

# A Brief Study on the Cultivation of Meta-Cognitive Strategies in English Majors' Pronunciation Learning

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## ABSTRACT

The article deals with the problem of English pronunciation learning strategies. Pronunciation is particularly important for English majors, which directly affects the effectiveness of communication, but the improvement of pronunciation learning and teaching is complicated. The article reviews the previous studies on meta-cognitive strategies and analyzes the relationship between independent learning and meta-cognitive strategies in English pronunciation learning. Finally, it tries to explore the cultivation of meta-cognitive strategies in English pronunciation teaching. The major methods for this study include documents study and experience summarization. The author holds that educators should pay attention to the cultivation of learners' meta-cognitive strategies so as to improve the effect of their pronunciation learning.

*Keywords: meta-cognition, learning strategy, English pronunciation, independent learning, cultivation*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language learning strategies can be divided into three categories: meta-cognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, social or emotional strategies. Among them, meta-cognitive strategies can coordinate various learning strategies. The concept of meta-cognition was put forward by American psychologist Flavell in the 1970s, he pointed out: "Meta-cognition is usually defined as knowledge and cognition about cognitive objects, that is, anything cognitive. However, the concept could reasonably be broadened to include anything psychological, rather than cognitive."

Linguists believe that learning a foreign language should not only lead to proficiency, but more importantly, help learners develop their meta-cognitive abilities to become autonomous learners. Meta-cognitive strategies can motivate people's thinking, enable them to study deeply and improve their learning effect, especially for second language learners. The purpose of meta-cognitive strategy training is to enable learners to control their own language learning process. Under the guidance of a teacher, learners can learn how to learn a foreign language more effectively. Therefore, the teacher's job is to help learners change or improve their learning skills rather than just teach them language points.

## II. METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES AND CLASSIFICATION

### A. Meta-cognitive strategy

Meta-cognitive strategy is a more specific cognitive behavior, a kind of learning strategy, and a process in which learners control cognitive activities in order to achieve cognitive goals. Because meta-cognitive strategies enable learners to adjust their learning process, cognitive psychologists generally believe that meta-cognitive strategies are superior to other cognitive strategies.

O'Malley studied 24 learning strategies of English as a foreign language learners in Britain, and pointed out the importance of meta-cognitive strategies. In his opinion, meta-cognitive strategy is one of the learning strategies and can control the cognitive strategy. Learners' learning success depends on the success of meta-cognitive strategy to a large extent. Oxford considered meta-cognitive strategy as indirect strategy and believed that it could coordinate the whole learning process. Their research shows that meta-cognition plays an integral role in controlling and regulating learners' learning, and the development level of meta-cognition directly promotes and restricts the development level of learning strategies

### B. Classification of meta-cognitive strategies

Meta-cognitive strategies can be roughly divided into the following three types: meta-cognitive planning

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strategy, meta-cognitive monitoring strategy and meta-cognitive evaluation strategy.

Meta-cognitive plan strategy refers to the strategy that an individual makes a plan for various activities, predicts possible results, selects available strategies and works out solutions to problems before carrying out a cognitive activity. The meta-cognitive planning strategy includes the following aspects: setting learning goals, browsing the learning materials, drawing up questions to be answered, and analyzing the methods to complete the learning tasks.

As an important part of the learning process, making a learning plan includes estimating the results and the completion time of the plan, selecting strategies that can be used and formulating various solutions to problems.

Meta-cognitive monitoring strategy refers to the cognitive strategy that learners make timely inspection of cognitive activities in order to correct and adjust them in time. This strategy enables learners to be alert to possible problems in their study so as to identify and modify them.

Meta-cognitive assessment strategy is one of the most important meta-cognitive strategies. Learners make examination, evaluation and reflection on their learning process and effect according to effective standards. In addition, their learning skills and strategic application, and the ability of completing learning tasks should be considered in terms of evaluation. They can improve and adjust their cognitive strategies based on the examination. By evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy, students can think deeply about their own learning process.

The aspects of meta-cognitive strategy always work together. Before learning, learners will generally recognize their learning tasks first, then make a learning plan, evaluate their understanding with some standards, estimate their learning time, and choose effective plans. Then, they will monitor their learning process and make some adjustments or take remedial measures according to the monitoring results.

Meta-cognitive strategies always work together with cognitive strategies. Only when learners have the ability and desire of cognitive strategies can they successfully carry out meta-cognitive activities such as cognition, planning, monitoring and self-regulation. As an essential tool for learning content, cognitive strategies help learners integrate known and new information and store it in long-term memory. Meta-cognitive strategies can guide and monitor learners' use of cognitive strategies, help them judge the learning level and plan the learning process. Teachers can teach students many different strategies, but if they lack the necessary meta-cognitive strategies, then it is likely that they do not know which strategies should be used in certain

situations, or to change strategies, then they are not successful learners.

### **III. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDEPENDENT LEARNING AND METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION LEARNING**

Meta-cognitive strategies make learners more responsible for their own language learning. With the change of teaching mode, teachers no longer completely guide and control every aspect of the learning process, but pay attention to the learning needs of students. After entering the university, students are no longer totally dependent on teachers, but are responsible for their own learning. The combination of meta-cognitive strategy and students' phonological autonomous learning can make learners responsible for their language learning, and also promote them to analyze their own phonological learning needs, learning strengths and weaknesses, and conduct self-guidance on the process of phonological learning.

Meta-cognitive strategies can help learners actively participate in learning rather than passively receive instruction. The key to successful second language learning lies in an increased awareness of the learning process. Meta-cognitive consciousness consists of three aspects: knowledge of what is known, knowledge of what is done, and knowledge of the current cognitive or emotional state. These are all necessary for learners to make decisions related to their own learning, all related to autonomy. The research made by Jones et al. has shown that meta-cognitive awareness is associated with successful language learning because successful language learners are aware of the processes that underlie their learning process and are able to successfully apply appropriate strategies to control their own learning.

Meta-cognitive strategies have executive functions which can help learners to be more purposeful and goal-oriented. According to Anderson's research, the development of learners' meta-cognitive awareness can make their cognitive skills more developed and their information processing more profound, thus generating critical thinking and evaluation. For example, when monitoring the performance of a study plan, they will look at the relationship between the learning goal, the means to achieve the goal, and the task outcome, and make adjustments based on what they observe.

### **IV. THE CULTIVATION OF META-COGNITIVE STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION TEACHING**

Teachers should make reasonable use of the favorable conditions and opportunities in and out of

class to develop students' meta-cognitive strategies and enhance students' learning independence and autonomy.

*A. Guiding and strengthening students' understanding and use of meta-cognitive strategies*

First, teachers should explain to students. For example, a lecture on meta-cognitive strategy may be held before class, which may help them know about the basic theory of meta-cognition and realize the fact that meta-cognitive strategy plays an important part in language learning. Thus, students may establish a preliminary meta-cognitive awareness, which may arouse their initiative and enthusiasm of applying of meta-cognitive strategy in their English pronunciation learning. Only when students fully realize and understand the importance of meta-cognitive strategy to learning can they consciously use this strategy in their own learning and improve the effectiveness of using the strategy. Although English majors have special pronunciation courses, they are usually only offered in the first semester of freshman year, with a few classes. It is difficult to completely correct the wrong pronunciation habits developed by students over the years in limited classes, so the improvement of pronunciation level relies more on students' independent learning. O'Malley et al. have pointed out that students who do not master meta-cognitive strategies basically have no direction and no ability to evaluate their own progress, their own performance and determine their own future learning direction. Shilan also believes that meta-cognitive strategy is the prerequisite for learners to realize self-management and the key to the development of learners' autonomy in learning. Therefore, teachers should provide students with clear guidance in time so that students can gradually enhance their meta-cognitive awareness and develop the habit of using meta-cognitive strategies correctly.

*B. Guiding students' to properly use meta-cognitive strategies in English pronunciation learning*

First of all, teachers should help students work out learning goals and plans according to their own specific conditions, and recognize their own key points and difficulties in their English pronunciation learning. Students with good phonetic foundation can aim higher and strive to be close to their native speakers. Students with poor pronunciation can set the target slightly lower, so as to make their pronunciation clear, natural and understandable. It is also feasible to set short-term goals at different stages of your study and complete them one by one. In the process of achieving learning goals, learners will enhance their sense of achievement and confidence in learning. Teachers should try their best to construct meta-cognitive behaviors in pronunciation classes. For example, before teaching each phonetic knowledge point, students should first

clarify their scope of phonetic knowledge, and they can use the questioning method to understand their deficiencies. In this way, learning with purpose will be more targeted and have better effects.

In addition to the resources in class, there are a large number of learning materials available on the Internet. Students should know how to choose suitable materials and make plans and arrangements for their study. Therefore, teachers should guide students to choose appropriate materials according to their own specific circumstances and practice in a planned way step by step.

After setting learning goals and learning plans, students should also monitor the implementation of their learning plans and the learning process. Once the study plan is made, it should be carried out on time. Of course, it can be adjusted according to the actual situation, but it must not blow hot and cold. Students should also monitor their own learning process and develop the ability to correct their own mistakes, rather than relying entirely on teachers' correction. Students should analyze and figure out their own imitation exercises with the help and guidance of teachers according to the phonetic knowledge they have learned, and try to find out their own problems and correct them. Students should also monitor their own methods and patterns of speech training and change inappropriate methods. After this kind of conscious training, students' self-monitoring and self-correction ability can be effectively improved, and the effect of pronunciation learning will be greatly enhanced.

*C. Helping students evaluate and adjust their English pronunciation learning*

Since self-assessment is an important part of pronunciation autonomous learning, teachers should also guide students to independently conduct self-assessment in the whole thinking process of pronunciation learning.

O'Malley and Chamot thought in the completion of a specific learning task, learners need to have a certain amount of time to dismember learning activities and evaluate the application of learning strategies when finishing the learning task. Meanwhile, they should be given enough time to make assessment of the learning objectives initially set. After a period of phonetic training, teachers should guide students to evaluate their learning, including the effect of their phonetic learning, application of pronunciation learning strategies and the completion of the plan. The evaluation can be completed by combining teacher's comments with students' self-evaluation. Teachers should encourage students in their comments. For the evaluation of students' self-study after class, teachers can provide personalized guidance through WeChat, QQ and other ways. Through self-assessment, students can reflect on

their problems in phonetic learning, analyze the causes and seek solutions, which greatly improves their learning autonomy. The effective use of meta-cognitive strategies will make students' phonological learning in a virtuous circle.

## V. CONCLUSION

As is mentioned above, meta-cognitive strategy can promote the cultivation of students' self-learning awareness and ability of phonetics, and students can learn English pronunciation more effectively. Therefore, the author believes that it is necessary to cultivate meta-cognitive strategies in pronunciation teaching of English majors in order to improve the effect of English pronunciation teaching and promote the quality of students' pronunciation learning.

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