

# **Communicating Grammatically: Constructing a Learner Strategies Website for Spanish**

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## **Abstract**

While second-language learners are encouraged to focus on communication, they also need to learn grammar. Given that some grammatical forms are problematic, could learners be more strategic in learning the grammar needed for effective communication? If strategy instruction is provided, it often focuses on skills other than grammar learning (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, writing, or vocabulary learning). Perhaps this is because neglected grammar cross-cuts these other skills. The problem is that various grammar forms are not just magically acquired, but rather their learning calls for conscious attention. This paper reports on the construction of a website to provide learners with strategies for enhancing their learning and performance of challenging grammatical structures. While focused on Spanish, the website uses English to convey the grammar strategy information, and is intended to serve as a template for the construction of a similar website for learners of any language. Video and audio-clip descriptions are offered from learners and nonnative teachers of Spanish about strategies for successfully learning problematic grammar forms, as well as strategies for producing them in an error-free fashion in speaking or writing. The website also includes diagrams, mental maps, charts, visual schemes and drawings used to convey strategy information. The website is both for obtaining strategies to enhance the learning of specific grammar forms, and to get ideas about strategies to facilitate the learning of grammar forms in general. The paper provides a model for constructing similar websites for other languages. The goal is to complement classroom instruction with supplementary input, aimed at what may be a crucial need for some students, namely, finding ways to deal successfully with the need to be grammatical. The paper ends with a brief report on relatively positive results of research on the use of the website by 14 undergraduate learners of Spanish.

**Key Words:** language learner strategies, grammar strategies, grammar strategies website

## Introduction

At this point in time, it is fair to say that *language learner strategies* have established themselves as having a viable and significant role in the learning and use of a second or foreign language (L2). Yet there are still those who are unclear as to just what language learner strategies actually are. It was for this reason that co-author Cohen conducted a survey to determine the use of terminology by nineteen world experts in the field of language learner strategies (Cohen, 2007). It was found that there was consensus among the experts in a number of areas and a modicum of disagreement when it came to the fine tuning of a definition for language learner strategies. For example, there was disagreement as to whether a language strategy has to have all of the following elements: a mental component, a goal, an action, a metacognitive component, and a potential that it will lead to learning. Nonetheless, there is enough of a consensus about language strategies to motivate the planning and execution of numerous studies into the effectiveness of employing strategies in order to enhance language development. Many of these studies are cited in recent reviews of the literature on listening, reading, speaking, writing, and vocabulary strategies (see Cohen & Macaro, 2007). Markedly absent from the research literature, on the other hand, are studies of grammar strategies. A chapter by Oxford and Lee (2007) notes that grammar strategies remain as yet unexplored, which is in part what prompted the effort to create a website replete with grammar strategies—the thought that the existence of such a website might, in fact, stimulate more research on grammar strategies.

A recent volume to emerge (Griffiths, 2008) was dedicated to the ground-breaking article by Rubin (1975) on what the good language learner can teach us. Rubin's article in many ways jump-started the field of language learner strategies. Chapters in the Griffith volume deal with the "good language learner" from various vantage points, including not only the skill areas such as those mentioned above, but in areas such as motivation, age, personality, gender, aptitude, beliefs, and, of course, strategies. One of the key findings from the work on strategies among good language learners is that while there will always be "natural learners," many language learners stand to benefit from explicit strategy instruction (see Rubin, Chamot, Harris, & Anderson, 2007; Chamot, 2008; Cohen, 2008). In other words, explicit strategy instruction can enhance their language ability.

The tenets of such instruction would include the following:

- raising awareness about the strategies that learners are already using,
- presenting and modeling strategies so that learners become increasingly aware of their own thinking and learning processes,
- providing multiple practice opportunities to help learners move towards autonomous use of the strategies through gradual withdrawal of teacher scaffolding, and

- getting learners to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used and efforts they make to transfer these strategies to new tasks.

It is important to note that the effectiveness of a given instance of strategy instruction for a selected group of learners will depend on:

- the specific learning context,
- the task at hand,
- the learners' background knowledge,
- the learners' goals for learning the particular language,
- the learners' style preferences, and
- the learners' language strategy repertoire.

Thus, teachers' skill at providing strategy instruction is important, but much of the success of strategy use depends on the learners themselves.

There are also teachers' guides that provide examples of activities to be used by an instructor for the purpose of strategy instruction. One such guide is intended for learners of all ages (Cohen & Weaver, 2006) and another is targeted at K-12 learners, especially English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students who need strategies both for learning language and for learning the content subjects such as math, science, and social studies (Chamot, 2009). These types of guides are meant to support teachers in their delivery of strategy instruction in the classroom.

One specific skill area in L2 learning to which strategies have been applied is that of the learning and performance of pragmatics. Two websites have been constructed with a strategic overlay in each case, so that users of the website do not just receive information on L2 pragmatics, but in addition are coached in the strategies that they could use to enhance their learning and use of this pragmatic material. The first website to be constructed was for learners of Japanese pragmatics. The website includes instructional units for five speech acts—requests, refusals, compliments, thanks, and apologies (see Cohen & Ishihara, 2005; Ishihara, 2007). The website, *Strategies for Learning Speech Acts in Japanese*, is intended to be used either be accessed independently by interested learners or as a supplement to an intermediate course in Japanese: <http://www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts/japanese/introtospeechacts/index.htm> (accessed 8.6.09). It includes unscripted audio interchanges between native speakers of Japanese. The second website is *Dancing with Words: Strategies for Learning Pragmatics in Spanish* (Sykes & Cohen, 2008). The website consists of an introductory module as well as eight additional modules: (1) Compliments, (2) Gratitude and Leave Taking, (3) Requests, (4) Apologies, (5) Invitations, (6) Service Encounters, (7) Advice, Suggestions, Disagreements, Complaints, and Reprimands, and (8) Considerations for Pragmatic Performance. It includes unscripted video interchanges between native speakers of different varieties of Spanish and utilizes

activities intended for learners at different proficiency levels and levels of language/pragmatic ability: [http://www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts/sp\\_pragmatics/home.html](http://www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts/sp_pragmatics/home.html) (accessed 8.6.09).

Thus, we see that there has been some effort to apply strategy instruction to a specific domain, namely that of pragmatics. It was the intention of the current project to apply strategies to the area of grammar. Even though in this era of communicative language teaching, there is a tendency to play down the issue of grammar and even relegate grammar learning to homework assignments, the hard fact is that learners encounter grammar forms that are problematic and may well cause them repeated difficulties, regardless of how well they are presented in textbooks, drilled in class, or exercised in homework assignments. As Oxford and Lee note in their review of grammar strategy issues, “grammar learning might or might not occur for a particular student. At heart, learning depends on the student” (Oxford & Lee, 2007, p. 119).

While much attention is focused on the teaching of grammar, it is probably fair to say that not very much attention is paid to how learners are to go about learning and performing it. While one approach to the learning of grammar has been heralded through sociocultural theory as having students work collaboratively on resolving grammar issues (see Swain, 2006), a recent study (McDonough & Sunitham, 2009) would suggest that students do not necessarily remember the grammar forms later on, even if they have a successful experience working through them. So the somewhat unfortunate reality is that grammar forms are not just magically acquired, even after collaborative work. Thus, there really seems to be a role for supporting students in the systematic use of strategies for retaining the grammatical forms that they encounter and need in order to perform in the language.

## The Design of a Grammar Strategies Website

It was with the intention of helping to enhance learners’ control of Spanish grammar that a website was designed. The goal was to provide examples of strategies that students of Spanish have found successful for them in dealing with problematic grammar. For the purposes of this website, *grammar strategies* were defined as “deliberate thoughts and actions students consciously employed for learning and getting better control over the use of grammar structures.” The website features strategies deployed successfully by learners, including strategies from nonnative teachers of Spanish—who need to learn Spanish grammar in order to teach it. So, rather than being a repository of Spanish grammar rules (which can be found elsewhere on the web), this website offers suggested strategies provided by those who have “been there and done that” successfully.<sup>1</sup>

The project commenced in August of 2007 with an initial effort involving the

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<sup>1</sup> Pinilla-Herrera made sure that the given learners of Spanish were, in fact, able to handle the grammar forms for which they provided their favorite strategies.

design of online surveys for learners and instructors as to what they considered to be problematic grammar forms in Spanish. We felt it imperative to do some “market research” to determine what, in fact, were perceived by learners and their teachers as problematic areas in Spanish grammar. Five versions of an inventory were constructed for learners so as to cover various possible problematic areas and to tap perceptions of learners at varying levels of language proficiency. Altogether, 111 students responded to one or another version of this questionnaire (see [http://www.carla.umn.edu/strategies/sp\\_grammar/students.html](http://www.carla.umn.edu/strategies/sp_grammar/students.html); accessed 8.6.09). In addition, 24 teachers responded to one of the two versions of the survey that were intended for teachers (see [http://www.carla.umn.edu/strategies/sp\\_grammar/structures.html](http://www.carla.umn.edu/strategies/sp_grammar/structures.html); accessed 8.6.09). Subsequent to the collection of this survey information, students and nonnative instructors of Spanish were invited to interview sessions that were both audio- and video-taped. Twenty-eight students and eight nonnative teachers participated. Questions were designed to probe the interviewees’ accuracy of use of the grammar form for which they used a given strategy.

While over 45 hours of audio- and video-taping were amassed, it turned out that only a limited portion of this material (e.g., 66 short video-clips) was worthy of being digitized and even a smaller portion was used in the website. The video-clips were digitized by a professional media consortium to ensure high quality. In addition to the video-clips, audio-clips were similarly identified and prepared for the website, along with graphs and other types of illustrations. As part of the interview process, the learners were encouraged to use a Cyberpad which made computerized versions of their lists and illustrations. The main purpose was to have a visual record of the mental images that learners described using as part of their strategizing. In addition, class notes were borrowed from the students in order to identify material that could be of benefit in preparing descriptions of strategies for the website. Sometimes the materials were usable as they were found. At other times it was necessary to enhance their appearance to make them more accessible to users of the website.

The content design team consisted of the co-authors of this paper with the part-time assistance of two graduate students in Hispanic Linguistics (Kristin Powell and Angela George). The web design team was composed of an undergraduate student (Chris Brandsey) and a staff member from the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota (Marlene Johnshoy). The website project also benefited from the visit of the national advisor, Rebecca Oxford (Air Academy, Montgomery, Alabama) in November of 2007. By July of 2008, the website, though still under construction, was ready for usability testing, and so eleven students taking Spanish Summer courses at the University of Minnesota participated in this process, which was conducted by Pinilla-Herrera and an undergraduate research assistant (Jonah Thompson). The resulting feedback included comments about the website credibility, organization, clarity, language, graphs and illustrations (including Cyberpad images), video-clips, audio-clips, inclusion of student

pictures, and user-friendliness. At the same time, this usability testing provided valuable suggestions for reducing the amount of text and for enhancing its presentation, making the navigation easier, reorganizing some sections, improving their appearance, and even making some very specific corrections.

One of the biggest challenges in constructing the website was determining how to organize it. With the assistance of the national advisor, Oxford, it was determined that the website would be divided into strategies specific to certain grammar forms and those of general application. But since it was decided that only high-quality strategies (i.e., of potential benefit to a large cross-section of learners) would be used on the website, we were limited in our breadth of coverage to those kinds of strategies. Consequently, we discarded much of the material gathered because it did not fit this criterion. In addition, we made no effort to elicit strategies in one or another category. And needless to say, much time was spent writing and revising the content for the website so that it would be of high interest and high readability for learners of Spanish. Hence, each entry needed to be brief, to the point, useful, and if possible entertaining or at least attractive. For this reason, the decision was made not to use clip art, but rather to use photos of the actual learners. We felt that this would have higher appeal.

The website <[http://www.carla.umn.edu/strategies/sp\\_grammar](http://www.carla.umn.edu/strategies/sp_grammar)> was launched in July of 2009. The content of the website includes an introduction that is meant to give general orientation to users of the site so that they can begin navigating it. Then each section has a brief preamble, followed by strategy descriptions, diagrams, and, in some cases, numerous examples. There was an effort to be parsimonious with the use of audio- and video-clips so that website users would not feel overloaded with them. In addition, the clips themselves were kept brief so as to maintain the flow of the website, and not to have learners getting unnecessarily bogged down. As to the rationale for using the various types of strategies, a separate section was set up with this information. A sidebar label takes website users to this rationale section. The website also includes a glossary.

## **The Organization of the Website**

The Introduction to the website gives the purpose of the website, as well as defining and exemplifying a grammar strategy. The following is the example of a grammar strategy provided in the Introduction:

“I wanted to learn whether to use *ser* or *estar* with adjectives to describe how people feel or what they are like (*feliz, emocionado, contento, alegre, optimista, satisfecho, triste, and deprimido*). The problem is that in Spanish, some of these adjectives can be used with both *ser* and *estar* and others tend to be used mostly with *estar*. So I created two lists in my mind:

LIST 1 ADJECTIVES THAT CAN BE USED WITH BOTH SER AND ESTAR	LIST 2 ADJECTIVES THAT TEND TO BE USED MOSTLY WITH ESTAR
• FELIZ	• CONTENTO
• ALEGRE	• SATISFECHO
• OPTIMISTA	• TRISTE
	• EMOCIONADO
	• DEPRIMIDO

Then, I created a mnemonic using the initials of the verbs in the second group: **CSTED**.

LIST 2 ADJECTIVES THAT TEND TO BE USED MOSTLY WITH ESTAR
C
S
T
E
D

Next, I thought of something silly:

I'M SAD BECAUSE I'M CASTED.

I have to remember that there isn't a word represented by the letter 'A'."

The Introduction to the website also has questions to promote self-awareness of current language strategy use, along with a listing of the factors that influence the choice and effectiveness of grammar strategies. Users of the website are also encouraged to take a learning style survey that can be uploaded from the website.

The Introduction also makes it clear that the website offers two means for accessing strategies (see Figure 1). The first section provides strategies for a particular grammar form and the second section entails strategies for enhancing your grammar

strategy repertoire. As indicated previously, there is also a section which provides the reason for using one strategy or another. In addition, there is a glossary.

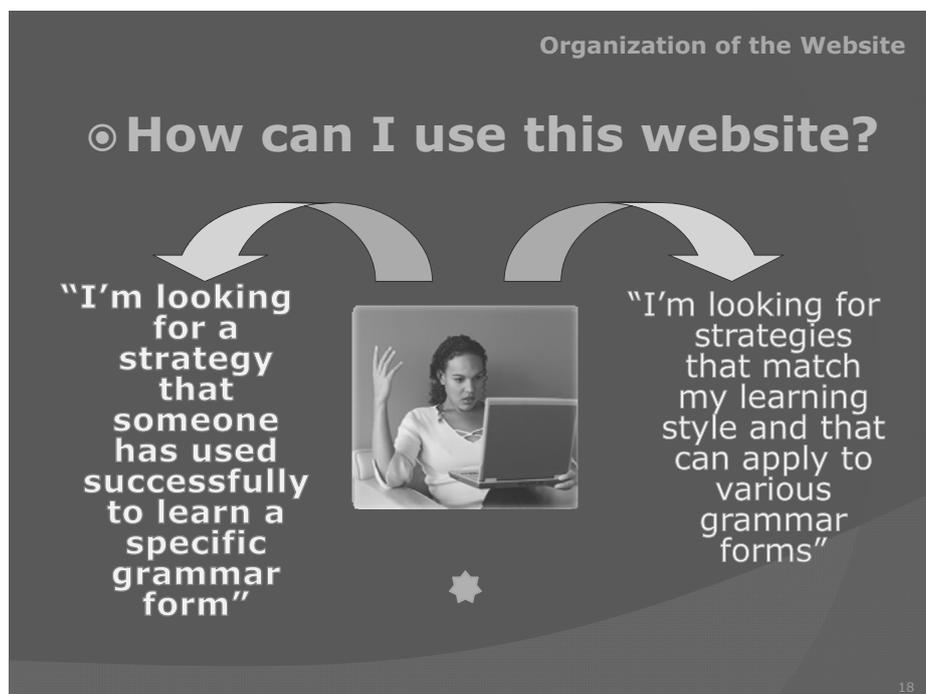


Figure 1. Two means for accessing strategies in the website.

**The First Section: Strategies for a Particular Grammar Form—“I’m looking for a strategy that someone has used successfully to learn a specific grammar form”**

Here is the listing of categories within the first section:

- Moods
  - Subjunctive
  - Imperfect subjunctive
  - Conditional
  - Conditional perfect and pluperfect subjunctive
  - Commands
- Pronouns
  - Relative pronouns
  - Simultaneous use of direct and indirect object pronouns
  - Direct and indirect object pronouns in affirmative and negative *tú* commands
  - Reflexive pronouns in present perfect constructions

- Tenses / Aspect
  - Preterite
  - Imperfect
  - Preterite vs. imperfect
- *Ser* and *estar*
- *Por* vs. *para*
- Gender / Agreement
  - Gender of nouns
  - Gender and number agreement
- Other
  - Demonstrative adjectives
  - *Lo* + adjective
  - *Hacer* and *desde* in time expressions
  - Negative words
  - Superlatives

Figure 2 (below) shows one of the strategies from this first section, focusing on specific grammar forms. It helps students remember the situations in which the verb is to be in the subjunctive mood.

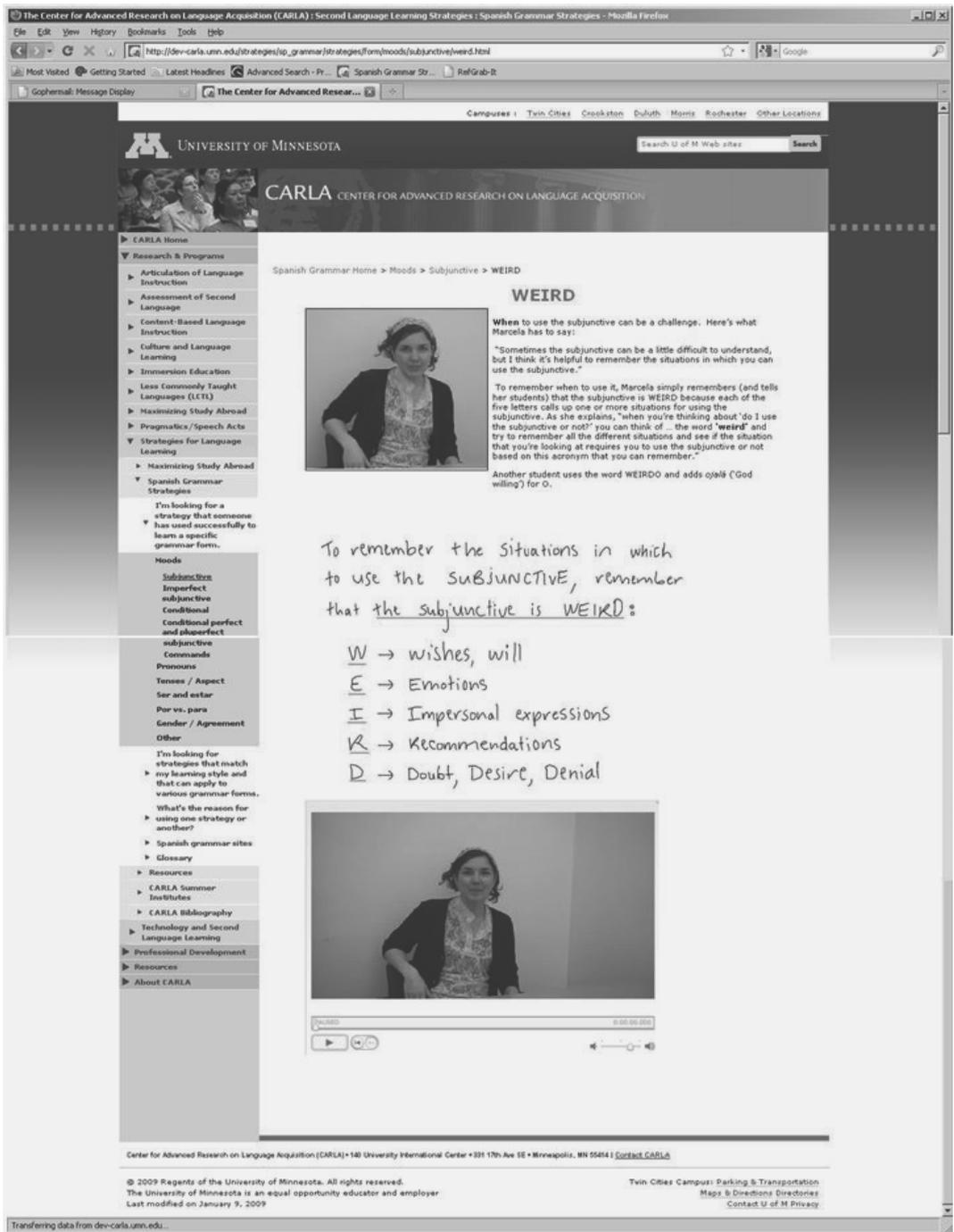


Figure 2. A strategy from “I need a strategy for a particular grammar form.”

**The Second Section: Strategies for Enhancing Your Grammar Strategy Repertoire—“I’m looking for strategies that match my learning style and that can apply to various grammar forms”**

Here is the listing for categories with this second section, “I need a strategy to enhance my grammar strategy repertoire”:

- Auditory
  - Rhymes
  - Songs and chants
  - Talking to native speakers
- Visual
  - Color coding
  - Decision maps
  - Drawings / mental images
  - Note cards
  - Playing with verbs
  - Quasi-math formulas
  - Quick grammar references
- Kinesthetic
  - Physical behaviors
  - Writing it over
- Memory aids
  - Acronyms
  - Initials as a vehicle for mnemonics
  - Phrases as memory aids
  - Phrases as vehicles for syntax
- Cognitive
  - English sentences with Spanish syntax
  - English sentences with Spanish words inserted
  - Focusing on meaning
  - Learning materials as a chunk
  - Learning grammar by explaining it
  - Using archetypal sentences
  - Using L1 to keep forms and functions straight
- Context-based
  - Making associations
  - Observing use in context
- Other
  - Avoiding avoidance
  - Combining perceptual modes

Figure 3 (below) illustrates one of the strategies from this section, the use of note card, which could be applied to the learning of numerous problematic grammar forms. In this instance the strategy entry gives students ideas about how to use note cards for studying often confused tenses.

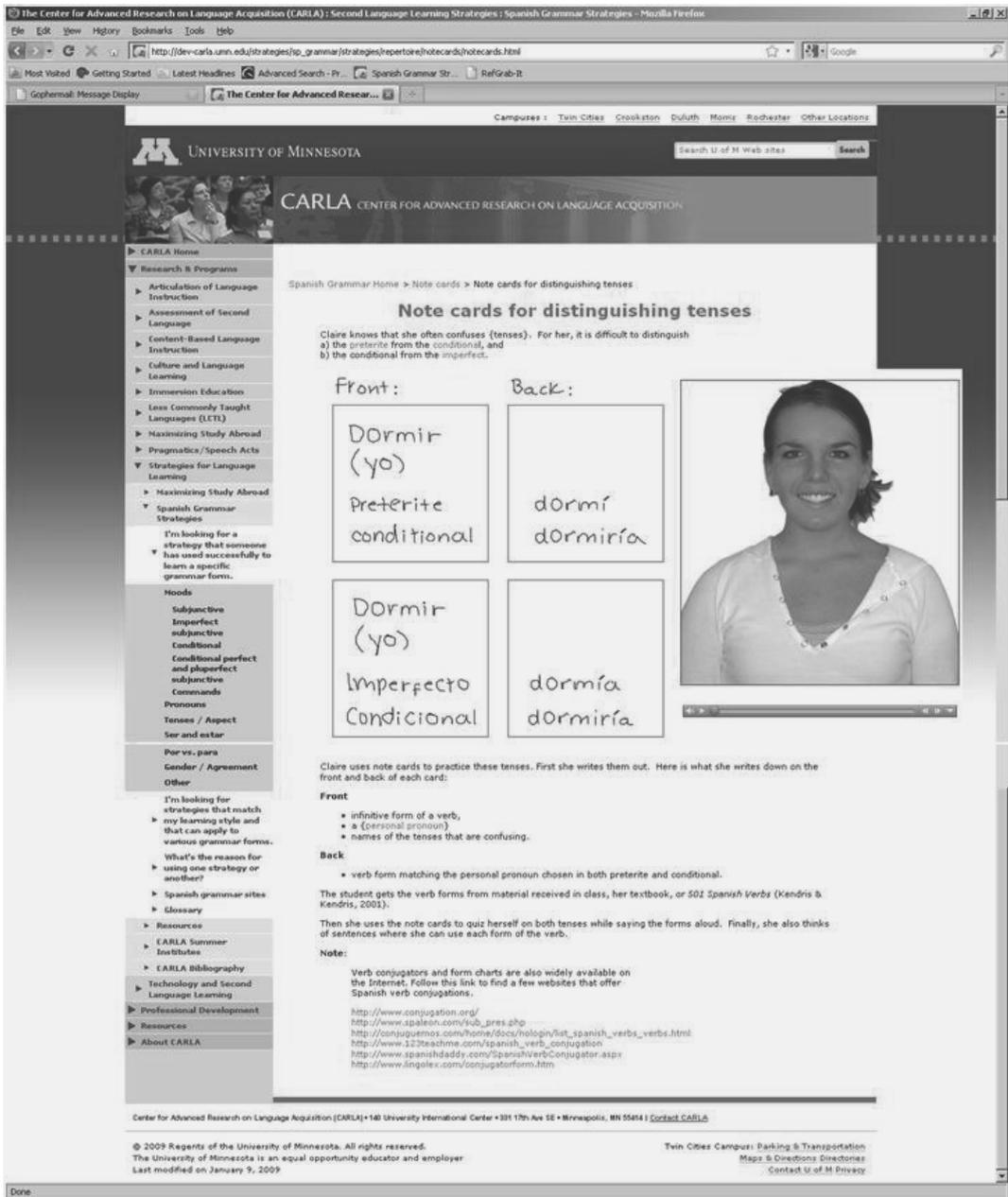


Figure 3. A strategy from “I need a strategy to enhance my grammar strategy repertoire.”

## The Effectiveness of the Website

As indicated above, in the summer of 2008 we conducted usability testing for the website with eleven student users—while the site was in an intermediate stage of development. The purpose was primarily to determine users' reactions to the features of the website, and much useful feedback was obtained for the web design team. Subsequent efforts were made to make the website more user-friendly. The following are some of the comments that learners had:

- This is a trustworthy, friendly website.
- The information is credible because it's from people who have studied Spanish.
- Good, detailed introduction.
- I liked the way you presented the strategies: (1) for a particular grammar form and (2) to enhance my grammar strategy repertoire.
- The website is pretty easy to navigate, especially if you know what you're looking for.
- The language is good. It's not too academic.
- It's personable.
- I like that students explain their own methods. They sounded smart.
- I like the pictures.
- I like the hand-drawn stuff.
- I like the notepad writing a lot. It's more personal than a website telling you how to conjugate the verbs.
- The audio and video files keep it interesting. It's better than just reading.
- These videos are interesting to watch.

With the completion of the website construction in January, 2009, evaluative research was conducted at the University of Minnesota to get a sense of how the website was actually being used and to also get a sense as to its benefit to learners. Two undergraduate research assistants (Jonah Thompson and Lance Witzig) investigated the impact of website use on 14 student learners of Spanish at varying proficiency levels. After an initial orientation session, the learners accessed the website for one to two months during Spring semester in 2009. The learners kept track of the strategies that they chose to add to their strategy repertoire through a Strategy Tracking Form that they filled out for each strategy (see the Appendix). They also participated in two interview sessions with one of the undergraduate research assistants where they reported on the specifics of their strategy use. The informants were given gift certificates at the University bookstore for their participation in the study.

While the complete set of findings for the research study on the website were prepared for presentation at the 2009 American Council for the Teaching of Foreign

Languages Convention (Cohen, Pinilla-Herrera, Witzig, & Thompson, 2009), the intention here will be to share just some of the preliminary results. Over the two interview sessions, the subjects reported on an average of seven strategies each. On the basis of the questionnaire that they completed for each strategy, it was possible to rate the value of the strategy for the given learner on a 5-point scale: 5—high value and clear utility, 4—apparent value in enhancing grammatical performance, 3—not clear whether the strategy assisted the learner, 2—suggestion that the strategy was not of assistance, 1—the strategy was clearly not working for the student. Based on this manner of analysis, four of the students (Cayla, Kate, Liz, and Megumi) reported that all but one of their selected strategies had high value for them, and were able to provide an example of one or more occasions where the strategy enhanced their performance. For three others, the majority of the strategies that they selected had apparent value for them (Missy, Monika, and Amy). With regard to the other seven learners (Andrew, Michael, Leigh Anne, Davis, Erika, Ashleigh, and Andrea), the results were mixed, with a third to a half of the grammar strategies that they selected not working so well for them and the rest working fine. What is useful about these findings is that they simply underscore the reality of learner variation in language learning in general, and in this instance, in taking advantage of a website especially designed to facilitate the learning of grammar.

Let us now take a look at some examples from the written questionnaire data. First, let us look at instances of high reported value in response to five strategies from the website:

#### 1. A rhyme to keep the **demonstrative adjectives** straight

Megumi: Even though I have been studying Spanish for so long, I still have trouble with demonstrative adjectives, specifically “this” and “that” because they are spelled so similarly . . . Recently while writing my essay, instead of going with my instinct on “this-that,” I try to remember this rhyme. Although I forget to use it sometimes, I noticed that I make less mistakes with these demonstrative adjectives and I don’t accidentally switch back and forth between “this-that” either.

Liz: This is a simple rhyme that has completely cleared up any confusion I had been having . . . When I am writing any of the demonstrative adjectives (*este, esta, ese, esa* . . .), I consciously think about this.

Andrew: I **always** confuse the demonstrative adjectives. I have looked them up a hundred times but when it comes to using them I always mess up, so that’s why I felt this would be useful . . . I can see a slight improvement in my use of the demonstrative adjectives. I don’t have to continually look them up as much . . . The other day I was working on my senior paper, and I was trying to

say “this method” and I couldn’t convince myself that “*este*” was correct, so I thought of the rhyme as a reassurance.

Melissa: Rhymes are generally easy to remember for me, and a good reference to keep handy. I would say that this strategy helped in and out of the classroom. I usually don’t use demonstrative adjectives that much, but now seeing this strategy made me feel like I should try to incorporate them more, so in class I have been thinking about them. I remember wanting to use the strategy just to enhance my overall use of demonstrative adjectives.

Erika: The rhyme was catchy. It was very brief and it was easy to remember demonstrative adjectives. This is one of the problems I encounter when I’m writing essays. I can’t determine when to use *estos* and *esos* or if *estes* even exists. It helps me with many of my writing assignments. Many words I use in my papers are *estos*, *estas*, *esos*, *ese*, etc. Now I can easily apply this fun, catchy line to help me (remember) when to use such words.

## 2. *por* vs. *para* distinction by using English equivalents for *por*

Kate: I used this strategy on my test last week for the *por* vs. *para* section. For each blank, I translated what the sentence was saying and chose the right word based on the equivalents I studied. I got my test back and got them all right!

Liz: I just took a Spanish 3015 test yesterday and had to write a paragraph on religion in *América Latina*. I used the acronym PRINT to remember “religion” used *ser*, so I was able to correctly form the sentence, “*Muchas personas en América Latina son católicas.*”

Leigh Anne: It’s a very simple method for remembering the uses of *por*, and then inferring when to use *para* based on those conclusions . . . It’s a way to remember the distinction without memorizing extensive definitions for both *por* and *para* . . . I consciously remember the definitions when I am writing.

## 3. DUWIT acronym for remembering when to use the **imperfect tense/aspect**

Leigh Anne: . . . I’ve referred to the acronym to decide which tense to use. My % correct of fill-in-the-blank conjugation questions increased after using this strategy . . . My pre-test worksheet = 50% correct [before adding this strategy], my exam = 100% correct.

## 4. Endings as band names for remembering **imperfect tense/aspect**

Liz: I haven't used this strategy in the classroom yet, but I have been able to use it in outside compositions. Suddenly, everything just makes sense. ☺

5. WEIRD acronym for remembering when to use the **subjunctive**

Liz: This strategy has helped me outside the classroom when I'm writing Spanish. Situations when I should have been using subjunctive, I often wasn't. Now that I have an easy tool to remember, I am using subjunctive more and more.

Now, so as to underscore the point that one size does not fit all, let us look at strategies #6 and 7, where high value was reported by most students, but nonetheless there was still one student who reported each of these strategies to be of little or no assistance to them:

6. A mnemonic device about actor Vin Diesel for remembering **affirmative tú commands**

*Reported to be of high value—*

Andrew: It is an acronym that I can remember fairly easily . . . I have noticed that I am less hesitant when using the affirmative *tú* commands . . . The other day I was trying to tell one of the children in my class to “do it,” but I couldn't think of the affirmative *tú* command for *hacer*, so I recalled the acronym and got *haz*.

Ashleigh: I was looking for a way to remember the irregular commands. Mnemonics are usually a good way for me to remember things, so this strategy works well for me. This strategy has helped me more inside the classroom than outside because I don't have many opportunities to use Spanish outside of class. In class, I've used it a few times when conversing with classmates. I have also used it when talking to my younger brother who is in Spanish classes in high school. When I was home over spring break my brother and I were talking, and I used the mnemonic to remember how to tell him to put my bag in my room.

Erika: It is such a bright idea that she would come up with some catchy and memorable (phrase) like this. It is easy to retain and understand. Some phrases are hard to comprehend and don't make sense but this one is amazing because I actually (understand) what they're talking about. It helped me with exams and writing essays. Some irregular *tu* commands are hard to remember because they don't sound the same as their indicative form. Commands are one of my weakest points in Spanish because there are just too many rules with the positive and negative including the agreement, *el*, *ellos*, formal and

informal. When I first saw it, I was impressed and I started saying (it) out loud over and over. I've used this in my essays because I had to write some dialogue for the characters and I used the commands for irregular *tu*.

*Reported to be of little assistance—*

Cayla: I know there are a few irregular commands so I wanted to find a strategy for them all . . . What's interesting is that I do remember this device; it sticks with me. I just choose not to use it. The way it sounds in my head does not at all relate to the irregulars: *ven di sal haz ten ve pon sé . . .*

#### 7. An acronym—PRINT + LITE, for the *ser-estar* distinction

*Reported to be of high value—*

Kate: I definitely used this strategy when I was writing my *mesa redonda* ["round table paper presentation"], especially because I had to also decide between *pretérito* and *imperfect*, so it was nice to be more certain about which (*ser* or *estar*) to use and then figure out which tense.

Melissa: I liked the easily remembered acronym of "print and lite" and I could always use some help with *ser* and *estar*. I have found this strategy to be very useful because I have been going back to it ever since I have been using the website. It has helped me both inside and outside of the classroom with my speaking and writing. I constantly refer back to it if I get confused between the two words and as long as I need to use it every now and then, it is easy for me to remember. On our last Spanish exam we were working with *ser* vs. *estar*. It was on our study guide to go over the two in our book, but I found this strategy more helpful so I added it to my study guide instead and remembered print and lite on our test. I referred back to it during the test too and it helped me to correctly determine the situations where *ser* was needed, and the situations where *estar* was needed.

I find this strategy useful for me too because in my class, SPAN 3015, we do not really have grammar books outside of our *composición* book, which is more useful for specific writing techniques, not as much specific grammar, and since ideas like *ser* vs. *estar* are easy to confuse it has been nice having this website to come to when I felt I needed a new way to look at certain concepts. Also, outside of the test, I used this strategy on almost all of my compositions in this class. If I ever second guessed myself, or thought something sounded funny, I would look at the strategy and compare it to my writing to see if it makes sense, which has been useful for me to correct my papers and improve them through drafts.

*Reported to be of little assistance—*

Michael: I thought it could be useful, but realized that I have trouble remembering what the letters stand for . . . I'll remember what the acronym is but not what each letter represents.

The data from these learners would suggest that the website has a real potential to support learners worldwide in their efforts to perform their grammatical knowledge. As reflected in these students' accounts of strategy use, learners may be aware of grammatical problems but not derive a dependable way to deal with them when left to their own devices. Having strategies readily available through a website such as this one can help to remediate some of these problem areas, though it depends largely on the learner as to what will work for whom and when, as the reported strategy experiences of Cayla and Michael would suggest.

## **Conclusions**

First and foremost, this project has served the function of illustrating in numerous ways just what form language learner strategies might take. There are more than 70 examples of strategies on the website. This gives learners a large assortment to choose from, and especially in the second section where learners are to use the strategies with grammar forms of their choosing. Secondly, the website showcases one way to bring technology into the learning of a second or foreign language. Thirdly, since the strategies on the website were generated by learners themselves and not by experts, it demonstrates how we can make the learners' voice more conspicuous in the language learning process. Finally, we would also like to think that having learners access a website such as this one may encourage them to take more responsibility for their own learning.

We enthusiastically welcome the replication of this website. It was the intention from the start of this project that the website serve as a model for other strategy websites, whatever the language involved and whatever the skill area. We would extend an invitation to colleagues to develop similar sites for strategies in the main skill areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It would also be beneficial to have a strategies website devoted to vocabulary. In all cases, we would recommend that the strategies be collected from learners themselves, whether they are students or teachers of the language. It may, for example, be useful to have a website such as this one focusing on strategies that Taiwanese students have for learning English grammar. While some of the strategies would be similar to those used by learners of English elsewhere in the world, there are likely to be some that are particular to the given language community, especially with regard to mnemonics and other forms of association.

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## Appendix Strategy Tracking Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

STRATEGY NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
(e.g., A song)

BRIEF DESCRIPTION/LOCATION: \_\_\_\_\_  
(e.g. Song to the tune of "Row, row your boat" / Song in the Affirmative *tú* commands section)

I visited this strategy because I was looking for...

- strategies that someone has used successfully to learn a specific grammar form.
- strategies that match my learning style and that can apply to various grammar forms.

1. Check the elements in the description you accessed.

- Written material       Audio       Video

2. How useful is this strategy?

- Extremely useful       Useful       Not sure       Not useful at all

3. Have you added this strategy to your repertoire?       Yes       No

4. What is the appeal of this strategy for you? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. What has been its effectiveness in the classroom?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. What has been its effectiveness outside the classroom?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Are there any instances where this strategy has played a role in your language performance (i.e., a test, a conversation, etc.) If so, please explain in detail.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(Additional space for your answers is provided on the back)