does not just speak to practicing teachers of modern languages. Rather, it serves as a robust background to the topic of LLS with two important themes throughout: (1) considering context in the effectiveness and application of LLS, and (2) learning more about the process of teaching LLS and its place in the classroom.

The first part of the book provides a coherent history of language theories ranging in focus from first language acquisition to sociocultural effects on language learning, all while connecting these theories to LLS. Thorough, yet concise, this section would be valuable to anyone new to the idea of LLS. Here, the authors place Bourdieu's and Vygotsky's sociocultural stances within a framework of language acquisition theory and argue for the need to consider context when teaching LLS. They highlight how everyone has a different experience acquiring and using language, mediated by "social structural relationships to the world," and thus, their language learning "cannot therefore be value-free, and identical for all" (pp. 41-42). This is a noteworthy and important stance in a field where language learning and teaching are often

presented as processes that can be standardized across contexts. In addressing what remains to be known of language acquisition, the authors present "the black box" of language acquisition (p. 10), or the processes that are not visible when people learn a language. The specifics of what occurs during language acquisition can only be hypothesized based on the outwardly observable actions of the language learner. The continuous refinement of theory, to which this book contributes, is therefore necessary as outcomes of practices are observed and more information is amassed.

The authors also present their own empirical research on the use of LLS across various contexts for diverse student profiles and non-European languages. This research is crucial to strengthen their argument in favor of increased attention to sociocultural theories, yet presented in technical language that would make it less accessible to readers unfamiliar with formal quantitative research practices. However, the authors demonstrate how different student characteristics correlate with the learning of an additional language through LLS, and they evaluate its applicability in learning a non-European language, specifically, Mandarin Chinese. This research is also valuable in pushing back against deficit views of students who are bilingual, which abound in education (Adair et al., 2017; Flores & Schissel, 2014). Their research shows that bilingual students experienced the greatest increases in language proficiency when they were explicitly taught strategies to increase autonomy in their process of learning a third language.

This empirical research nicely sets up the authors' research agenda that expands understanding of the place of LLS in language learning. In their research agenda, the authors place current knowledge about LLS into conversation with prevailing practices and policies in the UK classroom context. Suitable for practice- or policy-based stakeholders, this

research agenda is rooted in practice, and provides readers with examples of ways to make the most effective use of LLS in their classrooms and structures that prohibit that ideal use. The distinction between ideal and real effectively supports their call for future research and policy changes.

It is interesting to note that although Grenfell and Harris articulate an anti-hegemonic stance – such as acknowledging that language education often comes from an assumption of monolingualism as the norm (p. 199) – they also reveal the influence of unacknowledged hegemonic norms over their own work. For example, when they hypothesize that more affluent students may be more motivated to learn a second language because “it would enable them to make the most of their holidays abroad” (p. 59), they ignore the richness and diversity of language already present in London, where they conduct their study. In doing so they reinforce the idea of a monolingual society as the norm and neglect to acknowledge language as a tool that is valuable to students from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

In all, this book is successful in synthesizing existing knowledge about LLS and establishing its value both as a classroom strategy and topic of research, all with a writing style that lends itself to a range of readers. Additionally, while this book is foundational in nature, it is important to recognize that each section is distinct and may be more or less relevant to different stakeholders. For example, chapter one may be more helpful to those who are new to theories of LLS and language learning, chapter two would likely speak more to researchers, and chapter three may be more relevant for a broader audience of researchers, educators, administrators, and policymakers.

Despite extensive research into language teaching, the struggle for consistency and effectiveness in this educational endeavor continues. In *Language Learner Strategies*, Grenfell and Harris call for further research centered on LLS in the fields of applied linguistics and second language acquisition, and prepare their readers with an agenda for future research that will inform these theories.


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