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Oral skills and learner agency in the foreign language classroom: Reflections on self-regulated learning and feedback from a Nordic perspective

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Abstract

Learner agency is frequently advocated as a basic principle of contemporary language education, involving learner engagement and autonomy. This principle is supported by research in the fields of self-regulated learning (SRL) and formative assessment (FA). These two perspectives may be further linked to models of feedback in the sense that feedback is not only related to feedback on tasks, but also to learning strategies and self-regulation. Related to this, there is evidence that self-assessment (SA) and communication strategies (CSs) have potential for advancing student learning in the language learning classroom.

In the national curricula of foreign languages in the Nordic countries, the concepts of learner agency and self-regulated learning are emphasized as important for developing students' proficiency. However, in the research literature, little attention has been paid to the combined strategies of SRL and agency in relation to learners' oral skills. In this article, we discuss factors influencing the usefulness and effectiveness of feedback and how SRL and FA, more specifically SA and CSs, may promote oral skills in the foreign language classroom. Finally, we stress the need for more empirical studies, involving teachers and researchers, examining SRL strategies and learner agency in a Nordic school context.

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Keywords

Learner agency, formative assessment, self-regulated learning, student involvement, communication strategies.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of learner agency has attracted growing attention. It has been generally emphasized as important in the learning sciences (Sawyer, 2014) and is now implemented in many national curricula (e.g., Gyllander, Torkildsen & Erickson, 2016; Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2019). The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) even presents it as a prerequisite for successful language learning, stating that:

> The CEFR presents the language user/learner as "a 'social agent', acting in the social world and exerting agency in the learning process. This implies a real paradigm shift in both course planning and teaching, promoting learner engagement and autonomy. (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 28)

As the quote from the CEFR Companion Volume shows, agency can be linked to the notion of autonomy (Little & Erickson, 2015) and means that more emphasis is given to the role of the learner in education, accentuating learning rather than instruction (Rajala et al., 2016; van Lier, 2009). Such a student-focused perspective can be said to tie in with the ideas of self-regulated learning (SRL) and learning strategies, in the sense that students are to take more ownership over their learning (Griffiths, 2017; Oxford, 2017; Panadero, 2017; Panadero et al., 2018; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). It also accords with established conceptualizations of formative assessment (FA), which typically give learners a pivotal role in the learning process (Andrade & Cizek, 2010; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Broadfoot et al., 1999; Panadero et al., 2018; Wiliam, 2018). Such a view is furthermore supported by modern learning theories, which posit that individuals have a central role in constructing their learning (Penuel & Shepard, 2016). In the foreign language classroom, SRL and FA may contribute to enhancing different aspects of a learner's competence, including oral skills (Goh, 2019), which are the focus of the present article.

However, despite the growing emphasis on agency and its related notions of FA and SRL in research and language policies, there are indications that students in various contexts are not sufficiently involved in taking ownership of their learning, and that teachers and other stakeholders may benefit from gaining even better insight into the

pedagogical principles underlying learner-oriented approaches (Tengberg et al., 2022; Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2019). Moreover, the use of the combined strategies of FA and SRL in the foreign language classroom in general, and regarding oral skills in particular, is still an underexplored area of research (see e.g., Pawlak, 2021).

Oral skills are a fundamental component of language use and have even been declared to be the 'origin of language' (Council of Europe, 2020). However, they can be difficult to learn and teach. As for the construct of oral skills, it may be understood as being related to both production (e.g., sustained monologue), reception (e.g., understanding announcements) and interaction (Council of Europe, 2020), consisting of a number of different cognitively demanding skills, where the learners must decide what to say, use their linguistic resources to formulate the utterance and produce a sound message that can be understood by the listeners. This view ties in with the concept of oracy, which is understood as people´s ability to use 'spoken language' […] to communicate across a range of formal and informal settings" (Mercer et al., 2019, p. 293).

According to Mercer et al. (2019, p. 296), the framework of oracy includes physical skills (i.e. pronunciation and gestures), linguistic skills (i.e. appropriate vocabulary choice, register and grammar), cognitive skills (i.e. choice of content to convey meaning and time management) and social and emotional skills (i.e. turn-taking and listening actively). This is in line with Levelt's Speech Processing Model (1989), which describes the cognitive processes involved in the production and comprehension of spoken language. According to the model, speech is generated through interactions of cognitive processes that plan and select the content (conceptualization) and encode it by applying selected vocabulary and grammatical structures (formulation). Finally, the speaker produces the ideas audibly (articulation).

Conceptualizations of oral skills are frequently linked to theories of communicative competence, which comprise a number of skills and knowledge components necessary for communicating well in authentic situations (Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996). In Bachman and Palmer's model (1996), language competence consists of two components: i) *language knowledge* (e.g., grammatical knowledge, textual knowledge, functional knowledge, sociolinguistic knowledge) and ii) *strategic competence*, defined as a number of metacognitive strategies such as goal-setting and planning. Strategic competence also includes the ability to adapt language to different contexts and situations, as well as to use different communicative strategies. Since language learners have a limited capacity to process an utterance (Levelt, 1989), mainly

due to time constraints in an interactional context, they may find it difficult to design and formulate what to say and how to say this. Using communicative strategies (CSs) could therefore help learners to communicate in an effective way (Canale, 1983) and buy them extra processing time so that they can keep their turn in a dialogue (Hughes, 2011). In addition, CSs have also been found to be important in order to maintain the flow of an interaction (Jamshidnejad, 2011), and the use of CSs can contribute to a more fluent and engaged interaction between learners (Nakatani, 2005). In addition to the more specific communicative aspects of CSs, they also typically include a consciousness component (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). Hence, they share affinities with SRL, which is typically considered to comprise metacognitive elements (Zimmermann & Schunk, 2011). In other words, the successful use of both CSs and SRL seems to require that students are able to plan, monitor and evaluate their actions (see section 5, below).

Building on findings from FA, SLR, and communication strategy (CS) research, this paper discusses how teachers may help students become autonomous in their work to enhance strategic oral competence. A special focus will be devoted to the Scandinavian context. We argue that such an approach is well justified according to the stipulations made in the language curricula in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, and references to these curricula will therefore be made in the discussion.

2. Method

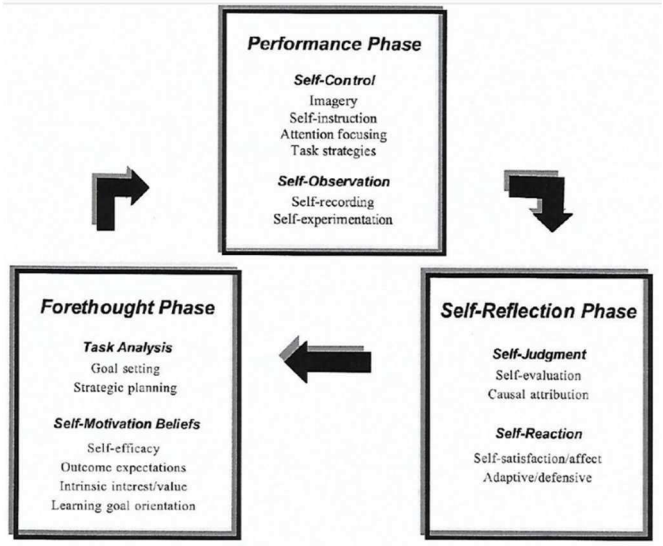
In order to investigate how teachers may assist students in developing their strategic oral competence, we carried out a literature search. As a relevant database for our research topic, we chose the university library system and Google Scholar. Keywords used in the literature search were L2 oral skills, agency, self-regulated learning, formative assessment, and learning strategies. The publications found were evaluated in terms of their quality and relevance regarding the focus of the present paper. The findings of the analyses of the publications found are provided in sections 3-5 below.

3. Agency, SRL and FA: Theoretical and empirical perspectives

Agency may be understood as “the learner’s psychological relation to the process and content of learning, [involving] a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action” (Little, 1991, p. 4). Thus seen, it can be said to relate to elements such as locus of control and self-regulation (van Lier, 2010), which directly link it to the notion of SLR.

According to Zimmermann (2000, p. 14), SRL refers to "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals," and the construct is commonly described as comprising cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational elements (Panadero et al., 2018). Moreover, models of SRL tend to divide the construct into three cyclical stages, as in the following one from Zimmermann & Moylan (2009): i) forethought phase, including task analysis and self-motivation beliefs; ii) performance phase, including self-control and self-observation; and iii) self-reflection phase, including self-judgment and self-reaction:

Figure 1. Phases and subprocesses of self-regulation (Zimmermann & Moylan 2009, p. 300)

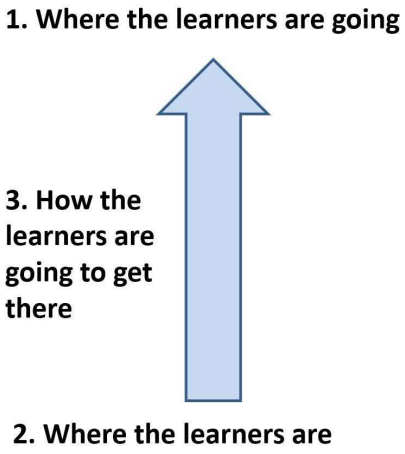


Particularly interesting here are the components of goal setting (in the forethought phase), self-recording (in the performance phase), and self-evaluation (in the self-reflection phase), as they intersect with the concept of metacognition in language education, understood as an awareness of and reflections about one's language learning and use (Haukås, 2018, pp. 14-15). In other words, an important aspect of becoming self-regulated means being consciously engaged in the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of one's own language performance and development. Notably, as we shall return to below, there is evidence that metacognitive strategy use can have an important positive impact on language learning outcomes in general (Goh, 2019) and oral skills, in particular (Cohen, 2011; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010).

The emphasis on metacognition in relation to goal setting, self-recording and self-evaluation also squares with important principles of formative assessment, at least in the way it has been described by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam. In an attempt to ground their conceptualization of

FA theoretically, Black & Wiliam (2009) draw on Ramaprasad's (1983) model of the three key processes in teaching and learning: a) establishing where the learners are in their learning, b) establishing where the learners are going and c) establishing how the learners are going to get there. The model is visualized in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Ramaprasad's (1983) three processes of teaching and learning.



The principles of FA, as developed by Black & Wiliam (2009), can be manifested in different categories, depending on whether they are initiated by the teacher, by peers, or by the learner. All three categories are important in formative assessment work. However, the learner category is the one we shall be focusing on here, as it is the one that is the most relevant for the agency perspective of the present article. The three categories have been visualized in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Categories of formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2009, p. 8)

	Where the learner is going	Where the learner is right now	How to get there
Teacher	**1** Clarifying learning intentions and criteria for success	**2** Engineering effective class-room discussions and other learning tasks that elicit evidence of student understanding	**3** Providing feedback that moves learners forward
Peer	Understanding and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success	**4** Activating students as instructional resources for one another	
Learner	Understanding learning intentions and criteria for success	**5** Activating students as the owners of their own learning	

As can be seen in Figure 3, the learner category in the model, which may simply be referred to as self-assessment (SA), emphasizes that the learners need to understand the goals to be reached, as well as what it takes to perform well in relation to those goals. The latter point, i.e., success criteria, may simply be a matter of providing the students with rating scale descriptors, or showing authentic examples of what good performance may be in relation to the goals (e.g., oral presentation skills). The SA category in Figure 3 furthermore implies that the students are to be actively engaged in the process of understanding how to reach the goals. In addition, they will have to reflect critically on what their current level of knowledge is in relation to those goals. The notion of being actively engaged involves knowledge of learning strategies and how to apply them appropriately in a given learning situation (Oxford, 2017).

Beyond Black and Wiliam´s approach to FA, Panadero and colleagues define SA as "a wide variety of mechanisms and techniques through which students describe (i.e., assess) and possibly assign, merit or worth to (i.e., evaluate) the qualities of their own learning processes and products" (2016, p. 804). This notion overlaps with the SRL principle of goal setting, self-recording, and self-evaluation (Zimmermann & Moylan, 2009), which again involves aspects of metacognitive awareness (Haukås, 2018). As Figure 3 shows, SA is just one configuration of an FA approach, but it demonstrates – together with the SRL perspective – the fundamental value of actively engaging students in their own learning processes.

Previous studies have shown positive effects of goalsetting strategies in promoting motivation, self-regulated learning, and self-efficacy (McCarthy, 2011) and that self-regulated learners develop strategies related to time management, metacognition, self-efficacy, and critical thinking (e.g., Broadbent et al., 2021). The stages in the model in Figure 1 are often used in studies on self-regulated learning. In a case study by McCarthy (2011), the stages were used in order to promote students' orals skills and thereby encourage them to develop SRL strategies, such as metacognitive reflection and more autonomous behavior. The results showed that all the students formulated learning goals on how they wanted to improve their speaking skills. Interestingly, although the students formulated similar goals, they used different strategies to reach these goals, and they focused on individual performance aspects such as pronunciation, vocabulary learning, and language anxiety. Moreover, the use of SRL methods showed positive effects on learning strategies, motivation, and self-efficacy. A prerequisite for the successful use of strategies, however, seemed to be that the formulated goals were perceived as relevant for future needs in order for the students to better control and reflect on their own learning process.

There is also substantial support for the benefits of involving learners in classroom assessment. Several studies have reported that SA strategies may be helpful for developing learner autonomy and, therefore, beneficial for learning (e.g., Andrade, 2010; Andrade & Brookhart, 2020). However, although several studies indicate positive effects of the use of SA to promote learners' oral language skills (e.g., Andrade, 2010), there are some concerns regarding the use of SA, and teachers and students are not always convinced of their usefulness (e.g., Oscarson & Apelgren, 2011; Sandvik & Sommervold, 2021). Since teacher beliefs are important when implementing tools in the classroom, this can affect the efficacy of the method. Indeed, as has also been pointed out in the literature, the implementation of SA needs time and effort to be effective (e.g., Sandvik & Sommervold 2021).

Most studies in the fields of SRL and FA in the Nordic countries have been examining feedback in written proficiency (e.g., Sandvik, 2011; Pålsson Gröndahl, 2015; Burner, 2016; Kjærgaard, 2018; Berggren, 2019; Christensen, 2021; Vold, 2021). In fact, there are fewer studies on the assessment of oral skills in a Nordic school context (e.g., Bøhn, 2016; Borger, 2018) and very few regarding formative practices in relation to oral skills. Although FA strategies and learner autonomy are viewed as important by policy documents, methods of SA are rarely used in language classrooms (Oscarson & Apelgren, 2011; Sandvik & Sommervold, 2021). As earlier mentioned, teachers are hesitant to use SA methods as they question their efficacy and usually find them time-consuming (Oscarson & Apelgren, 2011).

There are few studies on FA strategies taking the students' perspectives in a Nordic context. In a study by Kjærgaard (2018), English teaching in Danish lower secondary schools was analyzed in relation to formative feedback strategies with the support of technology, i.e., a program for feedback. The conclusion was that students were given a more active role and experienced more agency and self-regulation when having to revise their work and interact with the computer program. Similarly, Sandvik and Sommervold (2021) examined how students perceived their own involvement in FA practices of oral competencies in upper secondary schools in Norway by taking the students' perspectives. The findings revealed that understanding learning goals is central for students' learning, but also that they need assistance from the teacher in order to set learning goals for their oral competencies. In the same way, although rarely used, students reported that they were positive towards the learning potential of SA strategies, but that they wanted work in this area to be carried out in dialogue with the teacher. Finally, the study suggested that student involvement in language teaching and assessment practices of oral competence can be seen as a key factor in student motivation and positive learning outcomes.

4. Oral skills and agency in the language curricula in the Scandinavian countries

The Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) share a similar approach to language education in school, emphasizing communicative skills. According to the curricula, emphasis is put on the use of language in real-life situations for meaningful communication. Additionally, there is a focus on learner agency, referring to the ability of pupils to play an active role in their own learning process. This means that they are encouraged to set their own learning goals and reflect on their progress to achieve these goals. Furthermore, the increased focus on FA in international and national research in recent years has led to changes in policy documents regarding assessment. For example, formative assessment practices are now explicitly included in the educational documents in the Nordic countries (Vurderingsforskriften, 2020; Børne- og undervisnings-ministeriet, 2019a; Skolverket, 2021). Moreover, FA strategies can be traced to government directives and national curricula in the educational systems in the Nordic countries. In addition, the formulations in the policy documents also show that aspects of SRL constitute an underlying principle in education, although with slightly different foci in the respective national educational guidelines. In Norway, for example, the principles of FA and SRL are manifested in the regulations of the Education Act, hence making them statutory. This implies that pupils are to participate in the assessment of their own work and reflect on their own learning and professional development; understand what they are going to learn and what is expected of them; get to know what they master and get advice on how they can work further to enhance their competence (Vurderingsforskriften, 2020). As can be seen, the principles of FA involving students in their own learning process, assessing their own work, and reflecting on their own learning are important. This also involves understanding the learning goals and getting to know how to enhance their learning. In addition, in the Norwegian Curriculum in English, it is also stipulated in the 'core element' called *Communication* that "the pupils shall employ suitable strategies to communicate, both orally and in writing, in different situations and by using different types of media and sources" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020). As we mentioned above, there is an intrinsic connection between such communication strategies and FA and SRL.

Similarly, in Denmark, aspects of FA and SRL have made their way into the subject manual for languages. SA and the relation between given feedback, signs of learning, and the learning goals are all highlighted in the Danish context (Børne- og undervisningsministeriet, 2019a, pp. 18-20). Important in the Danish context is thus that the students set comprehensible, achievable, and meaningful goals for their learning and reflect on their learning process. The Danish

curriculum for languages stipulates that learners should know about relevant CSs, such as active listening, paraphrasing, and asking for clarifications (Børne- og undervisningsministeriet, 2019b), thus focusing on interactional CSs. In the same vein, learner autonomy and FA strategies are considered to be fundamental elements of language education in the Swedish educational context. Moreover, SA strategies are recommended by the Swedish National Agency of Education and are explicitly expressed in the syllabus for languages. The syllabus states that teaching should include opportunities for students to process their own oral performances and, for more proficient learners, also the performances of others (Skolverket, 2021). However, the policy documents and their guidelines in Sweden are not as elaborated regarding FA and SRL strategies as the policy documents and the guidelines in Denmark and Norway. The Swedish curriculum for languages includes specific elements of communicative strategies in the 'core section' and in the criteria. These focus on interactional strategies that involve managing the interaction with others, such as asking for clarifications, taking turns, and responding in an appropriate way. According to the curriculum, learners should be able to use different CSs in order to facilitate communication when their language skills are insufficient (Skolverket, 2021; 2022).

As is clearly stated in the policy regulations in these three Nordic countries, students are, to a large extent, defined as agents of their own learning and should develop agency and learner autonomy in order to enhance their learning process. FA, and sometimes also SRL practices, are often explicitly mentioned as useful tools in achieving learner agency in language learning, also in relation to CSs.

5. Communication strategies

As touched upon in the introduction, communication strategies (CSs) can be understood as a vital component of communicative competence and hence as important for successful language use (Canale & Swain, 1980). They are particularly relevant in oral communication and comprise a range of different means of conveying messages and negotiating meaning, such as buying oneself time to think, checking if the interlocutor has understood, or asking for help (Chan, 2021; Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Goh, 2019). CSs have traditionally been researched from two different angles: a psycholinguistic one and an interactional one (Bøhn & Myklevold, 2018). According to the psycholinguistic view, CSs are regarded as strategies language learners adopt in order to solve communication problems, such as when a learner's lack of linguistic resources prevents her from getting her message across (Bialystok, 1990; Bøhn & Myklevold, 2018; Lam,

2010). The interactional view, on the other hand, has focused on how language learners negotiate meaning in interaction (Corder, 1983; Tarone, 1980; see also Chan, 2021). Hence, both psycholinguistic and interactional CSs can be resources for meeting both cognitive and social demands in face-to-face interaction, such as the use of paraphrasing when speaking, employing clarification questions when listening, or using modified input to negotiate meaning in spoken interaction (Pica, 2002; Sato et al., 2019). Moreover, as touched upon above, conceptualizations of CS typically include an awareness component (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Nakatani, 2005), reflecting the idea that "strategy" typically denotes something employed consciously in order to achieve one or more intended goals. Thus, speakers who are aware of their own repertoire of communication strategies and how to employ them may achieve more effective communication in oral interactions. In this sense, CSs share with SRL the notion of metacognitive strategies, defined by Cohen (2011, p. 11) as "preassessment and preplanning, online planning and monitoring, and post-evaluation of language learning activities and of language use events." Beyond this, the awareness component in CS can be related to the notion of metalinguistic awareness, understood as "metacognitive knowledge about one's linguistic behaviour" (DeKeyser, 2009, p. 123; see also Jessner, 2018). Research on the use of metacognition in CS use indicates that it can improve communicative effectiveness (Kongsom, 2009; Lam, 2010; Zhang & Goh, 2006)

Beyond this, CS instruction research has shown that such instruction can contribute to enhancing the quantity and quality of CS use (Bøhn & Myklevold, 2018; Dörnyei, 1995; Lam, 2010). Also, there is evidence that it may contribute to improved learner fluency and meaning negotiation (Nakatani, 2005), better overall speaking performance (Maleki, 2007), and a positive view of the efficacy of strategy use (Bøhn & Myklevold, 2018; Dörnyei, 1995; Kongsom, 2009).

6. Suggestions for how to use CS in an SRL/SA perspective

A starting point for an agency-oriented CS instructional plan would be consistent and long-term work with awareness-raising related to the principles of FA and SRL (Bøhn & Myklevold, 2018). That is, students should, as a rule, learn to reflect on the goal(s) to be reached, consider the success criteria involved, identify their own current level of proficiency, and try to come up with strategies for reaching the goal(s) (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Wiliam, 2018). The latter point would involve metacognitive strategies (Cohen, 2011) and the principles of SRL

(Zimmermann & Moylan, 2009) and should involve reflections on what kind of strategies could work for each individual student.

As for the development of CSs, the teacher should consider starting by making the students reflect on what they could do to get their meaning across whenever they lack linguistic resources. Such a preparatory reflection phase would be an attempt to invoke the students' metacognitive awareness, alerting them to the fact that there may be ways of compensating for inadequate lexical, grammatical, or similar skills. Subsequently, in the introduction phase, the teacher could present a limited set of strategies, depending on the age and proficiency levels of the students, the type of course they were taking, their motivation, self-efficacy, etc. The choice of strategies would also depend on what kind of skills one would want the students to develop, i.e., productive, receptive, or interactive. If the focus were on productive oral skills in mainstream education, involving students at CEFR levels A2-B2, a suggestion could be to work with stalling strategies, paraphrasing, superordination, and all-purpose words. Simply put, stalling strategies are intended to buy the speaker time (e.g., "Uh…", "Well…", "Let me think…"), whereas paraphrasing involves reformulation (e.g., "It's a machine that cuts down trees" for forestry harvester). Superordination means finding a hypernym (e.g., "Bird" for sparrow), whereas all-purpose words are lexical items that have a broad range of meanings (e.g., "stuff", "thing", "device", "gadget").

After having been introduced to the strategies, the students should be given time to practice using them, for example, by working with tasks where they have to explain lexical items, including low-frequency words, to a learning partner without actually using the words (see, e.g., Bøhn & Myklevold, 2018). To our knowledge, there are no consistent findings in the research literature regarding how much time is needed in such an introductory phase, but 15-20 hours may be required (see, e.g., Rossiter, 2003). In line with the SA principle of providing success criteria (Black & Wiliam, 2009), an important point in the second phase would be to provide the learners with a rich selection of pertinent example strategies that they could practice using. As for paraphrasing, for instance, this could involve giving the students sentence starters to describe objects and phenomena ("It looks like…"; "It is bigger/smaller than…"; "It is the same size as…"; "It is made of plastic/metal/wood…"). If practiced rigorously, this might also help the students automate the use of a set of strategies (Goh, 2017).

Beyond the second practice phase, it would be relevant to also work with combinations of strategies. The teacher could then scaffold this by showing how, for instance, stalling strategies may be combined with superordination and paraphrasing in order to describe or explain objects or phenomena that they would otherwise not know the words for, e.g., "Well… let me think…

it is an animal that lives in trees in the rainforest. It has brownish fur and long claws. It is roughly the same size as a badger, and it eats leaves and buds" (description of a sloth). Working with CSs in this way may be differentiated by letting the more highly proficient students go on to look at strategies related to oral reception and interaction. Repetition of tasks would also be valuable (Goh, 2017).

An important point regarding the development of CSs from an SRL/SA perspective is that students should be given the opportunity to see the relevance of how such strategies may help them manage communication problems, create smoother interactions and develop their oral skills generally. Hence a presentation of a wide selection of strategies, and how to use them, can be useful, and it is essential that metacognitive strategies are activated so that students can reflect on their own specific learning challenges and what may work for them in order to develop better oral communication skills (Dörnyei, 1995; Kongsom, 2009), thus taking ownership over their own learning process.

7. Concluding remarks

If teachers are to support pupils in their development of oral skills in a foreign language, they need to provide them with opportunities to interact and use the language in the classroom, as well as formative strategies that will support the learning progress. As for the development of CSs in students, it should be pointed out that strategic language behaviour is a complex phenomenon involving a host of different factors which may influence such behaviour, like students' proficiency level, learning styles, attitude, anxiety, motivation and self-efficacy (Nakatani & Goh, 2007). Nevertheless, as mentioned above, there are indications that systematic work with CS use, including awareness raising, within the framework of an SRL/SA approach, may help the students become more independent in the development of their oral strategic competence.

The suggestions for the development of oral strategic competence in a FA/SRL perspective, as presented in this paper, may be structured within the framework of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) developed by the Council of Europe. The ELP allows language learners to reflect on their language learning process in a structured way, as well as to document their language proficiency. The portfolio includes a self-assessment grid and can be used as a source to develop a mutual understanding between teachers and learners. Moreover, the ELP can help learners set achievable language learning goals, document their progress and reflect on their achievements, thus using "ownership" as a source of motivation and inspiration (Schärer, 2010,

p. 331). In addition, as has been shown here, SA strategies may offer tools for language professionals that can contribute to a more effective learning process and support students' metacognitive reflections of their own learning. Carefully and thoughtfully implemented FA and SRL strategies, within an ELP framework, may contribute to students taking more responsibility also for their learning progress of oral skills and thereby promoting the progression of students' oral communication in line with the action-oriented approaches of the policy documents and the CEFR. Further, it seems important that the students learn how to formulate relevant goals for immediate and future needs and how to monitor their learning progress.

The increased focus on FA and SRL in international research and national policy documents actualizes the need for more research in this area, especially in a Nordic school context. Since other factors also affect the development of oral skills compared to written skills, for example, social and interpersonal factors, or the prevalence of oral foreign language anxiety, more research is needed in this area, especially regarding younger learners at lower levels in a Nordic school context.

More generally, in recent years, there has been a growing interest from teachers in knowing how to teach oral skills in a structured way. In order to do this, it seems important that teachers gain an understanding of the speaking construct and pay attention to cognitive and social processes that facilitate effective communication (Goh, 2017). We argue, in line with other researchers (Goh, 2017; Poehner & Inbar-Lourie, 2020), that one way for teachers to enhance their understanding of what oral skills are and how they can be promoted, is to carry out smaller inquiry projects in collaboration with researchers, where teachers can explore and implement research findings into the classroom. With an enhanced understanding of the learning process, teachers may know how to construct tasks that help language learners to develop oral skills in a foreign language.

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