

DEVELOPING METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES FOR SPEAKING

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Abstract: In today's globalized world, the ability to speak a second language fluently is a highly valuable skill. Among the four major language skills—listening, reading, writing, and speaking—speaking is often regarded as the most difficult to master. This is because it requires learners to think, formulate sentences, and deliver them instantly in real-time. While many learners focus on expanding vocabulary and improving grammar, fewer pay attention to how they learn and how they manage their own speaking process. This is where metacognitive strategies play a vital role. Metacognition, which means "thinking about thinking," enables learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning. When applied to speaking, metacognitive strategies help learners speak more confidently, identify problems, and improve their oral communication skills over time.

Key words: a metacognitive strategy, planning, monitoring, evaluating, feedback, speaking anxiety

A metacognitive strategy:

A metacognitive strategy is a method or technique that helps individuals become aware of and manage their own thinking and learning processes. The term "metacognition" comes from the Greek word meta (meaning "beyond" or "about") and the Latin word cognitio (meaning "knowledge"), and it literally means "thinking about thinking." In the context of language learning and speaking, metacognitive strategies are

used to plan, monitor, and evaluate one's performance in communication tasks. For example, before speaking, a learner might plan what they want to say, think about the vocabulary and grammar they need, or consider the structure of their message. This is called metacognitive planning. During the speaking task, they may monitor their speech in real time, checking for mistakes or making sure their message is clear—this is metacognitive monitoring. After speaking, they can evaluate how well they performed: Did they express their ideas clearly? Did they use appropriate language? What could be improved next time? This is known as metacognitive evaluation. Using metacognitive strategies helps learners become more independent, reflective, and effective communicators. These strategies encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and actively seek ways to improve. As a result, learners not only become better speakers but also more confident and self-aware individuals.

Metacognitive strategies for speaking are usually divided into *three stages*: planning, monitoring, and evaluating.

Planning

Effective speaking begins well before a speaker utters a single word. The planning stage is a critical part of the metacognitive process, where learners actively prepare for communication by organizing their ideas, anticipating challenges, and setting goals for their speech. This stage lays the foundation for successful, confident, and fluent speaking. In the planning phase, learners first identify the purpose of their speech: Are they trying to inform, persuade, describe, or ask? Understanding the goal helps shape the content and tone of the message. Next, learners consider the topic and organize their thoughts logically. This may involve mentally sequencing ideas, grouping similar points, or deciding on an introduction, body, and conclusion—especially for longer forms of speaking like presentations or speeches. Another key aspect of planning is language preparation. Learners can think about the vocabulary and grammar structures they will need, as well as useful phrases or expressions for introducing points, transitioning between ideas, or concluding. For example, phrases like “First of all,” “On the other hand,” or “In conclusion” can help maintain coherence and clarity. Effective planning

also involves anticipating the listener's needs. This means considering the audience's background knowledge, likely questions, or possible misunderstandings. A skilled speaker will prepare ways to explain complex terms or clarify ideas if needed. Anticipating listener reactions helps the speaker feel more in control and better equipped to handle unexpected situations. Additionally, learners may rehearse mentally or out loud, either alone or with a peer. They might make brief notes or outlines, especially when preparing for formal situations like classroom presentations, interviews, or debates. Practicing pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns also falls into this stage and can greatly enhance fluency and listener comprehension. Planning helps reduce anxiety and boost confidence. When learners know what they want to say and how they will say it, they are less likely to panic, get stuck, or lose their train of thought. This results in smoother delivery, better performance, and more positive speaking experiences. Planning is not just about thinking ahead; it is about strategically preparing the content, language, and delivery of one's speech. It transforms speaking from a spontaneous act into a well-structured, goal-oriented process.

Monitoring

Once a learner begins speaking, the role of metacognition does not stop — it continues through the process of monitoring, which is the act of consciously observing and regulating one's speaking performance in real-time. Monitoring allows the speaker to stay aware of how well they are communicating, enabling them to make immediate adjustments to improve clarity, accuracy, and fluency. During this stage, learners may ask themselves internal questions such as:

- Am I using the correct grammar?
- Is my pronunciation understandable?
- Am I speaking too quickly or too slowly?
- Do my listeners seem confused or engaged?

These questions reflect an active form of self-awareness, where the speaker is not only focusing on the content of the message but also on how it is being delivered. Unlike passive speaking, where words flow without much reflection, monitored speech is intentional and adaptive. If learners notice that they are making grammatical mistakes, they may attempt self-correction. For example, after saying “He go to school,” a learner might quickly revise it to “He goes to school.” Similarly, if they realize their pronunciation is unclear, they may slow down, articulate more carefully, or stress important words. This level of awareness helps to avoid miscommunication and keeps the conversation flowing smoothly. Monitoring also enables learners to respond flexibly to unexpected problems. If a speaker forgets a specific word, they might use paraphrasing — explaining the idea in another way or using simpler vocabulary. For instance, instead of saying “environmentally friendly,” they might say “good for nature.” This skill is particularly important in second language speaking, where vocabulary gaps or nervousness can easily disrupt communication. In conversations, monitoring also includes reading the listener’s cues — such as facial expressions, gestures, or verbal feedback — and adjusting accordingly. If a listener looks confused, the speaker might rephrase or explain their point differently. This interactional awareness enhances the effectiveness of communication and demonstrates empathy and attentiveness. Moreover, skilled speakers often monitor not just what they say, but also how they say it — paying attention to intonation, stress, rhythm, and body language. These elements add meaning beyond words and help the speaker convey emotions, emphasis, and intentions more effectively. It is important to note that monitoring is a skill that develops with practice. Beginners may find it difficult to speak and reflect at the same time. However, through repeated speaking tasks, feedback, and self-reflection, learners can become more efficient at noticing and correcting their own errors while speaking. Monitoring empowers learners to take charge of their speech in real time. It encourages flexibility, fosters self-correction, and builds communicative competence. Far from being a passive

process, effective speaking involves constant internal checking and adjustment — and this is exactly what monitoring enables.

Evaluating

Once the speaking task is completed, the evaluation stage becomes crucial in helping learners reflect on their performance and understand what went well and what areas need improvement. This step is a fundamental part of the metacognitive cycle, as it encourages self-reflection and supports learners in setting goals for continued growth in their speaking abilities. In this phase, learners engage in reflective thinking, assessing whether they achieved their communication objectives. For instance, they might ask themselves questions like:

- Did I manage to convey my ideas clearly and effectively?
- Did my listeners understand the message I intended to share?
- Were there any moments where I hesitated, stumbled, or felt lost for words?

By evaluating these aspects, learners can identify the strengths of their speaking performance, as well as the weaknesses. They might notice that certain vocabulary was used effectively, or that they successfully managed to stay on topic. On the other hand, they may recognize that certain phrases or grammar structures need more practice or that they were speaking too fast, causing misunderstandings. An important aspect of evaluating is being honest and constructive about one's performance. This self-assessment encourages a growth mindset—the idea that speaking skills can always be improved with practice, effort, and reflection. Learners should feel empowered by their successes and motivated by the areas that need work. For example, if they realize they had difficulty with pronunciation, they can make it a goal to focus on specific sounds in future speaking exercises.

There are several effective ways for learners to conduct this evaluation:

1. Language journals: Writing about their experience in a journal allows learners to articulate what went well, what could be improved, and how they felt during the speaking activity. This process reinforces their self-awareness and offers a record to track progress over time.

2. Recording and listening to speech: Another valuable strategy is recording their speaking and then listening to it afterward. This helps learners hear themselves objectively, notice areas for improvement, and recognize their progress. It also provides insight into aspects they may not have been consciously aware of while speaking, such as pacing, clarity, and use of filler words like “um” or “uh.”

3. Seeking feedback: Learners can also ask for feedback from peers, teachers, or mentors. Receiving external perspectives can offer new insights into areas that might not be apparent during self-evaluation. For example, a teacher might point out that the learner’s use of connectors (e.g., "therefore," "however") could be improved to enhance fluency, or a peer might suggest practicing certain vocabulary to sound more natural.

Additionally, evaluating non-verbal communication can be just as important as assessing verbal language. Learners might reflect on their body language, eye contact, tone of voice, and overall engagement with the listener. Were they confident and assertive? Did their gestures complement their words? These elements play a critical role in effective communication and should be considered in the evaluation process. Evaluation also involves setting specific, actionable goals for improvement. After reflecting on what went well and what could be better, learners should establish concrete steps to work on these areas in future speaking tasks. For instance, if they identified that they often hesitated or lacked fluency, they could set a goal to practice speaking more spontaneously in everyday situations, or work on specific pronunciation exercises. Ongoing evaluation helps learners see their progress over time. By consistently reflecting on their speaking performances, they can track improvements, adapt their

strategies, and celebrate their achievements. Over time, these evaluations encourage learners to become more independent, confident, and skilled speakers.

The Role of Teachers and Feedback

Teachers play a critical role in helping students develop metacognitive strategies for speaking. A teacher's ability to model these strategies and provide feedback helps learners see the value of reflective learning. For instance, by encouraging students to think about their own thinking, teachers can foster a more self-directed approach to language learning. One effective method is to provide learners with opportunities to self-assess their speaking, either through structured activities or informal discussions. By doing so, learners can become more engaged in their own progress, thus increasing their motivation. Moreover, teachers can design activities that explicitly promote metacognition, such as peer reviews, reflective journaling, or group discussions where students are asked to identify their strengths and areas for improvement.

Overcoming Speaking Anxiety

One of the most significant barriers to speaking a second language is anxiety. Many learners fear making mistakes, which can lead to avoidance of speaking tasks. Metacognitive strategies can help reduce this anxiety. By encouraging learners to focus on their own process and progress, rather than fearing judgment, they can become more relaxed in real-world conversations. Planning in advance allows students to feel more prepared, and monitoring helps them stay aware of their mistakes without feeling overwhelmed. Evaluation after speaking can help normalize mistakes as part of the learning process, allowing students to see each conversation as an opportunity for improvement rather than a potential failure. Metacognitive strategies are especially useful for learners who experience anxiety or low confidence when speaking. By breaking down the speaking process and focusing on self-regulation, these strategies can reduce stress and increase motivation. Furthermore, teachers play a critical role in

helping students develop these skills. They can introduce reflective activities, model how to plan and evaluate, and provide consistent feedback that encourages growth.

Conclusion

Metacognitive strategies are powerful tools for language learners aiming to improve their speaking abilities. Through planning, learners prepare their ideas and reduce uncertainty. By monitoring, they stay aware of their language use and adapt as needed. Evaluating allows them to reflect and learn from each speaking experience. These strategies promote independence, build confidence, and lead to more effective communication. When practiced regularly, they turn speaking into a more conscious and controlled process, helping learners become more successful and fluent speakers over time. Whether in academic, social, or professional settings, metacognitive strategies provide a clear path toward mastering the art of speaking in a second language. Additionally, the role of teachers and regular self-reflection can significantly enhance learners' ability to use these strategies effectively, leading to lasting improvements in their speaking skills.

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