

Lily Wong Fillmore’s Cognitive and Social Strategies for Second Language Learners

Variability Summary E

Annela Teemant & Stefinee E. Pinnegar

Cognitive strategies “enable learners to figure out how the new language is structured, to interpret meanings in it, and to begin expressing themselves using it” (Fillmore, 1976, p. 633). Social strategies involve “ways to receive input on which to base the language learning and making efficient use of the social setting in which language is used as an aid in that learning” (p. 633). Fillmore expressed these strategies as maxims to guide second language learners’ cognitive and social participation. We have added recommendations for how teachers can support these activities.

Cognitive Maxims:

One:

“Assume that what people are saying is directly relevant to the situation at hand or to what they or you are experiencing. Metastrategy: guess” (p. 634).

- Teachers can help learners make sense of what they hear.

Two:

“Get some expressions you understand and start talking” (p. 639).

- Teachers can encourage learners to produce language.

Three:

“Look for recurring parts in the formulas you know” (p. 644).

- Teachers can help learners notice the structure of language.

Four:

“Make the most of what you’ve got” (p. 649).

- Teachers can help learners feel good about their efforts to communicate and encourage continued language production.

Five:

“Work on the big things; save the details for later” (p. 655).

- Teachers can help learners focus first on the language structures that are most important for understanding and defer feedback on particular details until it is developmentally appropriate.

Social Maxims:

One:

“Join a group and act as if you understand what’s going on, even if you don’t” (p. 667).

- Teachers can help learners structure social settings and understand the importance of listening.

Two:

“Give the impression—with a few well-chosen words—that you can speak the language” (p. 669).

Teachers can help learners and native-speakers understand the importance of production in language acquisition.

Three:

“Count on your friends for help” (p. 688).

Teachers can help learners seek feedback and encourage peers and native-speakers to be helpful.

Source:

Fillmore, L. W. (1976). *The second time around: Cognitive and social strategies in second language acquisition*. (Doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1976). Dissertation Abstracts International, 37(10), 6443A.

Adapted with permission from:

Teemant, A. & Pinnegar, S. (2007). *Understanding Language Acquisition Instructional Guide*. Brigham Young University-Public School Partnership.



Principles of Language Acquisition

Bohdana Allman



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