IV.1. Introduction

The prominent shift within the field of language instruction over the last twenty years with greater emphasis being put on learners and learning rather than on teachers and teaching has been discussed in Chapter I and III. Individual learning through social constructivism is the interest of this new paradigm. Parallel to this new shift of interest, concerns such as how learners process new information and what kinds of strategies they employ to understand whether the learners learn or remember the information, and whether they learn to learn on their own or can we teach them how to learn on their own etc. have been the primary focus of the researchers working in the area of foreign language teaching and learning. Individual learning styles and strategies are gathering more attention than ever before and the philosophical, political, economical and social reasons for this shift of attention have also been examined in the previous chapters.

Chapter III has dealt with the concept of learning to learn and its relevance to the present day educational set up, and the first step of implementing this concept with special focus on senior secondary learners of English—the first step being the needs analysis. The second step is to formulate strategies keeping space for individual styles of learning, selecting strategies suitable for the learners, and evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of these strategies.
In this chapter, Chapter IV, the strategies and styles identified will be discussed along with the implementation of them among the target group of learners. So, a brief history of the development of this idea--strategies--will be of great use to any serious researcher.

IV.2. Learning strategies

Research into language learning strategies began in the 1960s; particularly developments in cognitive psychology influenced much of the research done on language learning strategies. In most of the research on language learning strategies, the primary concern has been on “identifying what good language learners report they do to learn a second or foreign language, or, in some cases, are observed doing while learning a second or foreign language.” (Rubin and Wenden 1987:19). In 1966, Aaron Carton published his study entitled ‘The Method of Inference in Foreign Language Study’, which was the first attempt on learner strategies. After Carton, in 1971, Rubin started doing research focusing on the strategies of successful learners and stated that, once identified, such strategies could be made available to less successful learners. Rubin (1975) classified strategies in terms of processes contributing directly or indirectly to language learning. Wong-Fillmore (1976), Tarone and Yule (1989), Naiman et al. (1978), Bialystok (1979), Cohen and Aphek (1981), Wenden (1982), Chamot and
O’Malley (1987), Oxford and her colleagues and many others studied strategies used by language learners during the process of foreign language learning.

There is an old proverb by Confucius, the ancient Chinese philosopher, which states: “Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach him how to fish and he eats for a lifetime”. Applied to the field of language teaching and learning, this proverb might be interpreted to mean that if students are provided with answers, the immediate problem is solved. But if they are taught the strategies to work out the answers for themselves, they are empowered to manage their own learning. This is exactly what is aimed at by autonomous learning, in this study.

Since the pioneering work carried out in the mid-seventies (for instance by Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975) there has been an awareness that language learning strategies have the potential to be “an extremely powerful learning tool” (O’Malley, Chamot, et al.1985, p.43). In spite of this awareness, and in spite of much useful and interesting work having been carried out in the intervening years (nearly a quarter of a century), the language learning strategy field continues to be characterized by “confusion” and “no consensus” (O’Malley et al.,1985, p.22), while Ellis (1994) comments that the language learning strategy concept remains “fuzzy”…
Considering the potential usefulness of language learning strategies as a language teaching tool and a language learning tool, I would like to try to put this rather fuzzy picture in to some sort of perspective. I will begin by looking at the basic terminology, the frequently conflicting use of which does nothing to aid consensus. I will then discuss definition and classification of language learning strategies, and go on from there to look at language learning strategies from a theoretical perspective before reviewing language learning strategy research to date. (p.529)

Before attempting to define and classify language learning strategies as used by speakers of other languages, first of all, it will be appropriate to examine the rationale for the choice of the term ‘strategy’. Although used by many prominent writers (such as Rubin, 1975; O’Malley et al, 1985; Oxford, 1990) the term ‘strategy’ is not without its controversy. Consensus is not assisted by some writers’ use of conflicting terminology such as ‘learning behaviors’ (Politzer and McGroarty, 1985), ‘tactics’ (Seliger, 1984) and ‘techniques’ (Stern, 1992) more or less (but not always exactly) synonymously with the term ‘strategy’. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991, p.199) opt for the term ‘strategy’ since, as they point out, Rubin (1975) used it “in perhaps the earliest study in this area and it enjoys the widest currency today”. For this reason, ‘strategy’ is the term which will be used for the purposes of the present work.
Since the work done by researchers such as Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975) in the mid-seventies, awareness has been slowly growing of the importance of the strategies used by learners in the language learning process, since ultimately, like the proverbial horse led to water but which must do the drinking itself, even with the best teachers and methods, students are the only ones who can actually do the learning. This analogy coincides with the same idea of the gardener and plants mentioned in Chapter I. As Nyikos and Oxford (1993, p.11) put it: “learning begins with the learner”. This growing awareness has resulted in more recent years in what Skehan (1989, p.285) calls an “explosion of activity” in the field of language learning strategy research. In spite of this activity, however, defining and classifying language learning strategies remains no easy task. Wenden and Rubin (1987, p.7) talk of “the elusive nature of the term”, Ellis (1994) describes the concept as “fuzzy”, quoted on page…. while O’Malley et al (1985) put it this way:

There is no consensus on what constitutes a learning strategy in second language learning or how these differ from other types of learner activities. Learning, teaching and communication strategies are often interlaced in discussions of language learning and are often applied to the same behavior. Further, even within the group of activities most often referred to as learning strategies; there is considerable confusion about definitions of
specific strategies and about the hierarchic relationship among strategies. (p.22)

IV.3. Communication strategies

One of the earliest researchers in this field, Rubin (1975) provided a very broad definition of learning strategies as “the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge” (p.43). In 1981 (pp.124-126) she identified two kinds of learning strategies: those which contribute directly to learning, and those which contribute indirectly to learning. The direct learning strategies she divided into six types (clarification/verification, monitoring, memorization, guessing/inductive inferencing, deductive reasoning, practice), and the indirect learning strategies she divided into two types (creating opportunities for practice, production tricks). Under production tricks, Rubin included communication strategies. This is a controversial inclusion since learning strategies and communication strategies are seen by some as two quite separate manifestations of language learner behavior. Bialystock (1978) identified four categories of learning strategies in her model of second language learning: ‘inferencing monitoring, formal practicing and functional practicing’. In this model, learning strategies are defined as “optimal means for exploiting available information to improve competence in a second language (p.71).
Brown (1980, p.87), for instance, draws a clear distinction between learning strategies and communication strategies on the grounds that “communication is the output modality and learning is the input modality”. Brown suggests that, while a learner generally applies the same fundamental strategies (such as rule transference) used in learning a language to communicating in that language, there are other communication strategies such as avoidance or message abandonment which do not result in learning. Brown (1994, p.118) concedes, however, that “in the arena of linguistic interaction, it is sometimes difficult.....to distinguish between the two”.

Ellis (1986) is another who views strategies for learning and strategies for using, including communication strategies or “devices for compensating for inadequate resources” (p.165), as quite different manifestations of a more general phenomenon which he calls learner strategies. He argues that it is even possible that successful use of communication strategies may actually prevent language learning since skilful compensation for lack of linguistic knowledge may obviate the need for learning. At times, when one goes through the answer scripts of our learners, this view of Ellis may seem right, with a few learners of course.

Tarone (1980) takes a different point of view. She suggests that by helping students to say what they want or need to say, communication strategies can
help to expand language. Even if the peripheral structure of communication is not perfect in grammatical or lexical terms, in the process of using the language for communication the learner will be exposed to language input which may result in learning and therefore may be considered a learning strategy. The key point in this argument would seem to be that in order to be considered a learning strategy rather than a communication strategy, the “basic motivation is not to communicate but to learn” (Tarone, 1980, p.419).

IV.4. Between learner strategies and communication strategies

The problems with differentiating between communication strategies and learning strategies on the grounds of motivation or intention; however, as Tarone (1981) acknowledges, are that we have, in practice, no way of determining what motivates a learner, that learners may have a dual motivation to both learn and communicate, or that learners may learn language even when the basic motivation is to communicate. As Tarone (1981, p.290) aptly comments, “The relationship of learning strategies to communication strategies is somewhat problematic”.

Ellis (1994, p.530) also concedes that there is “no easy way of telling whether a strategy is motivated by a desire to learn or a desire to communicate”. This inability to differentiate clearly between communication and learning strategies does nothing to simplify the decision regarding what should or should not be
included in learning strategy taxonomies such as Rubin’s and others, and leads to what Stern (1992, p.264) acknowledges is “a certain arbitrariness in the classification of learning strategies”. In the experience of this researcher, many students of communicative English courses have acknowledged their improvement in written exams along with their improvement in spoken English, after the course. So, in the context of this study, Tarone and Ellis seem right – communication strategies and learning strategies are complementary, not discrete.

Working at much the same time as Rubin in the mid-seventies, Stern (1975) produced a list of ten language learning strategies which he believed to be characteristic of good language learners’. At the top of the list he put “personal learning style” (p.311). Stern later defined “strategies” as “broadly conceived intentional directions” (1992, p.261), which is more similar to the definition of the term ‘styles’ as used by other writers such as Willing (1988) and Nunan (1991). The “behavioral manifestations of the strategies” (Stern, 1992, p.261), he called techniques -- a definition which would fit better with what Rubin (1975) calls strategies. This inconsistent use of basic terminology as employed by key researchers and writers in the language learning strategy field has contributed to difficulties with definition and classification which remain to this day.
When O’Malley *et al* (1985) came to conduct their research, they used the definition of learning strategies as being “operations or steps used by a learner that will facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval or use of information” (p.23), a definition originally used by Rigney (1978), they say. In an attempt to produce a classification scheme with mutually exclusive categories, O’Malley and his colleagues developed a taxonomy of their own identifying 26 strategies which they divided into three categories: metacognitive (knowing about learning), cognitive (specific to distinct learning activities) and social–affective strategies. Names and definitions of different strategies listed by O’Malley and Chamot will be helpful to understand them as they come across later in this study.

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**Metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring the learning task, and evaluating how well one has learned.**

1. **PLANNING:** previewing the organizing concept or principle of an anticipated learning task (advance organization); proposing strategies for handling an upcoming task; generating a plan for the parts, sequence, main ideas, or language functions to be used in handling a task (organizational planning).

2. **DIRECTED ATTENTION:** deciding in advance to attend in general to a learning task and to ignore irrelevant distracters; maintaining attention during task execution.
3. SELECTIVE ATTENTION: deciding in advance to attend to specific aspects of language input or situational details that assist in performance of a task; attending to specific aspects of language input during task execution.

4. SELF MANAGEMENT: understanding the conditions that help one successfully accomplish language tasks and arranging for the presence of those conditions; controlling one’s language performance to maximize those conditions; controlling one’s language performance to maximize use of what is already known.

5. SELF MONITORING: checking, verifying, or correcting one’s comprehension or performance in the course of a language task. This has been coded in the think-alouds in the following ways:

A. comprehension monitoring: checking, verifying, or correcting one’s understands.

B. production monitoring: checking, correcting, or verifying one’s language production.

C. auditory monitoring: using one’s “ear” for the language (how something sounds) to make decisions.

D. visual monitoring: using one’s “eye” for the language (how something looks) to make decisions.

E. style monitoring: checking, verifying, or correcting based upon an internal stylistic register.
F. *strategy monitoring*: tracking use of how well a strategy is working.

G. *plan monitoring*: tracking how well plan is working.

H. *double – check monitoring*: tracking, across the task, previously undertaken acts or possibilities considered.

6. **PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION**: explicitly identifying the central point needing resolution in a task or identifying an aspect of the task that hinders its successful completion.

7. **SELF- EVALUATION**: checking the outcomes of one’s own language performance against an internal measure of completeness and accuracy; checking one’s repertoire, strategy use, or Ability to perform the task at hand.

   This has been coded in the think- alouds as:

   A. *production evaluation*: checking one’s work when the task is finished.

   B. *performance evaluation*: judging one’s overall execution of the task.

   C. *ability evaluation*: judging one’s ability to perform the task

   D. *strategy evaluation*: judging one’s strategy use when the task is completed

   E. *language repertoire evaluation*: judging how much one knows of the L2, at the word, phrase, sentence, or concept level.
Cognitive strategies involve interacting with the material to be learned, manipulating the material mentally or physically, or applying a specific technique to a learning task.

1. REPETITION: repeating a chunk of language (a word or phrase) in the course of performing a language task.

2. RESOURCING: using available reference sources of information about their target language, including dictionaries, textbooks and prior work.

3. GROUPING: ordering, classifying, or labeling material used in a language task based on common attributes, recalling information based on grouping previously done.

4. NOTE TAKING: writing down key words and concepts in abbreviated verbal, graphic, or numerical form to assist performance of a language task.

5. DEDUCTION OR INDUCTION: consciously applying learned or self developed rules to produce or understand the target language

6. SUBSTITUTION: selecting alternative approaches, revised plans, or different words or phrases to accomplish a language task.

7. ELABORATION: relating new information to prior knowledge; relating different parts of new information to each other; making meaningful personal associations to information presented. This has been coded in the think aloud data in the following ways:

   a. personal elaboration: making judgments about or reacting personally to the material presented.
b. *world elaboration*: using knowledge gained from experience in the world

c. *academic elaboration*: using knowledge gained in academic situations.

d. *between parts elaboration*: relating parts of the task to each other.

e. *questioning elaboration*: using a combination of questions and world knowledge to brainstorm logical solutions to a task.


g. *creative elaboration*: making up a story line, or adopting a clever perspective.

h. *imagery*: using mental or actual pictures or visuals to represent information; coded as separate category, but viewed as a form of elaboration.

8. *SUMMARIZATION*: making a mental or written summary of language and information presented in a task

9. *TRANSLATION*: rendering ideas from one language to another in a relatively verbatim manner.

10. *TRANSFER*: using previously acquired linguistic knowledge to facilitate language task

11. *INFERRENCE*: using available information to guess the meanings or usage of unfamiliar language items associated with a language task, to predict outcomes, or to fill in missing information.
Social and affective strategies involve interacting with another person to assist learning or using affective control to assist a learning task.

1. QUESTIONING FOR CLARIFICATION: asking for explanation, verification, rephrasing, or examples about the material; asking for clarification or verification about the task; posing questions to the self.

2. CO OPERATION: working together with peers to solve the problem, pool information, check a learning task, model a language activity or get feedback on oral or written performance.

3. SELF-TALK: reducing anxiety by using mental techniques that make one feel competent to do the learning task.

4. SELF-REINFORCEMENT: providing personal motivation by arranging rewards for oneself when a language learning activity has been successfully completed.

The metacognitive and cognitive categories correspond approximately with Rubin’s indirect and direct strategies. However, the addition of the social mediation category was an important step in the direction of acknowledging the importance of interactional strategies in language learning. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) quote different classifications from different authors (see Appendix-Taxonomy of learning strategies).

Oxford (1990) took this process a step further. Like O’Malley et al. (1985), she used Rigney’s definition of language learning strategies as “operations employed...”
by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information” (Oxford, 1990, p.8) as a base. Attempting to redress the perceived problem that many strategy inventories appeared to emphasize cognitive and metacognitive strategies and to ascribe much less importance to affective and social strategies, she classified learning strategies into six groups: memory strategies (which relate to how students remember language), cognitive strategies (which relate to how students think about their learning), compensation strategies (which enable students to make up for limited knowledge), metacognitive strategies (relating to how students manage their own learning), affective strategies (relating to students’ feelings) and social strategies (which involve learning by interaction with others). (see Appendix A 2)

These six categories (which underlie the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning-SILL—used by Oxford and others for a great deal of research in the learning strategy field) were further divided into direct strategies (those which directly involve the target language such as reviewing and practicing) and indirect strategies (those which provide indirect support for language learning such as planning, co-operating and seeking opportunities). see appendix A 2.

Oxford’s taxonomy is perhaps the most comprehensive classification of learning strategies to date. But, it is still, of necessity, somewhat selective since “dozens and perhaps hundreds of such strategies exist” (Oxford, and Crookall,
Oxford (1990) acknowledges the possibility that the categories will overlap, and gives as an example the metacognitive strategy of planning, which, in as far as planning requires reasoning, might also be considered a cognitive strategy. She also deals with the difficulty of whether a compensation strategy such as looking for synonyms when the exact word is unknown is a learning strategy or a communication strategy. Almost all researchers are aware of their overlapping in spite of their classifications. See Appendix B where O’Malley and Chamot point out the same notion.

Although Ellis (1994, p.539) comments that compensation strategies are included “somewhat confusingly”, Oxford (1990, p.49) justifies including such behaviors as learning strategies on the grounds that they “help learners become more fluent in what they already know [and] may lead learners to gain new information about what is appropriate or permissible in the target language”. However, she acknowledges that there is no complete agreement on exactly what strategies are; how many strategies exist; how they should be defined, demarcated, and categorized; and whether it is - or ever will be - possible to create a real, scientifically validated hierarchy of strategies. Classification conflicts are inevitable. (p.17)

Amid this welter of overlapping material and conflicting opinion, the process of establishing terminology, definitions and classification systems for language
learning strategies is far from straightforward. In the face of the lack of consensus which is a feature of the language learning strategy field, whatever term may be used, and however it may be defined or classified, it is inevitably going to come into conflict with one or other of the competing terms, definitions and classification systems. However, Rigney’s definition together with Oxford’s (1990) classification system can provide a useful base for understanding language learning strategies.

IV.5. Learner strategies with special reference to ESL

The development of language learning strategy theory can be beneficial to probe into this abstract idea. As noted by Griffiths and Parr (2001), over the years, many different methods and approaches to the teaching and learning of language to and by speakers of other languages, each with its own theoretical basis, have come and gone in and out of fashion (for instance the grammar-translation method, the audio lingual method, the communicative approach). Language learning strategies, although still fuzzily defined and controversially classified, are increasingly attracting the interest of contemporary educators because of their potential to enhance learning. In the light of this interest, I would like to take a look at the theory underlying language learning strategies beginning from the perspective of the various other theories, methods and
approaches from which, and alongside which, language learning strategy theory has developed.

Derived from the way Latin and Greek were taught in ancient times, the Grammar-Translation method, as its name suggests, relied heavily on the teaching of grammar and practising translation as its main teaching and learning activities. The major focus of this method tended to be reading and writing, with very little attention paid to speaking and listening. Learners were treated like soldiers under strict training. Vocabulary was typically taught in lists. High priority was given to accuracy and to the ability to construct correct sentences. Instruction was typically conducted in the students’ native language. This resulted in, as Richards and Rodgers (1986, pp.3-4) put it, the type of grammar-translation courses remembered with distaste by thousands of school learners, for whom foreign language learning meant a tedious experience of memorizing endless lists of unusable grammar rules and vocabulary and attempting to produce perfect translations of stilted or literary prose.

The possibility that students might use language learning strategies to promote their own learning had little or no place in grammar-translation theory, and is rarely if ever mentioned in any literature on the subject, as Tarone and Yule (1989, p.133) point out when they comment “relatively little attention seems to have been paid, in any consistent way, to considerations of the whole process
from the learner’s point of view”. It was assumed that if learners simply followed the grammar-translation method they would, as a matter of course, learn language, although the seeds of an awareness of the importance of the learner’s contribution to the learning process was perhaps there-- for example, suggestions for how to remember vocabulary lists (mnemonics, grouping, repetition etc) which were quite common in grammar-translation classrooms.

IV.6. Learner autonomy across methodologies

Partly out of a reaction against the limitations of the grammar-translation method, and partly out of the urgent war-time demands for fluent speakers of languages such as German, Italian and Japanese grew the Audio Lingual Method. The “Army Method” was developed to produce military personnel with conversational proficiency in the target language. After the war, the “Army Method” attracted the attention of linguists already looking for an alternative to grammar-translation and became known as the audio lingual method, which was widespread in the sixties.

In direct contrast to the Grammar Translation Method, the Audio Lingual Method was based on the belief that speaking and listening are the most basic language skills and should be emphasized before reading and writing (Richards, Platt and Platt, 1992). As discussed earlier, Audio - Lingual teaching methods depended heavily on drills and repetition, which were justified according to
behaviorist theories that language is a system of habits which can be taught and learnt on the stimulus, response and reinforcement basis that behaviorists believed controlled all human learning, including language learning, L1 or L2.

Learners were believed to be equal to animals that can be conditioned in the desired manner. There was little or no recognition given to any conscious contribution which the individual learner might make in the learning process, as Audio-Lingual Theory depended on the automatic patterning of behavior.

Indeed, learners were discouraged from taking initiative in the learning situation because they might make mistakes (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). If anything, there was even less place for individual language learning strategies in audio-lingual theory than there had been in grammar-translation theory, except, perhaps, in a very limited form in the exercising of memory and cognitive strategies by means of repetition and substitution exercises, and even this was rarely, if ever, made explicit. The effect of audio-lingual techniques of rote learning, repetition, imitation, memorization and pattern practice was to minimize the importance of explicit learning strategies in the language learning process (Stern, 1992).

As said earlier, in the early sixties, audio-lingualism was commonly seen as a major breakthrough which would revolutionize the teaching and learning of languages. No more tedious grammar rules! No more vocabulary lists! No more
hours spent translating boring texts! Audio-lingualism, as Stern (1980, p.465) puts it, “raised hopes of ushering in a golden age of language learning”. By the end of the sixties, however, the limitations of the Audio Lingual Method were beginning to make it obvious. Contrary to Audio- Lingual Theory, as Hutchinson and Waters (1990) comment, language learners did not act according to behaviorist expectations. They wanted to translate things, demanded grammar rules, found endless repetition boring and not conducive to learning.

It was at this time, in the mid to late sixties, that the ideas of the highly influential linguist, Noam Chomsky (1965; 1968) began to have a major effect on linguistic theory. Chomsky postulated that all normal human beings are born with a Language Acquisition Device (LAD) which enables them to develop language from an innate set of principles which he called the Universal Grammar (UG). His theory of Transformational-Generative Grammar(TG) attempts to explain how original utterances are generated from a language user’s underlying competence. Chomsky believed that behaviorist theory could not explain the complexities of generative grammar and concluded that “the creative aspect of language use, when investigated with care and respect for the facts, shows that current notions of habit and generalization, as determinants of behavior or knowledge, are quite inadequate” (Chomsky, 1968, p.84). Instead, his theories substantiated the innateness of language and language learning.
Although Chomsky’s theories directly related mainly to first language learners, his view of the learner as a generator of rules was taken up by Corder (1967) who argued that language errors made by students who are speakers of other languages indicate the development of underlying linguistic competence and reflect the learners’ attempts to organize linguistic input. Thus more focus on errors brought out new perspectives to language learning. The intermediate system created while the learner is trying to come to terms with the target language was later called “inter language” (IL) by Selinker (1972) who viewed learner errors as evidence of positive efforts by the student to learn the new language. This view of language learning allowed for the possibility of learners making deliberate attempts to control their own learning and, along with theories of cognitive processes in language learning promoted by writers such as McLaughlin (1978) and Bialystok (1978), contributed to a research thrust in the mid to late seventies aimed at discovering how learners employ learning strategies to promote the learning of language (for instance Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Naiman, Frohlich, Stern and Todesco, 1978). The idea that teachers should be concerned not only with “finding the best method or with getting the correct answer” but also with assisting a student in order to “enable him to learn on his own” (Rubin 1975, p.45) was, at the time, quite revolutionary. Arthur (1980) points out that ‘errors made by second language learners are, from the
learners own perspective, not errors at all’ (p.178). In other words, they are consistent with systematic rules of the learner’s own inter-language. It is just that the learner’s rules are not the same as the target language rules. Consequently, if an ESL learner identifies well-formed English sentences as ungrammatical and ill-formed sentences as grammatical, then the teacher may have discovered an aspect of the learner’s inter-language which will seriously interfere with any further development towards ability to use the second language effectively.

At the same time, however, as researchers such as Rubin, Stern and Naiman et al. were working to develop an awareness of language learning strategies, Krashen (for instance, Krashen, 1976; 1977) dealt the fledgling language-learning-strategy movement a body blow and took off in almost exactly the opposite direction. Challenging the rule-driven theories of the grammar-translation method, the audio-lingual behaviorist theories that language can be taught as a system of habits, as well as the idea of learners being able to consciously control their own learning, Krashen proposed his five hypotheses. Summarized briefly (Krashen and Terrell, 1983), these consist of:

1. The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis (conscious learning is an ineffective way of developing language, which is better acquired through natural communication);
2. The Natural Order Hypothesis (grammatical structures of a language are acquired in a `predictable order);

3. The Monitor Hypothesis (conscious learning is of very little value to an adult language learner, and can only be useful under certain conditions as a monitor or editor);

4. The Input Hypothesis (language is acquired by understanding input which is a little beyond the current level of competence (comprehensible input)) and

5. The Affective Filter Hypothesis (a learner's emotions and attitudes can act as a filter which slows down the acquisition of language. When the affective filter is high it can block language development).

Thus in the 1970s and 80s, taken to their extreme, Krashen’s hypotheses led to the belief that conscious teaching and learning were not useful in the language learning process, and that any attempt to teach or learn language in a formal kind of a way was doomed to failure. By implication, therefore, since in Krashen’s view conscious learning had so little value, there was very little room for conscious language learning strategies to play a role in the process of language development. Many of Krashen’s ideas have been soundly criticized over the years, and his penchant for sweeping statements, such as “speech cannot be taught directly but ‘emerges’ on its own as a result of building
competence via comprehensible input” (Krashen, 1985, p.2) and “when the filter is ‘down' and comprehensible input is presented and comprehended, acquisition is inevitable. It is, in fact, unavoidable and cannot be prevented” (Krashen, 1985, p.4), have made him easy to challenge. McLaughlin (1978), for instance, approaching the issue from a cognitive psychologist’s point of view, proposed an information-processing approach to language development whereby students can obtain knowledge of a language by thinking through the rules until they become automatic, a view which is quite contrary to the assertions of the Monitor Hypothesis. Gregg (1984, p.94) voiced the criticism that “each of Krashen’s hypotheses is marked by serious flaws”, while Pienemann (1985; 1989), challenging the claims of the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, postulated that language can be taught and learnt when the learner is ready (Teachability Hypothesis). However, the debate has not yet died down, and teachers of second languages are more skeptic toward the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis of Krashen.

In spite of the many challenges, Krashen’s views have been, and may remain very influential in the language teaching and learning field. Even a harsh critic such as Gregg, who censures Krashen for being “incoherent” and “dogmatic”, admits that “he is often right on the important questions” (Gregg, 1984, pp.94-95), and in as far as Krashen (1981) believed that language develops through
natural communication, he might be considered one of the driving forces behind
the communicative language teaching movement which is in vogue to the
present day, along with other cognitive approaches.

An important theoretical principle underlying the communicative language
teaching (CLT) movement was called “communicative competence” by Hymes
(1972), which has been briefly outlined in Chapter I. Communicative
competence is the ability to use language to convey and interpret meaning, and
it was later elaborated by Canale and Swain (1980) into four separate
components: grammatical competence (which relates to the learner's knowledge
of the vocabulary, phonology and rules of the language), discourse competence
(which relates to the learner’s ability to connect utterances into a meaningful
whole), sociolinguistic competence (which relates to the learner's ability to use
language appropriately) and strategic competence (which relates to a learner’s
ability to employ strategies to compensate for imperfect knowledge) which were
dealt with in Chapter III.

Another cornerstone of communicative language teaching theory is the belief
that how language functions is more important than knowledge of form or
structure. The concept of the communicative functions of language, promoted by
Wilkins (1976), has had a strong influence on contemporary language learning
programs and textbooks. Hence, the learner is supposed to have better
sociolinguistic and strategic competence, not knowledge in form and structure alone.

The above mentioned theory (CLT) has been consolidated and extended by others. Widdowson, for instance, believes that by using a communicative approach language can be developed incidentally, as a by-product of using it (1978), and that “knowing will emerge from doing” (1991, p.160), while Littlewood (1981) stresses the need to give learners extensive opportunities to use the target language for real communicative purposes, and believes that the ability to communicate effectively is more important than perfect mastery.

Although “the communicative approach implicitly encourages learners to take greater responsibility for their own learning” (Oxford et al, 1989, p.33), typically the emphasis in the communicative language movement, as in previous methods and approaches, has been on how teachers teach, with relatively little attention paid to how learners learn. Even today, when the communicative approach underlies a substantial number of syllabuses for speakers of other languages, and in spite of insights from a considerable body of research, it is unusual to find textbooks which include learning strategies in their material. A rare exception is *Blueprint* (Abbs and Freebairn, 1991), and even in this series, the space dedicated to learning strategies consists of no more than a paragraph at the end of each section, says Oxford.
Other less widely adopted language teaching and learning methods and approaches include, among others, situational language teaching (whereby grammar and vocabulary are practiced through situations), the natural method (which emphasizes natural acquisition rather than formal grammar study), the direct method (which uses only the target language), the total physical response method (which stresses the importance of motor activity), the silent way (which encourages the teacher to be silent as much as possible) and suggestopoeia (which attempts to harness the influence of suggestion, such as music or art, on human behavior). Almost all of these theories have been mentioned in Chapter III.

It would probably be fair to say that to a greater or lesser extent all of these various methods and approaches have had some influence on the contemporary language learning and teaching field which has tended in recent years to move away from dogmatic positions of “right” or “wrong” and to become much more eclectic in its attitudes and willing to recognize the potential merits of a wide variety of possible methods and approaches, as noted by writers such as Larsen-Freeman (1987) and Tarone and Yule (1989). In line with this modern interest in eclecticism, educators are becoming increasingly interested in the contribution made by the learners themselves in the teaching/learning partnership. That means language learners are individuals who can take charge
of their own learning and achieve autonomy by the use of learning strategies.

This idea has been researched and promoted by educators such as Oxford, O’Malley and Chamot, Bialystok, Cohen, Wenden, and Green and Oxford, whom this study has mentioned almost in every chapter.

IV.7. Towards eclecticism in terms of autonomy

Although a single comprehensive theory cannot put forward all the probable strategies, there are several important theoretical assumptions which underlie contemporary ideas on language learning strategies. To comment that some students are more successful at learning language than others is, of course, to do no more than state the obvious. Language learning strategy theory postulates that, other things being equal, at least part of this differential success rate is attributable to the varying strategies which different learners bring to the task. From this perspective, which views students as being able to consciously influence their own learning, the learning of language becomes a cognitive process similar in many ways to any other kind of learning (McLaughlin, 1978). It is a view diametrically opposed to Krashen’s Monitor and Acquisition/Learning Hypotheses (Krashen, 1976; 1977) which states that language cannot be consciously learnt but only acquired through natural communication and therefore, by implication, that conscious learning strategies are not useful in the development of language.
From experience, one can say that, with the exception of the Monitor and Acquisition/Learning Hypotheses, language learning strategy theory operates comfortably alongside most of the contemporary language learning and teaching theories and fits easily with a wide variety of different methods and approaches. For instance, memory and cognitive strategies are involved in the development of vocabulary and grammar knowledge on which the grammar-translation method depends. Memory and cognitive strategies can be involved to make the patterning of automatic responses characteristic of the audio-lingual method more effective. Learning from errors (developed from inter-language theory) involves cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Compensation and social strategies can easily be assimilated into communicative competence theory and the Communicative Language Teaching approach. Methods such as Suggestopoeia involve affective strategies. The fact that learning strategy theory can work so easily alongside other theories, methods and approaches means that it has the potential to be a valuable component of contemporary eclectic syllabuses. But, weather the syllabus designers and material producers working for the Government of Kerala realize the importance of learning strategies is doubtful.

The theoretical development of the very idea of strategies of learning having been explored, let’s go to the acquisition part of language strategies. One of the
difficulties in learning language learning strategies is that they cannot usually be observed directly; they can only be inferred from language learner behavior. As Ellis (1986, p.14) rather colorfully puts it: “It is a bit like trying to work out the classification system of a library when the only evidence to go on consists of the few books you have been allowed to take out”. Given the difficulties of such a task, the challenge has been to devise a means first of all to record and subsequently to interpret the phenomena involved, a process which Ellis (1986, p.188) likes to “stumbling blindfold round a room to find a hidden object”.

Over the years, different researchers have employed a variety of approaches to this rather daunting task, one of the most frequently used of which has been the gathering of data about good language learners and about what it is that they do that makes them more successful than slower language learners.

Rubin (1975), who studied about good language learners, defining strategies as “the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge” (p.43) concluded that successful language learners had a strong desire to communicate, were willing to guess when unsure, and were not afraid of being wrong or appearing foolish. This did not mean that they did not care about correctness; however, good language learners also paid attention to form and meaning in their language learning. In addition, good language learners practise and monitor their own language and the language of those around them. Rubin
noted that the employment of these strategies depended on a number of
variables such as target language proficiency, age, situation and cultural
differences. Some of Rubin’s findings have been supported by other more recent
researchers, such as Wong Filmore (1982), who, reporting on research into
individual differences at the University of California, paid special attention to the
social strategies (although she did not use this term) employed by good
language learners. She reported that the good language learners “spent more
time than they should have during class time socializing and minding everyone
else’s business.....they were constantly involved in the affairs of their
classmates” (p.63). This behavior is consistent with the strong desire to
communicate, noted by Rubin (1975) as characteristic of good language
learners.

Almost at the same time as Rubin, Stern (1975) produced a list of ten
language learning strategies which were believed to be characterized by the
good language learners:

- a personal learning style or positive learning strategies, an active
  approach to the learning task,
- a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language which is
  empathetic with its speakers,
- technical know-how about how to tackle a language,
- strategies of experimentation and planning with the object of developing the new language into an ordered system with progressive revision,
- constantly searching for meaning,
- willingness to practice,
- willingness to use the language in real communication,
- critically sensitive self-monitoring in language use, and
- an ability to develop the target language more and more as a separate reference system while learning to think about it.

These rather broad "characterizations" (Stern, 1975, p.316) are somewhat at variance with the more specific way in which Rubin (1975) defines the term strategy, especially as she refined her usage of the term in later work. Although this very early work by researchers such as Rubin and Stern provided many valuable insights and formed the foundations for much subsequent work on language learning strategies, the difficulties with the definition evident even at this point remain unresolved to this day, as previously discussed. In another pioneering piece of research, Naiman, Frohlich, Stern and Todesco (1978) also tried to find out what people known to be good at languages had in common. Using a very broad definition of strategies as "general, more or less deliberate approaches" (p.4), they discovered that good language learners are able to adapt learning styles to suit themselves, are actively involved in the language
learning process, are able to develop an awareness of language both as a system of rules and as a means of communication, are constantly working at expanding their language knowledge, develop the target language as a separate system which does not always have to be related to the first language, and are realistically aware of the demands of learning language.

Other studies which have attempted to investigate the relationship between language learning strategies and success in language development by speakers of other languages have produced mixed results. O’Malley et al (1985, 1985a) discovered that, although students at all levels reported the use of an extensive variety of learning strategies, defined as “any set of operations or steps used by a learner that will facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval or use of information” (1985, p.23), higher level students reported greater use of metacognitive strategies (that is strategies used by students to manage their own learning), leading the researchers to conclude that the more successful students are probably able to exercise greater metacognitive control over their learning. This conclusion, however, is somewhat at variance with the results of a study by Ehrman and Oxford (1995) who investigated the relationship between end-of-course proficiency and a number of variables including language learning strategies. The results of this study indicated that cognitive strategies such as looking for patterns and reading for pleasure in the target language were the only
kinds of strategies which had a significant positive relationship with success in learning language.

Language learning strategies of all kinds are used more frequently by higher level students according to the results of a large-scale study of university students in Puerto Rico by Green and Oxford (1995). Green and Oxford also discovered a core of what they call “bedrock strategies” (p.289. Authors’ italics), a group of 23 strategies used equally frequently by students across proficiency levels. Green and Oxford speculate that these basic strategies are not necessarily unproductive, but that they may contribute significantly to the learning process without being in themselves sufficient to move the less successful students to higher levels of proficiency.

Griffiths (2003) also discovered a positive correlation between course level and reported frequency of language learning strategy use. In a study involving 348 students in a private language school in New Zealand, Griffiths found that language learning strategies were reportedly used significantly more frequently by advanced students than by elementary students. According to an examination of the patterns of language learning strategy use which emerged from the data, higher level students reported highly frequent use of strategies relating to interaction with others, to vocabulary, to reading, to the tolerance of ambiguity, to
language systems, to the management of feelings, to the management of
learning and to the utilization of available resources (p.17).

Although it is perhaps natural to want to concentrate positive attention on
good language learners, researchers have also been aware that there is a lot to
be learnt by observation of what unsuccessful language learners do, and,
therefore, by implication, what learners should, perhaps, try to avoid. Writing
about her own (less than totally successful) efforts to become literate in Chinese,
Sinclair Bell (1995) reports that she found the experience immensely stressful.
One of the reasons for her difficulties, she believes, is “I used the same
strategies and approaches for L2 literacy as had given me success in L1 literacy”
(p.701). The difficulty of changing students’ familiar strategy patterns is also
reported by O’Malley (1987).

A similar observation is also made by Porte (1988, p.168): “The majority of
learners said that they used strategies which were the same as, or very similar
to, those they had used at schools in their native countries”. After interviewing
fifteen under-achieving learners in private language schools in London, Porte
came to the rather interesting conclusion that these under-achieving students in
fact used very similar strategies to those used by successful language learners.
The difference seemed to be not so much which strategies were used, but “the
fact that they may demonstrate less sophistication and a less suitable response to a particular activity” (p.68).

Although the research into language learning strategies used by successful and unsuccessful language learners has produced some interesting insights, the picture which emerges is far from unified. An alternative approach used by researchers has been to study some of the various factors which influence individual students in their choice of learning strategies.

Studies investigating factors affecting strategy choice are a fashion these days. Studies which have examined the relationship between sex and strategy use have come to mixed conclusions. Ehrman and Oxford (1989) and Oxford and Nyikos (1989) discovered distinct gender differences in strategy use. The study by Green and Oxford (1995) came to the same conclusion. Ehrman and Oxford’s (1990) study, however, failed to discover any evidence of differing language learning strategy use between the sexes. It might be concluded, perhaps, that, although men and women do not always demonstrate differences in language learning strategy use, where differences are found women tend to use more language learning strategies than men.

The effects of psychological type were the focus of a study by Ehrman and Oxford (1989) when they reported on an investigation into the effects of learner variables on adult language learning strategies at the Foreign Service Institute,
USA. They concluded that the relationship between language learning strategy use and personality type (as measured by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or MBTI) is far from straightforward. In a later study in the same setting, Ehrman and Oxford (1990) concluded that psychological type appears to have a strong influence on the way learners use language learning strategies.

Another factor, the effects of motivation on language learning strategy use were highlighted when Oxford and Nyikos (1989) surveyed 1,200 students studying various languages in a Midwestern American university in order to examine the kinds of language learning strategies the students reported using. On this occasion, the degree of expressed motivation was discovered to be the most influential of the variables affecting strategy choice examined. In their study at the Foreign Service Institute, Ehrman and Oxford (1989) discovered that career choice had a major effect on reported language learning strategy use; a finding which they suggest may be the result of underlying motivation. A detailed theoretical support in the relation between autonomy and motivation related aspects of learning are provided in Chapter II.

Studies which have investigated nationality as a factor in language learning strategy use are not easy to find, although Griffiths and Parr (2000) reported finding that European students reported using language learning strategies significantly more frequently than students of other nationalities, especially
strategies relating to vocabulary, to reading, to interaction with others and to the
tolerance of ambiguity. European students were also working at a significantly
higher level than students of other nationalities. In a study involving a
questionnaire and group interviews in Taiwan, Yang (1998) made some
interesting discoveries about her students’ language learning strategy use,
including strategies for using dictionaries. In a later study, Yang (1999)
discovered that, although her students were aware of various language learning
strategies, few of them actually reported using them. Using a journal writing
method, Usuki (2000) discussed the psychological barriers to the adoption of
effective language learning strategies by Japanese students, who are typically
regarded as passive learners, and recommended more co-operations between
students and teachers.

Two studies which produced findings on nationality-related differences in
language learning strategies incidental to the main research thrust were those
reported by Politzer and McGroarty (1985) and by O’Malley (1987). Politzer and
McGroarty discovered that Asian students exhibited fewer of the strategies
expected of “good” language learners than did Hispanic students while O’Malley
ascribed the lack of success of Asian students to the persistence of familiar
strategies.
An interesting contrast to the findings of all of the previous studies reported in this section is that by Willing (1988). Willing administered questionnaires on learning style preference and strategy use to a large number of adult immigrant speakers of other languages in Australia. The results were examined for style preference and strategy use compared with various biographical variables such as ethnic origin, age, gender, proficiency and length of residence in Australia. Willing concluded that style preference and strategy use remained virtually constant across all of these variables. Such conflicting research findings do nothing but underscore the difficulties of reaching any kind of consensus in the area of language learning strategies.

The effects of strategy instruction are never free from criticism. The belief that language learning strategies are teachable and that learners can benefit from coaching in learning strategies underlies much of the research in the field. In line with this belief, many researchers have worked to demonstrate the pedagogical applications of findings from studies into language learning strategies. One study which researched the effects of the teaching of cognitive and metacognitive strategies on reading comprehension in the classroom was conducted by Tang and Moore (1992). They concluded that, while cognitive strategy instruction (title discussion, pre-teaching vocabulary) improved comprehension scores, the performance gains were not maintained upon the withdrawal of the treatment.
IV.8. Metacognition leading to autonomy

Metacognitive strategy instruction, involving the teaching of self-monitoring strategies, appeared to lead to improvements in comprehension ability which was maintained beyond the end of the treatment. This finding accords with that of O’Malley et al (1985) who discovered that higher level students are more able than lower level students to exercise metacognitive control over their learning.

So is this researcher’s experience with the senior secondary learners of ESL. One of the reasons may be the fact that higher order thinking skills develop to the maximum potential at this stage, and effective application of learning strategies are a result of higher order thinking skills.

In another classroom based study which aimed to research whether learner strategy training makes a difference in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes, Nunan (1995) involved 60 students in a 12 week program “designed to help them reflect on their own learning, to develop their knowledge of, and ability to apply learning strategies, to assess their own progress, and to apply their language skills beyond the classroom”(p.3). Nunan concluded that his study supported the idea that language classrooms should have a dual focus, teaching both content and an awareness of language processes.

A negative result for the effectiveness of language learning strategy instruction was achieved, however, when O’Malley (1987) and his colleagues
randomly assigned 75 students to one of three instructional groups where they received training in (1) metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies, (2) cognitive and socio-affective strategies, or (3) no special instruction in language learning strategies (control group) for listening, speaking and vocabulary acquisition skills. Among other findings, it was discovered that the control group for vocabulary actually scored slightly higher than the treatment groups. O’Malley explains this unexpected finding as being due to the persistence of familiar strategies among certain students, who continued to use rote repetitive strategies and were unwilling to adopt the strategies presented in training, especially when they knew they would be tested within only a few minutes. This is an interesting finding when compared with Porte’s (1988) observations (reported in this chapter earlier) concerning his underachieving students and with Sinclair Bell’s (1995) comments on her own attempt to become literate in Chinese.

Although results regarding the effectiveness of strategy training are rather mixed, the hypothesis that some of the success achieved by good language learners may be as a result of more effective language learning strategies is intuitively appealing, as is the assumption that the language learning strategies of the more successful students may be learnt by the less successful students and that teachers can assist the language learning process by promoting
language learning strategy awareness and use. This teachability component has meant that language learning strategies are increasingly attracting the attention of contemporary educators and researchers who are keen to harness the potential which language learning strategies would seem to have to enhance an individual's ability to learn language.

The history of what might be called modern second language teaching (since the middle of the twentieth century) has been punctuated by extremes. Each new method or approach has tended to be heralded as the answer to all problems, and, in the rush to welcome the newcomer, the older methods and approaches have often been unceremoniously abandoned in what might be called a baby-and-bathwater type reaction. Increasingly, however, as the new methods and approaches have failed to deliver quite the hoped-for miracles, awareness has grown that each different method or approach has its strengths and that, in combination, they can be used to enhance each other. As a result “there has emerged a general movement towards eclecticism” (Tarone and Yule, 1989, p.10) where methods are chosen to suit the students and the situation involved rather than because they conform to some rigid theory (such as the Audio-lingual insistence that students should never see words written before they have heard them spoken). As Larsen-Freeman (1897, p.7) puts it: “It is not uncommon for teachers today to practice a principled eclecticism, combining
techniques and principles from various methods in a carefully reasoned manner”.

In the light of historical experience, therefore, it is perhaps, important that, although learning strategies have the potential to be “an extremely powerful learning tool” (O’Malley, 1985, p.43), we should keep them also in perspective. It is probably unlikely that learning strategies will prove to be a magic wand to solve all language learning problems any more than any of the other eagerly-seized new ideas have proven to be in the last 50 years. But, used eclectically, in conjunction with other techniques, learning strategies may well prove to be an extremely useful addition to a language learners’ tool kit. The next step in the implementation of autonomous learning is assessment.

IV.9. Assessment and feedback

Assessment is a term which tends to have a rather bad press among both learners and teachers. It conjures up images of tests, marks, stress, and the words ‘pass’ or, worse still, ‘fail’. For those who have studied a language in a formal context, with a more or less intimidating examination at the end of the course, such reactions are not difficult to understand. This having been said, assessment is simply one stage in the teaching-learning process: goals are set and attainment of these goals is monitored, which then leads to feedback and a renewed cycle of goal-setting and learning. Assessment is therefore an integral
part of teaching as much in a learner-centered mode of teaching as in any other.

A major impetus to the investigation of the self-assessment abilities of language learners arose out of the Council of Europe’s Modern Languages Project (CRAPEL) with its emphasis on a learner-centered and motivation-based form of learning. Trim, in the preface to Oskarsson’s ‘Approaches to Self-Assessment in Foreign Language Learning’, makes the following comments about the role of evaluation in the Modern Languages Project:

> Evaluation was to be seen, not as a means of imposing the objectives of an authoritarian technocracy upon the population of learners, but as a means of enabling learners to achieve more effectively more objectives corresponding to their needs. (1980: ix, original emphasis.)

Trim (1980) goes on to point out that this calls for ‘a close interaction between learners, teachers, planners and experts at all levels and stages in the educational processes’. Trim thus links evaluation with needs analysis and the setting of learning objectives; he also sees it as a pedagogical undertaking in which learners should play an active role, albeit as part of a broadly-based pooling of knowledge with other participants. For Trim, then, learner involvement in assessment is an essential component of a learner-centered approach to teaching.
James et.al. (2006) distinct the two different purposes of assessment as:

assessment for learning and assessment of learning. The Assessment Reform Group (2002a) gave the definition of assessment for learning as: ‘…the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there’. According to James et al, one significant element of this definition is the emphasis on learners’ use of evidence. This draws attention to the fact that teachers are not the only assessors. Pupils can be involved in peer- and self-assessment and even when teachers are heavily involved, pupils need to be actively engaged. Only learners can do the learning. So, they need to act upon information and feedback if their learning is to improve. This requires them to have understanding, but also the motivation and will, to act. In contrast, the main purpose of assessment of learning is to sum up what a pupil has learnt at a given point. As such it is not designed to contribute directly to future learning although high-stakes testing can have a powerful negative impact (Assessment Reform Group, 2002b). In assessment of learning, the judgment will explicitly compare a pupil’s performance with an agreed standard, or with the standards achieved by a group of pupils of the same age. That means assessment of learning is more useful when there is a need to report to parents or any monitoring system. (p.9)
The ultimate goal of a learner-centered approach is learner empowerment, or enabling learners to pursue their language-related life goals in an informed and self-directive manner, this goal being achieved by means of language education. Self-assessment plays a crucial role both in language education and in terms of learner empowerment or learner autonomy. The reasons for this are relatively clear: if learners are to be in a position to operate self-learning, they must have the ability to assess:

- The communicative and linguistic demands of their target situations of use;
- Their current abilities with respect to these demands;
- The practical learning options that is available to them as means of attaining their goals and their subjective interaction with these options.

In what follows, self-assessment will be presented as an activity which encompasses these three elements – target situation analysis (what learners will need to do in the language), present situation analysis (what they can currently do), and strategic analysis (how they can best attain their desired learning goals in the light of the learning options available to them; their subjective needs and individual learning preferences). Self-assessment will thus be seen as an activity which is central to the active and reflective involvement of learners in
their language study, and thus as an integral component of language education and learner autonomy.

Oskarson (1989) suggests six main reasons for developing learners’ self-assessment abilities which bring out very clearly the powerful educational function of self-assessment..

1. Promotion of learning – Encouraging students to think critically about their competence in the TL is beneficial to language education, and can foster a more informed and intelligent attitude among students.

2. Raised level of awareness – Training students in self-assessment procedures, rather than expecting them to rely solely on the judgments of others, generates a more independent and discerning attitude not only to assessment *per se*, but also to course content and learning options.

3. Improved goal-orientation – Self-assessment leads students to reflect on the variety of goals that can exist and thereby broadens their vision of what learning a language is or can be. ‘Other directed’ assessment trends to have a limiting effect and generates passivity. Self-assessment can foster students’ creativity in various aspects of their learning, including their participation in classroom activities.

4. Expansion of range of assessment – The individual student’s understanding of his competence in a language is closer and more deeply
and personally felt than that of an outside agent, especially in terms of his affective learning needs. Student involvement can thus produce a richer and fuller profile of learning needs.

5. Shared assessment burden – Sharing the responsibility for assessment between both teacher and students, rather than leaving it with the teacher alone, as is the case in traditional approaches, can lighten the teacher’s load in both practical and psychological terms.

6. Beneficial post course effects – Training students in self-assessment provides them with a skill crucial to subsequent learning, possibly in contexts where they will not have access to the evaluative advice of a teacher. Self-assessment therefore fosters independent learning, or in other words, learner empowerment. (1989:3-5 adapted)

Oskarsson sees training in self-assessment as having a positive influence on a general quality of learners’ involvement in their language study, and as a means of fostering their ability to assume an active and self-directive role in their learning – both during and subsequent to their formal course of study. He thus accords to self-assessment a pivotal role in terms of both language education and, in his sixth point, learner empowerment.

Fontana and Fernandez (1994) conducted a research study as peer and self-assessment. Over a period of twenty weeks, primary school pupils were
progressively trained to carry out self-assessment that involved setting their own learning objectives, constructing relevant problems to test their learning, selecting appropriate tasks, and carrying out self-assessments. Over the period of the experiment the learning gains of this group were twice as big as those of a matched ‘control’ group.

The importance of peer and self-assessment was also illustrated by Frederiksen and White (1997) who compared learning gains of four classes taught by each of three teachers over the course of a term. All the classes had an evaluation activity each fortnight. The only thing that varied was the focus of the evaluation. Two classes focused on what they liked and disliked about the topic; the other two classes focused on ‘reflective assessment’ which involved pupils in using criteria to assess their own work and to give one another feedback. The results were remarkable. All pupils in the ‘reflective assessment group’ made more progress than pupils in the ‘likes and dislikes’. However, the greatest gains were for pupils previously assessed as having weak basic skills. This suggests that low achievement in schools may have much less to do with a lack of innate ability than with pupils’ lack of understanding of what they are meant to be doing and what counts as quality.

From 1999 to 2001 a development and research project was carried out by Paul Black and colleagues (2002, 2003), at Kings College London with teachers
in Oxfordshire and Medway (the King’s, Medway and Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project – KMOFAP), to test some of these findings in a British context because much of the earlier research came from other countries. They found peer-assessment to be an important complement to self-assessment because pupils learn to take on the roles of teachers and to see learning from their perspective. At the same time they can give and take criticism and advice in a non-threatening way, and in a language that children naturally use. Most importantly, as with self-assessment, peer-assessment is a strategy for ‘placing the work in the hands of the pupils’.

In a latest project of the Economic and Social Research Council’s (ESRC) Teaching and Learning Research Program (in England from 2001-2005) by four teams from four universities, the importance of assessment in learning how to learn is concluded as:

For learning how to learn to be effective, pupils need to become both thoughtful and active learners – they need to become autonomous. They must, in the end, take responsibility for their own learning; the teacher’s role is to help them towards this goal. Assessment for learning is a vital tool for this purpose of promoting learning autonomy. (Mary James et.al:2006.p.13)

Again, it is interesting to note the evidence from research conducted by ESRC regarding self-assessment and peer-assessment:
Learners must ultimately be responsible for their learning since no one else can do it for them. Thus assessment for learning must involve pupils. The awareness of learning and the ability of learners to direct it for themselves are of increasing importance in the context of encouraging lifelong learning (Assessment Reform Group, 1999).

Self-assessment has been defined as ‘the process of reflecting on past experience, seeking to remember and understand what took place and attempting to gain a clear idea of what has been learned or achieved’ (James et al 2006:44). In self-assessment pupils have to understand the criteria or standards that will be used to assess their work make judgments about their work in relation to these and any feedback from the teacher, and work out the implications of this for future action.

For self-assessment to work, it is important that pupils are given opportunities to reflect on the quality of their work against agreed standards. (These ‘agreed’ standards might be ‘received’ national curriculum standards or they might be negotiated in the classroom.). Pupils need to be supported to admit to difficulties without risk to their self-esteem. They need to be given time to work problems out and know that it is acceptable to consider a number of possible solutions before acting.
The move from assessment by teachers to self-assessment can be challenging and peer-assessment can help pupils to make this transition. Peer-assessment is valuable because it improves motivation, involves communication in pupils’ natural language, encourages acceptance by pupils of criticism, strengthens pupil voice in feedback to the teacher, and frees teachers to stand back from activity and observe.

New learning strategies can be developed by scrutinizing the work of others because it gives pupils a wider view of what is possible. Exploration of others’ work allows pupils to see different ways of tackling the same task and, as a result, extending their own repertoire.

It is possible for pupils to become clearer about their own expectations through trying to explain strengths and weaknesses to others. This may result in the learning of new and better strategies.

Druckman and Swets (1988), quote James et al, argue that peer feedback is as, or more, influential than teacher feedback in obtaining lasting performance results, but effective learning will occur only if pupils are clear about what they know, understand and can do at the start of a piece of work and what they will know, understand and be able to do when they have completed the work.

Self-assessment and peer-assessment help pupils to become more effective learners by enabling them to reflect on their knowledge of themselves as
thinkers and learners; their understanding of the task in hand; ways in which they can improve their learning. In doing so, it contributes to increased self-esteem, motivation and personal responsibility for learning.

Successful self-and peer-assessment involves all three of the other key processes that are the focus of assessment for learning:

1. Developing classroom talk especially through questioning
2. Feedback

Susan Sheerin (1989), in Self-access, mentions the advantages and disadvantages of self-assessment as:

Advantages:

- Students take responsibility for their own level assessment. This is very much in tune with the whole philosophy of learner independence which lies behind self-access learning.
- Students are in the best position to know where their own strengths and weaknesses lie.
- In using self-assessment forms, students have the chance to assess themselves as being at different levels in different skills. Assessment can, therefore, be more sensitive.
Disadvantages

- Some students may not have the maturity to assess themselves honestly.
- Self-assessment forms may need to be translated into the student’s first language.
- Asking students to assess themselves may come as a shock to students from some cultures. They may feel that professional assessment is part of what they are paying for.

The kind of self-assessment outlined here is an absolute assessment in that it relates to performance in the real world. The point was made however, at the start of this section, that what is required is assessment related to the learning materials on offer. It may not be easy, therefore, to relate such an absolute assessment to an abstract notion of level in a study centre. Self-assessment may be more useful for purposes of needs analysis. (p.40)

Sheerin quotes self-assessment forms from Oskarsson (1980:p.39, see appendix Strategies to be adopted for promoting self-assessment and peer-assessment are studied in the conclusion (chapter 5).

Another area that is usually neglected in assessment is the assessment of motivational beliefs of the learners. We discussed motivational beliefs in Chapter II. By including the assessment of students’ goal orientations in their evaluations, teachers communicate to students that positive motivational beliefs are valued.
In doing so, they are actually supporting the development of such beliefs in students. In addition, assessments of students’ goal orientations provide teachers with important information they can use in formative evaluations of their own teaching. Based on this information, teachers can make necessary and timely adjustments to their instructional practices and thereby support students’ academic learning. Not surprisingly, researchers (Ames, 1992; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002) have found that the classroom environment has a powerful influence on students’ motivational beliefs. Teachers should, therefore, continually monitor how their classroom procedures and activities influence students’ achievement goal orientations. This is particularly important when it comes to classroom evaluation procedures. Motivational theorists (Ames, 1992; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002) maintain that the way in which students are evaluated has a strong influence on the goal orientations they adopt.

The last thing teachers want is yet another responsibility to add to an already overflowing plate of expectations and demands on their time. Fortunately, methods for assessing students’ motivational beliefs can be incorporated into pre-existing instructional strategies and assessment practices. The following is a brief overview of methods for assessing student motivational beliefs that teachers can incorporate into their pre-existing routines:
Purposefully or not, teachers routinely make observations of their students’ behavior both inside and outside the classrooms. During any given lesson, teachers are watching for behavioral signs that students are paying attention, not disrupting others, and behaving within the guidelines of class expectations. By being aware of and focusing on specific motivational behaviors, teachers can incorporate the assessment of motivational beliefs into these pre-existing observational routines. For example, teachers might assign a challenging in-class assignment just beyond their students’ current ability level. (The parameters to measure the students’ goal orientations were discussed in Chapter II). By observing whether students are willing to seek help when they are experiencing difficulty, teachers may be able to infer the goal orientations held by their students. For instance, students holding a performance-avoid goal orientation would be expected to avoid asking for help, fearing that their help-seeking might be perceived as a sign that they are less capable than other students. Unfortunately, the research evidence suggests that “the very students who need help the most seek it the least, and a performance goal orientation exacerbates the situation” (Urdan, Ryan, Anderman, & Gheen, 2002, p. 68). To the extent that teachers can infer maladaptive beliefs from observing their students’ achievement behavior, the more likely they will be able to intervene and encourage more adaptive beliefs and behaviors.
Of course, inferences based on mere observations of student behavior can be incorrect. However, when conducted judiciously, observations of students' effort, persistence, and avoidance behaviors can provide useful insights. According to Pintrich and Schunk (2002), "[t]hese behaviors are valid indicators of motivation to the extent that they are straightforward and involve little inference on the part of observers" (p. 15). Still, given the wide array of alternative explanations for student behaviors (e.g., feeling ill, distracted by out-of-school concerns, fatigue), inferences made about student motivation beliefs need to be validated by comparing them with other indicators of motivation (e.g., multiple samples of student work, surveys, assessment conversations, and so on).

Paper-and-pencil questionnaires are the most popular and efficient way to assess students' goal orientations. Students typically are provided with a list of statements about their achievement-goal beliefs and are asked to indicate their level of agreement with these statements by circling one of various possible choices (e.g., strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree). Teachers can get ideas for writing items from examining sample items in Elliot (1999), Pintrich & Schunk (2002), Stipek (1998), Urdan, et al. (2002), and related sources. The following are sample items representing different achievement
goal orientations (items with a plus sign represent a mastery orientation and items with minus sign represent a performance-avoid orientation):

- **Making mistakes is part of learning (+)**
- **I want to learn as much as possible from this science experiment (+)**
- **It’s important that I keep trying, even if I make mistakes (+)**
- **I just want to avoid doing poorly in this class (-)**
- **When I don’t understand my math assignment, I often guess instead of asking someone for help (-)**
- **I am afraid if I ask questions I will look “dumb” (-)**

Younger students can be read more simplified statements and asked to indicate their agreement by circling one of several emoticons (i.e., smiling face, ambivalent face, frowning face). Teachers can summarize the data to get a sense of the motivational beliefs held by the class in general (e.g., percentage of students holding a mastery goal orientation), subgroups of the class (e.g., potential differences in goal orientations between girls and boys), and individual students (e.g., Johnny avoids sharing his answers in class discussions because he worries that others will think he is “dumb”).

Goal-orientation questionnaires can be used as a non-graded measure of student learning. For example, a teacher can administer a brief questionnaire at the start of a math unit to quickly assess students’ goal orientations and then
pass out a similar assessment at the end of the unit to determine whether there have been any changes. Stiggins (2001) suggests that when using such questionnaires, teachers need to carefully explain to students why they are being asked these questions and that an honest answer is what teachers are looking for rather than a “right answer.” Even when the purpose is carefully explained, students may still provide socially desirable responses rather than accurate responses, that is, responses they think their teacher wants to hear (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Stiggins, 2001). Therefore, teachers should consider occasionally using questionnaires that maintain the anonymity of students.

In summary, even though questionnaires have their limitations (e.g., socially desirable responses or invalid responses from young students not understanding the question), they can still yield reliable and accurate indications of students’ motivational beliefs if used with care and in conjunction with other measures (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

Teachers often use class discussions to assess students’ pre-existing, current, and changing knowledge. For example, a popular assessment conversation technique teachers use is the K–W–L chart (Ogle, 1986). The letters K, W, and L represent the following questions: What do you already know? What do you want to know? What did you learn? At the start of a new lesson or instructional unit, the teacher writes the letters K, W, and L on a large
piece of construction paper and asks students to share what they already know about the topic and what they would like to learn. The teacher explains that following the lesson (or instructional unit), the class will return to the K – W – L chart to discuss what was learned as well as what students may still want to learn. (more about this technique in chapter 5)

By simply elaborating on this pre-existing technique, teachers can incorporate motivational belief questions such as: *Are you interested in this topic? Do you think this topic is important? What goals do you have for this lesson? Having completed this lesson, are you interested in learning more?*

Using class discussions in this way allows teachers to develop a general sense of their students' achievement goals. However, given that individual students may be reluctant to share their actual motivational beliefs in a group setting, teachers should consider using more direct forms of assessment (e.g., one-on-one conversations) when attempting to understand the motivational beliefs of a particular student. Taking a few moments to visit with a student can provide meaningful insights into that student’s achievement goals. As a result, teachers can get a more fine-tuned sense of the motivational beliefs of their students. They can then use this information to create learning environments that further support and cultivate adaptive motivation beliefs (see Ames, 1992; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; and Stipek, 1998).
In summary, when assessing students’ goal orientations, regardless of method, teachers need to use the same level of care and consideration as they would when assessing students’ academic ability. Stiggins’ (2001) cautions that many people wrongly assume that just because they are assessing motivational beliefs the principles of sound assessment can be disregarded. Issues of reliability and accuracy still apply. While it is beyond the scope of this article to address these issues, teachers should at the very least use multiple methods across multiple instances when assessing motivational beliefs. As with all assessment, no single method is sufficient.

Finally, teachers should avoid basing grades on motivational beliefs. Although students’ motivational beliefs should be monitored and feedback provided in an effort to encourage the development of adaptive goal orientations, students should not be further penalized by receiving low marks for holding performance-avoidance goals or other maladaptive motivational beliefs. As said earlier, one method or one strategy may not bring improved results in teaching ESL. Our quest for better strategies and methods should never stop at any one in particular.

IV. 10. From the field

The present study has stemmed out of a natural and intense feeling of this researcher’s experience as an amateur teacher trainer. While working as a
member of a voluntary organization called English Language Teachers’ Interactive Forum (ELTIF) which conducted classes for teachers, students, headmasters, auto-drivers, and the general public, in different parts of Kerala and a few places in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, for the last one decade, there have been enough opportunities for interacting with learners and teachers of various schools in and outside Kerala. While trying out novel classroom strategies, it has become clear that the more autonomy and self initiated learning was promoted, the greater was the language proficiency among the students. ELTIF has been organizing academic activities mainly at two levels: teacher empowerment programs and learner proficiency courses. In the case of teachers, empowerment programs conducted by ELTIF have been found more rewarding compared to the traditional teacher training programs.

For learners, most of the activities – both indoor and outdoor—which have been practiced during the proficiency courses had great impact. Many of them reported the motivation and confidence they gained after attending the courses. It is a truism that if something works well, there must be a strong theory behind it. The positive effect and response from the learners as well as teachers made this classroom teacher undertake short-term action researches which contributed to the proto-form of this study.
As mentioned earlier in Chapter I, for self-conviction of the researcher to substantiate her line of thinking, a field study is conducted on a sample of the target group. The rationale of the study is the presupposition that the average senior secondary learners of ESL do lack any form of formal instruction in learning strategies; and strategy instruction, whether embedded or separate, will help them in learning to learn and thereby achieving learner autonomy. Also it may be presumed, based on the experience and other empirical researches conducted in different parts of the world, that self initiative may be the best way to learning, provided a free atmosphere and sufficient guidance and support are given. This study is relevant in the sense that adolescence is the most appropriate stage for autonomy, in all its aspects. Strategy training mastered at this stage has its telling effect throughout their lives. As the teachers are unaware of the need for strategy instruction, the curricular objectives are not realized. Hence it is supposed that the lack of strong theoretical basis causes handicap for teachers in implementing the curricular directives in actual classrooms, especially in ESL contexts. So the study is conducted with the hypothesis that a teacher who is convinced of the psychological and philosophical theoretical basis can train learners to learn how to learn through effective instruction in learning strategies. Many of the strategies selected in this study create an interface in bringing together the learner's individual self and
social self. Nair (2007:7) propounds this idea of connecting the individual self with that of the social self:

…any attempt for leading instructional programs closer to learner autonomy, or an experiment of making the second language learner more and more independent must take into consideration the socio-cultural traditions which have molded the past educational experiences of the learner. However, any such experiment should ensure a smooth and gradual transition causing minimal tension to the teachers as well as learners.

So the activities designed are in such a way that learners involve themselves in the learning process without any compulsion from outside. A need for each activity is created through clever planning and guidance.

The samples selected are learners of class 11 and class 12, of a government higher secondary school (heterogeneous groups in every sense) of boys and girls. They have only limited proficiency in speaking and writing English. Only less than 10% were from English-medium schools. 13% got A+ for English in class 10. 15-18% got only D+. Though not a highly disciplined group, they are accustomed with group work and were cooperative. The classroom arrangement is not conducive for cooperative learning as envisaged by the constructivist pedagogy. 55-60 students are seated on benches in a 6m×9m classroom. No
tables or chairs ideally suitable for cooperative learning in groups. Hence, outdoor activities were the real test-ground for constructive learning.

Tools used in the study were: questionnaires, structured and unstructured interviews, think-aloud protocols, surveys, peer assessment forms and self-assessment forms, (see appendices task-sheets for data collection and surveys etc. The standardized tests/tasks conducted were all lifted from authentic sources like TOFEL and IELTS materials. These tests/tasks were not pre-planned, except a few. After needs analysis survey and open discussions, the area where learners needed help was identified and tests/tasks were designed accordingly.

After an awareness-raising in learning strategies, a comprehensive list of strategies is prepared with the help of the learners. Strategies for different language components are identified and supplemented wherever necessary. Ogle’s chart, learning-contracts, think-aloud protocols are a few that created genuine interest among learners. But the students show more eagerness to apply these strategies in other subjects like math, physics, accountancy etc. as revealed in their final opinion. Diary for vocabulary is the only metacognitive strategy they unanimously acknowledge as the one they will use in learning English. It shows that strategy instruction within a very short span of time (two weeks in this case) need not make the learners get familiar with the numerous
strategies—whether cognitive, metacognitive, or socio-affective. Many of the strategies they use cannot be identified by the learners themselves, though.

Yet another interesting outcome of the study reveals the ignorance of metalinguistic features of English language. Although given in all course books right from class 5, the phonemic script is totally alien to most of the learners. Exposure in the classroom amounts to the minimum. So a few sessions on spoken language are included which give them confidence and motivation to do the interviews, surveys and reporting etc.

Two activities of integrated skills need to be mentioned are: writing the profiles of three important personalities in their neighborhood and conducting a survey to write an article about the relevance of Kudumbasree units in their area. Both the activities are group activities. The group prepare the questions to be asked while interviewing each person, in English. Learners are to ask questions to the public in their regional language, while among themselves they use their fragmentary English. The rewarding experience of this teacher-researcher as she comes to listen to their fragmentary English compensates the hard work behind this research. When we teach our regular students, we do not pay much attention to their change as effective users of language. Whereas, in this separate study and that too for over a period of more than two weeks, the teacher gets an opportunity to observe the behavioral changes from different
angles. The development of cognitive and metacognitive strategies has not been studied in detail though the awareness has helped the learners to think of strategies for learning.

As mentioned earlier, this researcher has tried a number of strategies in her regular teaching. One strategy that is effective as an instructional tool is think-aloud protocol which we mentioned in Chapter III. Having used effectively in mathematics instruction in her early days of teaching career, she experimented this technique on her ESL learners. Even without knowing that this has been identified as a strategy in language pedagogy, it has been used without paying any special attention to its effect on instruction. Once got interested in the field, special attention and observations on each move in the ESL instruction became a sort of a habit. It was quite surprising to listen to her students’ remarks in their cooperative learning groups. The students used to stay back after their school hours, in the verandah next to this researcher’s office. While doing their assignments in groups, she could hear:

‘read it again’, ‘use the past tense, you started with one’, ‘this does not make sense at all’, ‘don’t you remember what she said about using the present for future?’, ‘let’s put it this way it’s more clear’, ‘why don’t you look up this word?’, ‘let’s note the important points first’ and a number of talking-aloud and thinking-aloud from the groups.
The think-aloud protocols we have discussed in Chapter III have two-pronged benefits: to learners, it helps them to identify the strategies they use; to teachers, to adapt their teaching styles and materials to the learners’ needs. The limitation of this procedure—only one student at a time and spending a lot of time on each—actually becomes beneficial to the learner as he gets individual attention and a chance to know different strategies to be used for listening, reading and writing. If tried in a collaborative learning classroom, the effect of this technique would be amazing. In groups when they work on a task, left on their own, they start thinking aloud the different strategies to understand, to pronounce, to retrieve, to compare, to contrast, to correct, to review, to analyze, to group, to associate, to elaborate etc. etc.. To sum up, think-aloud protocol can be used as one of the strategy elicitation techniques to know how learners think as they learn. When the learners undergo this procedure, they realize how to go about reading comprehension, listening and writing in a better way.

Besides, this strategy, once developed, can be compared to a problem solving method. As the learner progresses, he pauses at difficult junctures devising solutions to precede further, applying different strategies. Once the problem is solved, the learner’s motivational belief is enhanced and he is motivated more to use this strategy in other related areas. An important point to remember here is that the teacher should not stop this way of approaching a task with one or two
classes; this strategy should be an ongoing one throughout the year. Then

learners will acquire it as a habit, and start using this as a very effective learning
strategy, not only in ESL contexts but in other subjects also. Besides, this habit
once developed, it helps them to learn on their own through reference work,
asking for help to peers and teachers or elders, raising awareness in their level
of achievement, and finally leads them to autonomy.

IV. 11. Conclusion

This chapter has tried to probe into that realm of mind where strategies lay
hiding, concealing their powers, misleading sometimes but rarely springing up to
surprise us with their magical megawatts. Strategies and their classification
never go free of disputes. But a consensus has reached where trespassing is
allowed into any sector whether cognitive or metacognitive or socio-affective.
The theoretical underpinnings examined, the implications analyzed, the
relevance weighed out, the next step, that is the effective employment of these
strategies in the ESL classrooms, has been practically verified. Some serious
doubts regarding the practice of the constructs—learner autonomy, learning
strategies and communication strategies—have also been cleared in this
chapter. The researcher’s humble attempt to reiterate what she already knows
from her experience is given in a very brief manner. So the next step invariably
demands the overall results of the study—the findings and suggestions. The next
chapter, Chapter V, sometimes revisits the concepts and theories to substantiate the proposals. Also, a number of practicable activities (which we sometimes feel like calling strategies), most suitable for the target group, to practice during their regular courses, will be suggested in the coming chapter.