IV. LEARNERS' DIVERSITY

We are all different. Like snowflakes, no two human beings areexactly alike. How we recognize and relate to those differencesdepends on the prevailing culture, how individuals choose to make theirneeds known, and the technologies available to accommodate differences. Educators must recognize that every student is unique. Differencesamong our students may be small or large. Some differences areconsidered advantageous (the "gifted" student) and give the student anadvantage in the classroom. Other differences can be a challenge to theindividual (the "disadvantaged" or "differently abled" student), especiallyin situations that highlight the challenge because of the emphasis oncertain information-processing strategies. In the following, a set of diversity indicators will set forth.

1. GENDER

Certainly one difference that can be measured among any human popula-tion is gender. Gender becomes a factor in classroom instruction when theteacher creates a learning environment that favors the success of either boysor girls. Most of the time the teacher 's favoritism is subtle and unintentional.Historically, certain subject areas have tended to be problematic in termsof gender favoritism. Two curricular areas where gender is problematic arescience and technology.Gender differences are both similar to and different from culturaldifferences. Certainly there are physiological differences between thesexes, but these do not extend to inherent differences in the ability to suc-ceed at school or work. The effect of gender on learning and achievementis constructed by culture.

2. CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

Cultural differences are very real, but for the most part they havebeen constructed by society. That is to say, the differences we perceive are largely based on factors such as upbringing, training, and socioeconomiccircumstance. Cultural differences can also be problematic because theyare "in the eye of the beholder." Each individual identifies more withsome aspects of his or her heritage than with other aspects.

3. NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING – REVELL AND NORMAN (1997)

Some people are better at some things than others – better at analyzing or at remembering faces than others. This fact would indicate that there are differences in the ways individual brains work. It also suggests that people respond differently to the same stimuli. There are two

well-known theories which teachers have attempted to use for the benefit of their learners. One of them is Neuro-linguistic programming. According to this we use a number of "primary representational systems" to experience the world. These systems are described in the acronym

"VAKOG" which stands for:

- Visual (we look and see) – visual learners tend to prefer reading and studying charts, drawings and graphic information;
- Auditory (we hear and listen) – these learners are characterised by a preference for listening to lectures and audiotapes;
- Kinaesthetic (we feel externally, internally or through movement) – these learners are right-brain dominant, they use both hemispheres of their brains simultaneously that is why they are acquiring the structures through actions;
- Olfactory (we smell things),
- Gustatory (we taste things) – in case of the latter two nose and mouth are involved in the presentation of certain topics, it must be added that they have not been explored in language teaching so far. (Harmer 2003: 41)

4. MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES THEORY – GARDNER (1983)

The other one is Multiple intelligences theory which is a concept introduced by Howard Gardner. In his book Frames of Mind he suggested that as humans we do not possess a single intelligence, but a range of intelligences (Gardner: 1983). He listed seven of these:

- **Musical/Rhythmic** – learners like singing, listening to music; they are good at remembering melodies, picking up sounds; they can learn language best by music, rhythm and melody;
- **Verbal/Linguistic** – (left-brain dominant) learners like reading, writing and telling stories; they are good at memorizing names, places, dates; they learn best by saying, hearing and seeing words;
- **Visual/Spatial** – learners are the same as visual learners in the previous system, they like drawing, looking at pictures, movies and drawings; they are good at imagining things, reading maps, charts; they learn best by dreaming, visualizing, working with colours and pictures;

5. LEARNERS' STYLE

A preoccupation with learner personalities and styles has been a major factor in psycholinguistic research. Researchers have tried to identify learning styles in their own words, describing individual behavior they have observed. Brown (2000) attempts to define the term style by saying:

> Style is a term that refers to consistent and rather enduring tendencies or preferences within an individual. Styles are those general characteristics of intellectual functioning that pertain to you as an individual and that differentiate you from someone else. For example, you might be visually oriented, more tolerant of ambiguity, or more reflective than someone else. These would be styles that characterize a general pattern in your thinking or feeling. (pp. 114 -122)

In his description, Brown distinguishes a number of "cognitive, affective, and physiological traits" which are stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment. Brown (2000) focuses the study on Field Dependent/Field Independent, Ambiguity Tolerance/ Intolerance, Reflectivity and Impulsivity, left-and Right-Brain Functioning, and Visual and Auditory styles.

5.1. Field Independence

Is the ability to perceive a particular, relevant factor or item in a field of distracting items. It enables the leaner to distinguish parts from a whole, to concentrate on something, to analyze separate variables without the contamination of neighbouring variables. **Field Dependence**, on the other hand, is the tendency to be "dependent" on the total field so that the parts embedded within the field are not easily perceived , although that total field is perceived more clearly as a unified whole. It is the ability to perceive the whole picture, the larger view, the general configuration of a problem, an idea or an event.

Brown (2000) states that research in the field of learning has established that both styles can be beneficial and useful for the learners according to the contexts in which they learn. While Field Independent styles are more frequently used in classroom-organised learning, Field Dependent styles are much more practised in communicative language learning contexts where the purpose is not in conformity with language rules but rather achieving communicative goals. As a consequence of this dilemma and a compensation of learning

styles, Brown suggests that language learning within the classroom requires more Field Independent implementation, and "natural" communicative language learning needs more Field Dependent support (2000).

5.2. Tolerance and Intolerance

Of Ambiguity is a matter of accepting or rejecting contradictory, conflicting ideas with one's beliefs, principles or structure of knowledge. Some learners are open-minded and can easily cope with different ideologies or events which contradict their own views. Others are close-minded simply reject whatever idea that is incongruent with their own system of cognitive organization. Both styles have their advantages and drawbacks. Successful language learning requires foreign language learners' tolerance of different language structure and culture and it also requires intolerance of meaningless chunks learned by rote.

5.3. Reflectivity and Impulsivity

Are personality tendencies of making either a slow, calculated decision as an answer to a question – a solution to a problem, or a quick, gambling guess. Brown (2000, pp. 121-122) argues that it has been found that reflective learners make fewer reading errors than impulsive learners but as far as the reading –psycholinguistic guessing game-progresses, impulsive learners tend to be faster than reflective ones. Teacher-learner interaction, however, can be seriously affected by the reflective or impulsive style of the learners. Reflective learners need much more time to react and require, hence, more patience from the teacher while impulsive learners, who take the risk of responding quickly, may face harsh judgment from an impatient teacher.

On **Left – and Right-Brain Functioning**, Brown (2000) considers that though neurological bimodality studies (of neurological activity in left and right hemispheres of the brain) established characteristic features of this distinction, it remains unsatisfactory to say that a learner would use one or the other distinctively; learners use more or less one of them or both simultaneously in almost all types of learning activities. The various studies that Brown mentions characterize Left-Brain and Right-Brain dominance in terms of opposite mental operations that can be best summarised in the table below:

Table 1. ***Left – and Right-Brain Characteristics. (Table 5.1.in Brown, 2000, p. 125)***

Left-Brain Dominance	Right-Brain Dominance
Intellectual	Intuitive
Remembers names	Remembers faces
Responds to verbal instruction and explanations	Responds to demonstrated, illustrated, or symbolic instruction
Experiments systematically and with control	Experiments randomly and with less restraints
Makes objective judgements	Makes subjective judgement
Planned and structured	Fluid and spontaneous
Prefers established, certain information	Prefers elusive, uncertain information
Analytic reader	Synthesizing reader
Reliance on language in thinking and remembering	Reliance on images in thinking and remembering
Prefers talking and writing	Prefers drawing and manipulating objects
Prefers multiple choice tests	Prefers open-ended questions
Controls feelings	More free with feelings
Not good at interpreting body language	Good at interpreting body language
Rarely uses metaphors	Frequently uses metaphors
Favours logical problem solving	Favours intuitive problem solving

5.4. Visual and Auditory styles

are elementary input recognition. Some learners prefer reading and studying charts, drawings, maps and other graphically represented information. Other learners prefer listening to lectures and audiotapes. Most of the studies mentioned in Brown (2000) distinguish the prominence of visual or auditory styles according to cultural and educational factors and all the studies admit that even if learners favour one of the styles this does not necessarily exclude the use of the other style. In an attempt to define what a learning style is, Lightbrown and Spada (1999, p. 58) say, "Learning style has been used to describe an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred way of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills."

The methodologist Wright describes different learner styles within a group (1987, pp. 117-118). 'The enthusiast' looks to the teacher as a point of reference and is concerned with the goals of the learning group. 'The oracular' also focuses on the teacher but is more oriented towards the satisfaction of personal goals. 'The participator' tends to concentrate on group goals and group solidarity, whereas 'the rebel' while referring to the learning group for his or her points of reference, is mainly concerned with the satisfaction of his or her own goals.

Working with adult students in Australia, Willing (1987) provides the following classification:

- **Convergers:** these are students who are by nature solitary; prefer to avoid groups, and who are independent and confident in their own abilities. Most importantly they are analytic and can impose their own structures on learning. They tend to be cool and pragmatic.
- **Conformists:** these are students who prefer to emphasize learning 'about language' over learning to use it. They tend to be dependent on those in authority and are perfectly happy to work in non-communicative classrooms, doing what they are told.
- **Concrete learners:** though they are like conformists, they also enjoy the social aspect of learning and like to learn from direct experience. They are interested in language use and language as communication rather than language as a system. They enjoy games and group work in class.
- **Communicative learners:** they are language use oriented. They are much more interested in social interaction with other speakers of the language than they are with analysis of how language works. They prefer not to be guided by the teacher.

Research findings on learning styles underscore the importance of recognizing learners' varying preferences. However, teachers must take a cautious approach measurement of style preferences (Ehrman & Leaver, 2003). The fact that learners' styles represent preferred approaches rather than immutable stable traits means that learners can adapt to varying contexts and situations. And styles can be a reflection if not a direct product of one's cultural background (Wintergerst, DeCapua, & Itzen, 2001; Oxford & Anderson, 1995). That is why research on learning styles prods teachers to help learners first of all to take care of their language learning, to become autonomous learners, and then to become aware of their styles, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses, and finally to take appropriate action on their second language learning challenges (Brown, 2007).

6. LEARNING STRATEGIES

In the literature concerning cognitive science in general or language learning in particular, the term 'strategy' has been referred to a small range of synonyms such as 'technique', 'tactic'

and ‘skills’, by which individual researchers describe their understanding in this particular area in slightly differential ways. Mc Donough (1995), for example, sees a number of terms as overlapping with the concept of strategies. He identifies language skills, language processes, mechanisms to compensate for lack of language, action plans, all as terms used at various times to discuss learner strategies.

In fact, one of the tasks of researchers and writers has been to try to come up with clear definitions of what strategies are. There is little in the literature concerning the definition or the identification of language learning strategies. Inevitably these definitions are linked to the researcher’s or author’s main sphere of interest. Some relate to a psycholinguistic domain (the link between the way the brain functions and the language it encounters, some to a more pedagogical one (the way that students appear to learn in general and learn languages in particular).

There are some views triggering the discussion about whether language learning strategies are behavioral (observable), mental (unobservable) or both. For example, Oxford (1990, p. 8) defines learning strategies as specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations. Whereas Weinstein & Mayer (1986) argue that they are the behaviors and thought that a learner engages in during learning that are intended to influence the learner’s encoding process.

In addition, the disagreement is about the nature of the behaviors, on the presupposition the language learning strategies are behaviors. Chamot (1987, p.71) claims that “ they are techniques, approaches or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information.” Stern (1983, as cited in Ellis, 1994, p. 531) adds that “strategy is best reserved for general tendencies or overall characteristics of the approach employed by the language learner, leaving techniques as the term to refer to particular forms of observable learning behavior”. Here Stern describes the nature of strategy as general and overall. While Wenden (1987a, p. 7) blurs the distinction between these two by referring to ‘strategies’ as ‘specific actions or techniques, adding that they are not about general approach of learners like reflecting and risk-taking.

Another major dispute deals with the learners’ awareness of strategy use issue. Wenden (1987, p. 6) claims that:

> Learner strategies refers to language learning behaviors learners actually engage in to learn and regulate the learning of a second language …what they know about the strategies they use….what they know about aspect of their language learning other than the strategies they use.

In the same perspective, Cohen views that:

> Second language learner strategies encompass both second language learning and second language use strategies. Taken together they constitute the steps or actions consciously selected by learners either for the learning of a second language, the use of it, or both. (1998, p. 5)

For Seliger (1984, as cited in Ellis, 1994, p. 531), he refers to the abstract cognitive categories of processing information subconsciously or unconsciously as 'strategies', while he defines another term 'tactics' as learners' deliberate respond to the learning circumstances. However, many researchers avoid making clear distinction on the issue of consciousness, and some suggest that learners cope with new information by deploying strategies consciously and these strategies would gradually become conscious with repeated application and self-adaptation.

From the above definitions, we notice that some authors have used 'language learning strategies' while others used 'learner strategies'. Both terms appear in the literature to be synonymous and interchangeable. But Maccaro (2001), in his valuable work entitled 'learning strategies in second language acquisition', proposes his own distinction between these two terms by considering 'language learning strategies' as the process of language learning, and 'learner strategies' as techniques in the learning of any subject. The latter term seems to capture more effectively the emphasis placed on the learner as the active participant in the process of learning. According to this distinction, learner strategies often subsumes learning strategies.

Oxford (1989) divides strategies into two major classes: direct and indirect. Direct strategies deal with the new language, which consists of three classes: memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies are strategies that support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language. They are divided into metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

Direct strategies are divided into: memory strategies, such as, grouping or using imagery, have a specific function: helping students store and retrieve new information. Memory strategies fall into four sets:

1. Creating mental linkages: grouping, associating/elaborating, and placing new words into a context.

2. Appling images and sounds: using imagery, semantic mapping, using keyword and representing sounds in memory.

3. Reviewing well: structured reviewing.

4. Employing action: using physical response or sensation, and using mechanical technical techniques.

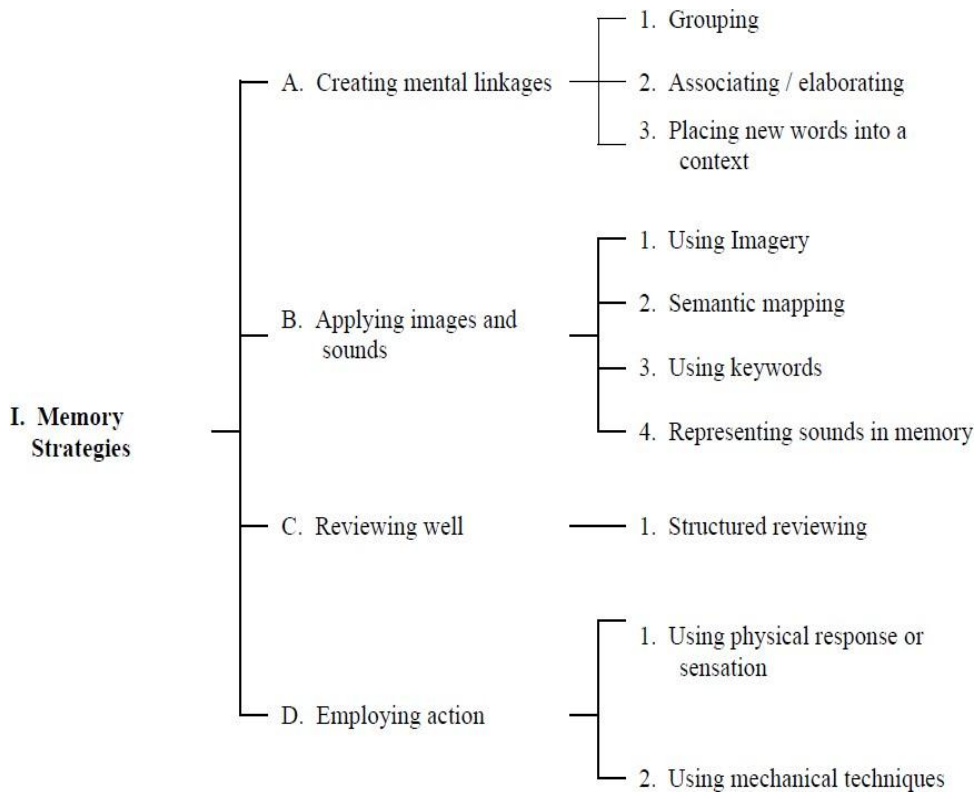

Figure 1. **Diagram of the strategy system showing the memory strategies. (Figure 1.4, in Oxford.R,L. 1990, pp. 18-21)**

Secondly, cognitive strategies which, according to Oxford, involve hypothesis testing like searching for clues in the material studied or in one's own knowledge by hypothesizing

the meaning of the unknown item. Mnemonic strategies relate one thing to another in a simple stimulus response manner but do not reinforce associations. Cognitive strategies operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning.

Cognitive strategies, such as summarizing or reasoning deductively, would enable learners to understand and produce the target language by many different means. They have four sets:

1. Practicing: repeating; formally practicing with sounds and writing system, recognizing and using formulas and patterns, recombining, and practicing.
2. Receiving and sending messages: getting the idea quickly, using resources for receiving and sending messages.
3. Analyzing and reasoning: reasoning deductively, analyzing expressions, analyzing contrastively, translating, and transferring.
4. Creating structure for input and output: taking notes, summarizing, and highlighting.

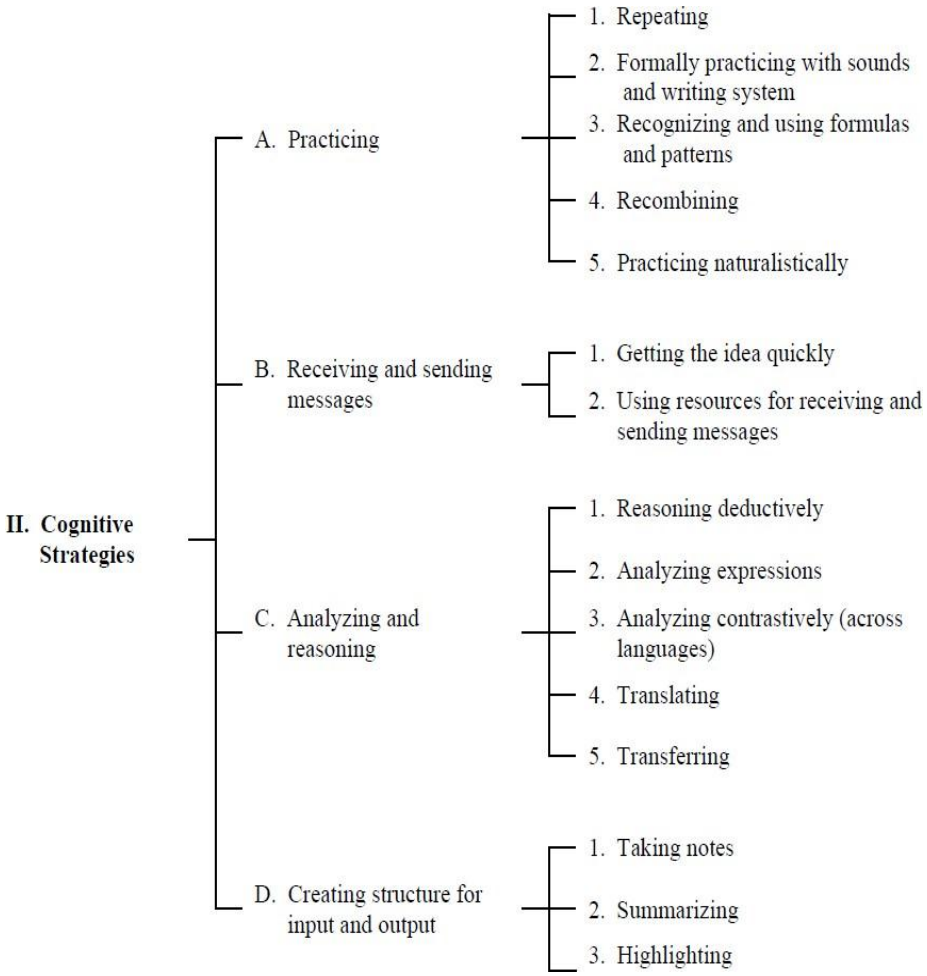

Figure 2. **Diagram of the strategy system showing the cognitive strategies. (Figure 1.4, in Oxford.R,L. 1990, pp. 18-21)**

Thirdly, the compensation strategies, like guessing or using synonyms, allow learners to use the language despite their often large gaps in knowledge. Compensation strategies consist of:

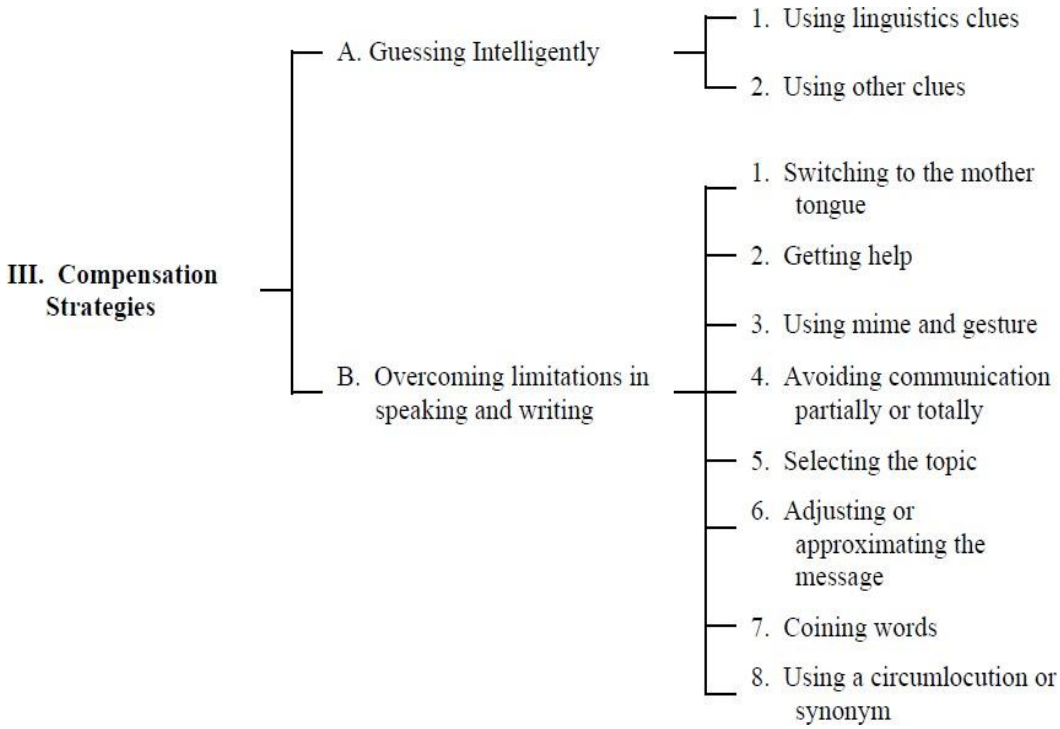

Figure 3. ***Diagram of the strategy system showing the compensation strategies. (Figure 1.4, in Oxford.R,L. 1990, pp. 18-21)***

The indirect strategies entail the metacognitive strategies which are higher order executive skills that may entail planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of a learning activity (Brown et al. 1983). They are applicable to a variety of learning tasks (Nisbet & Shucksmith, 1986). The processes that would be included as metacignitive strategies for receptive or productive language tasks are presented in the following:

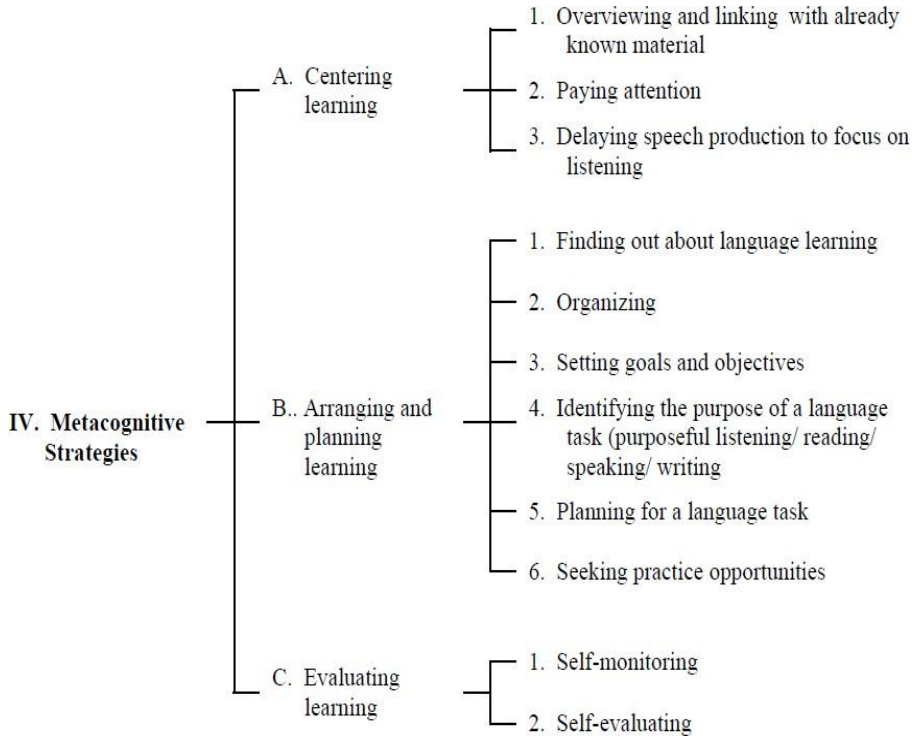

Figure 4. **Diagram of the strategy system showing the metacognitive strategies. (Figure 1.4, in Oxford.R,L. 1990:18-21)**

Affective strategies help to regulate emotions, motivations, and attitudes. They fall into three sets:

- Lowering anxiety: using progressive relaxation, deep breathing or meditation, using music, and using jokes.
- Self encouraging: giving positive statements, taking risks wisely, giving reward to students.
- Taking emotional temperature: paying attention to responses, using a checklist, writing a language learning diary, discussing feelings with peers.

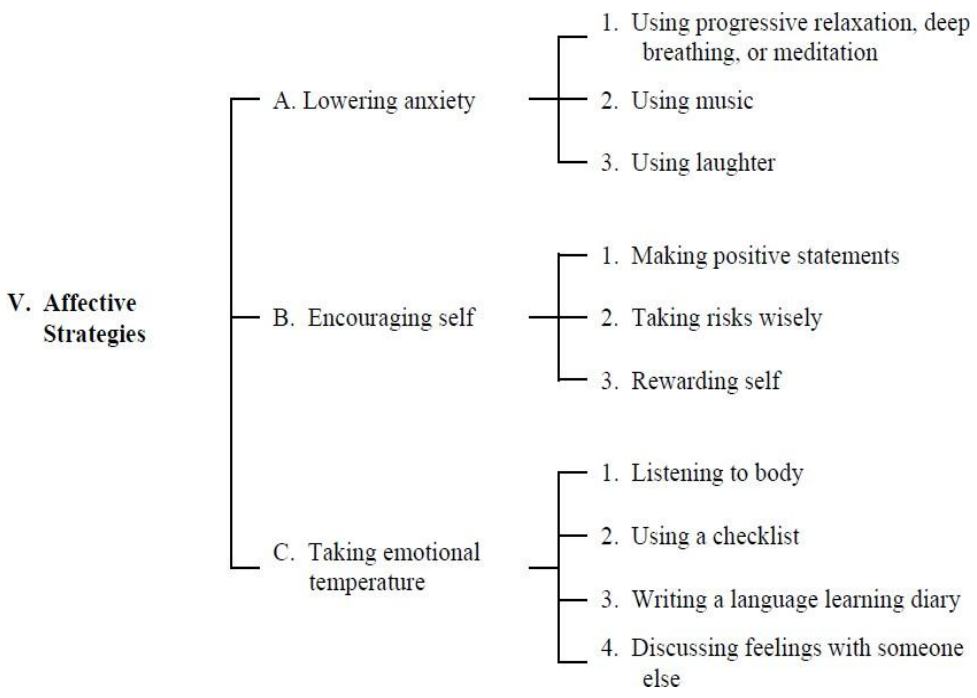

Figure 5. **Diagram of the strategy system showing the affective strategies. (Figure 1.4, in Oxford.R,L. 1990, pp. 18-21)**

Social strategies represent a broad grouping that involves interaction with another person. Generally they are applicable to a wide variety of tasks, and they help students learn through interaction with others. Social strategies fall into three sets:

1. Giving questions: asking for clarification or verification, asking for correction.
2. Cooperating with others: with peers, with proficient users of the new language.
3. Empathizing with others: developing cultural understanding, becoming aware of other' s thoughts and feelings.

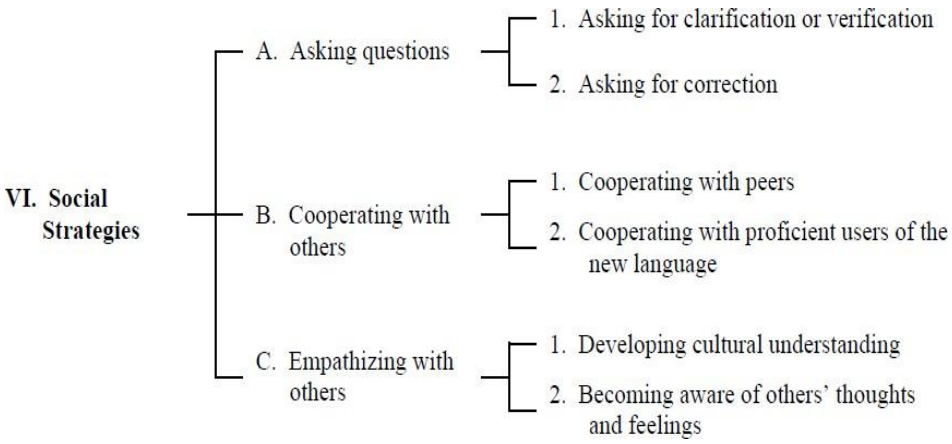

Figure 5. **Diagram of the strategy system showing the social strategies. (Figure 1.4, in Oxford.R,L. 1990, pp. 18-21)**

Basically, learning strategies are steps taken by students to enhance their own 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 learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence. How language learning strategies stimulate the growth of communicative competence in general can be summed up as follows: metacognitive strategies help learners regulate their own cognition to focus, plan and evaluate their progress as they move toward communicative competence. Affective strategies develop the self-confidence and perseverance needed for learners to involve themselves actively in language learning. Social strategies provide increased interaction and more emphatic comprehension toward the lesson.

While learning strategies deal with the receptive domain of intake, memory, storage, and recall, communication strategies pertain to the employment of verbal or non-verbal mechanisms for the productive communication of information. Faerch and Kasper (1983a, p. 36) defined communication strategies as "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal." Dornyei' (1995, p. 58) offered a taxonomy that reflects accepted categories over several decades of research. According to his categorization, communication strategies are set into avoidance strategies and compensatory strategies.

Avoidance is a common communication strategy that can be broken down into several subcategories: syntactic or lexical avoidance within a semantic category; the phonological avoidance and the topic avoidance. The compensatory strategies, on the other hand, involve compensation for missing knowledge. The communication strategies are detailed in the following table:

Table . 2. ***Communication Strategies (Table: 5.3 in Brown, 2000, p. 127)***

Avoidance Strategies
1. Message abandonment: leaving a message unfinished because of language difficulties. 2. Topic avoidance: Avoiding topic areas or concepts that pause language difficulties.
Compensatory Strategies
3. Circumlocution: Describing or exemplifying the target object of action (e.g., the thing you open bottles with for corkscrew) 4. Approximation: Using an alternative term which expresses the meaning of the target lexical item as closely as possible (e.g., ship for sailboat) 5. Use of all-purpose words: Extending a general, empty lexical item to contexts where specific words are lacking (e.g., the overuse of thing, stuff, what-do-you-call-it, thingie) 6. Word coinage: Creating a non existing L2 word based on a supposed rule (e.g., vegetarianist for vegetarian) 7. Prefabricated patterns: Using memorized stock phrases, usually for "survival" purposes (e.g., Where is the_____or Comment allez – vous? Where the morphological components are not known to the learner) 8. Non linguistic signals: Mime, gesture, facial expression, or sound imitation. 9. Literal translation: Translating literally a lexical item, idiom, compound word, or structure from L1 to L2.

10. Foreignizing: Using a L1 word by adjusting it to L2 phonology (i.e., with a L2 pronunciation) and/or morphology (e.g., adding to it a L2 suffix)

11. Code-switching: Using a L1 word with L1 pronunciation or a L3 pronunciation while speaking in L2.

12. Appeal for help: asking for aid from the interlocutor either directly (e.g., What do you call….?) or indirectly (e.g., rising intonation, pause, eye contact, puzzled expression)

13. Stalling or time-gaining strategies: Using fillers or hesitation devices. to fill pauses and to gain time to think (e.g., well, now let's see, uh, as a matter of fact)