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# Unveiling students test strategizing through the lens of Monitor Theory: Teaching insights

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the integration of Monitor Theory into the design and implementation of Test-Taking Strategy (TTS) instruction tasks. It critically analyzes the landscape of language test-taking strategies, addressing key issues such as the advisability of explicit teaching, methods for identification, and the impact of less beneficial strategies. Advocating for the teaching of test-taking strategies, the paper recommends the Monitor Theory as an optimal model for pedagogical integration. The exploration aims to provide valuable insights for refining language assessment practices, ensuring alignment with the principles of language acquisition. The content-independent nature of these strategies maintains test validity, offering students opportunities for more comprehensible input and enhancing critical thinking. It proposes a model that emphasizes natural language use, acquisition through natural inference, and feedback mechanisms to enhance language learning and test performance. Practical strategies such as interactive test reviews, critical thinking tasks, and real-world applications are suggested to optimize TTS instruction. By linking test-taking strategies with the acquisition-learning hypothesis, this paper offers a comprehensive approach to optimizing language assessment practices and promoting holistic language development. The discussion underscores the importance of authentic learning experiences, learner autonomy, and comprehensive coaching interventions in fostering genuine understanding and proficiency in language assessment contexts.

**Keywords:** test-taking strategies; Monitor Theory; strategies teaching; assessment practices; pedagogical challenges

## 1. Introduction

Language assessment holds a pivotal role in evaluating learners' proficiency and shaping instructional practices within the dynamic landscape of education. In this context, a profound understanding of language test-taking strategies becomes imperative for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers alike. This research aims to illuminate the multifaceted domain of language test-taking strategies through the lens of Monitor Theory, addressing contentious issues surrounding their integration into pedagogy and the ongoing debate regarding the advisability of explicitly teaching these strategies.

Drawing from the Monitor Theory, which posits the existence of a language acquisition device (LAD) and a monitor that oversees language production, this study seeks to explore how learners utilize conscious strategies to self-correct and regulate their language output during assessment tasks. By examining the role of the monitor in language test-taking contexts, the research aims to shed light on the cognitive processes involved in strategy employment and its impact on test performance.

## **1.1. Importance of the research**

The significance of comprehending these strategies and associated issues arises from the pivotal role of tests in two crucial aspects. Firstly, tests serve as evaluative tools measuring students' overall achievement in attaining instructional goals, thereby emphasizing construct validity (Harris, 1969). Construct validity ensures that a test effectively measures what it is intended to measure. Any compromise in construct validity, possibly influenced by test-taking strategies, can result in outcomes that are challenging to interpret. Secondly, and equally significant, tests serve as indispensable teaching tools, offering students additional opportunities for learning and growth beyond mere evaluation.

### **1.1.1. The research gap**

While the literature acknowledges the influence of test-taking strategies on language assessment outcomes, there exists a notable gap in understanding the nuances of how these strategies are developed, implemented, and assessed within educational contexts from the perspective of Monitor Theory. Existing research primarily focuses on identifying the presence and impact of these strategies on test performance, yet there is limited exploration into the cognitive mechanisms underlying their use and the role of the monitor in strategy deployment. Addressing these gaps is crucial for informing evidence-based pedagogical practices and enhancing the validity and reliability of language assessments.

### **1.1.2. The research aims**

Guided by Monitor Theory, this research aims to:

- 1) Explore the pedagogical approaches: Investigate how educators can leverage Monitor Theory to design and implement instructional strategies that facilitate learners' effective use of the monitor in language test-taking contexts.
- 2) Examine strategy effectiveness: Analyze the effectiveness of Monitor Theory-based strategies in improving language learners' test performance across various language skills and proficiency levels.
- 3) Assess strategy implementation: Investigate the challenges and facilitators of implementing Monitor Theory-informed strategies in diverse educational settings, considering teachers' perceptions and practices.
- 4) Develop assessment methodologies: Propose innovative methodologies for assessing the efficacy of Monitor Theory-based strategy instruction interventions in language assessment contexts.
- 5) Inform evidence-based practices: Synthesize findings to inform evidence-based practices for integrating Monitor Theory principles into language teaching and assessment, thereby enhancing the validity, reliability, and fairness of language assessments.

By integrating Monitor Theory into the investigation of language test-taking strategies, this research aims to advance scholarly understanding and pedagogical practices in language assessment, ultimately contributing to more effective language learning outcomes.

## **1.2. Test-taking strategies in the Saudi context**

As a seasoned researcher exploring the dynamics of language assessment practices, my experience spanning over a decade has led me to critically examine the efficacy of utilizing test-taking strategies in achievement tests in gauging students' true language proficiency. Despite witnessing equally competent students actively participating in the classroom and demonstrating a strong command of the target language, I have observed significant disparities in their test scores. This incongruity raises questions about the accuracy of conventional achievement tests in reflecting students' actual language proficiency.

In delving into the nature of test-taking strategies within the Saudi context, a crucial debate emerges regarding their conscious or subconscious nature. Notably, researchers such as Addamegh (2003), Al Fraidan and AlSalman (2023), and Al Fraidan and Al Khalaf (2012) have documented instances where some students in the Saudi context automatically process vocabulary items, while others strategically employ specific approaches. The broader understanding is that successful second language learners are adept at utilizing reading strategies to enhance text comprehension, in contrast to less successful readers who lack awareness of effective reading comprehension strategies.

Given this context, it becomes imperative to raise the question of how can we integrate explicit instruction on test-taking strategies in language education. Scholars like Scruggs and Mastropieri (1992) argue that teaching these strategies not only familiarizes students with test formats and conventions but also cultivates a sense of comfort during examinations. Furthermore, they contend that incorporating test-taking strategies enhances the validity of assessments, ensuring that test scores more accurately reflect learners' actual knowledge.

In the context of Saudi Arabia, the landscape of academic research and education has seen a continuous evolution. However, it is notable that there has been a conspicuous absence of explicit calls for test-taking strategies coaching in the Saudi educational framework. Despite the growing emphasis on standardized testing and the consequential impact on students' academic trajectories, the discourse on tailored coaching strategies for effective test-taking remains largely unexplored. This research paper aims to fill this critical gap by shedding light on the necessity and potential benefits of introducing targeted test-taking strategies and instruction in the Saudi educational context. The absence of prior calls for such interventions underscores the novelty and significance of this research, as it seeks to address an uncharted domain and contribute valuable insights to the enhancement of academic performance and educational practices in Saudi Arabia.

## **1.3. Test-taking strategies and language learning theories**

The ambiguity surrounding test results, as discussed earlier, raises fundamental questions about the meaningfulness of test messages, particularly in relation to language proficiency. The inquiry into whether test-taking strategies are integral to language proficiency is essential for understanding the validity of test results influenced by these strategies. Language skills and abilities, inseparable and intertwined, interact simultaneously, making it challenging to isolate test-taking

strategies from the broader language context.

One pivotal question arises: are language test-taking strategies a manifestation of linguistic knowledge? If so, they could be perceived as a “mind module,” akin to metacognitive knowledge, influencing cognitive strategies in second language learning. This perspective aligns with the idea that modules contribute inputs to central processes without performing central processes, as suggested by Gerrans (2002). Alternatively, these strategies might be viewed as part of our innate language biological faculty, echoing Chomsky’s universal grammar (UG) concept. Like children, students develop their strategies as part of the language acquisition process, indicating a parallel evolution of language and strategy proficiency.

The practical application of various forms of classroom language tests serves to augment students’ linguistic input, prompting the utilization of test-taking strategies. This aligns with the concept of “test input,” which, based on theoretical foundations, can be a basis for designing language test-taking strategies tasks as manifestations of UG principles or parameters. Teaching strategies grounded in first language acquisition aid in solving challenges encountered during second language learning.

This perspective converges with Stephen Krashen’s Monitor Theory, emphasizing the importance of comprehensible input in language acquisition. Krashen introduces the concept of ‘I’ (current proficiency level) and ‘I’ + 1 (level immediately beyond current proficiency) to underscore the value of input slightly exceeding the learner’s current level. Language classroom tests, designed to teach new-but-slightly-beyond-current-level linguistic features, serve as markers with pedagogical implications for current input and future potentials.

Tests play a crucial role in instruction, offering teachers a tool to interact with second language learning processes. Constructing questions that engage learners with the language theories behind the curriculum allows teachers to guide learners toward operationalizing their language skills. Teachers can predict and test learners with small quizzes based on covered and assumed-to-be-next linguistic points, encouraging the development of personal strategies reflective of learner proficiency.

In line with Krashen’s theory, teachers should introduce students to salient characteristics found in various second language tests and foster high-level thinking interactions. Learners, in turn, must apply reasoning as critical thinkers, utilizing test data as higher-level input to approach increased language proficiency. Successful test strategies thus become indicators of students’ success in acquiring required input, while unsuccessful strategies highlight areas where additional input is needed—essentially serving as markers of learners’ input levels. This nuanced understanding emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between language learning theories, test-taking strategies, and instructional practices.

#### **1.4. Types of test-taking strategies**

Cohen’s classification of test-taking strategies provides a nuanced understanding of the cognitive processes involved in responding to language test questions. The three types identified, namely test learner strategies, test-management strategies, and test-wiseness strategies, shed light on the multifaceted nature of test-taking behaviors. However, Cohen refines this classification by suggesting that test learner strategies are

essentially language learner strategies, leaving us with two main categories: test-management strategies and test-wiseness strategies.

1) Test-management strategies

These strategies involve the ability to respond appropriately to test questions, encompassing logistical aspects such as time management and decision-making regarding answer placement. An example of this is distributing time effectively for each question to ensure all questions are addressed within the allotted time.

2) Test-wiseness strategies

Test-takers may navigate around the test rather than through it, resulting in discrepancies between those adept at maximizing scores by exploiting test format characteristics or weaknesses in specific items and those relying solely on their knowledge to complete tasks (Brow et al., 1984). Cohen (1998b, 2006) and Cohen and Upton (2006, 2007) highlight instances where learners engage in surface matching between words in the stem and alternatives in multiple-choice reading comprehension tests, bypassing the stem's meaning, which the task aims to assess. Test-wiseness, often viewed as a biasing factor in measuring L2 learners' achievement (Al-Tarouti, 2002), involves processes exploiting flaws and cues in test items or formats and incorporating irrelevant information into the test construct. Recognizing and identifying these strategies is crucial for evaluating test validity.

The term test-wiseness has been broadly defined by some researchers (Thorndike, 1951; Amer, 1993; Al-Tarouti, 2002; Retorta, 1997), encompassing every strategy used in a test task as a test-wiseness strategy. While this broad usage contradicts earlier definitions, it aligns with Millman et al. (1965) taxonomy and Sarnacki's (1979) analysis, which subsumes test-taking strategies (TTS) under test-wiseness. Cohen (1998a, 2006) makes a clear distinction between TTS and test-wiseness, categorizing them as three largely distinct sets of strategies: language learner strategies, test management strategies, and test-wiseness strategies. We argue that these three sets collectively form TTS.

A learner employing strategies to reach an answer without knowledge of the construct being tested is considered a wise test-taker while using strategies based on knowledge of the targeted construct is termed a legitimate strategy. Examples of test-wiseness strategies include selecting an answer based on its sequence in multiple-choice tests or surface matching between the stem and text in reading comprehension tests. Recognizing these strategies becomes challenging when test constructs are not clearly defined. Test-wiseness has been criticized for introducing invalidity and unreliability into test scores, yet the distinction can be made in favor of test-wiseness if these strategies are employed as sub-strategies alongside other main strategies relevant to the construct being tested. Cohen (2009) notes concerns about the susceptibility of standardized tests, such as the TOEFL, to test-wiseness, with some researchers suggesting that half of the items in the TOEFL test may be affected. While test-wiseness is often associated with harming assessment validity, a subtle distinction can be made when these strategies are used in conjunction with other main strategies relevant to the construct.

Recently, a novel category has emerged in the realm of test-taking strategies—test-unwiseness (Al Fraidan, 2014). This concept refers to a set of tactics employed by students, often those with high proficiency, leading them to lose deserved marks.

Examples include changing a correct answer to the wrong one, selecting unknown answers without processing for meaning, neglecting test instructions, incomplete question reading, and poor time management. Al Fraidan and Al Salman (2023) highlight the significance of assessment literacy for teachers and strategic competence for students, emphasizing the impact on test validity. The paper suggests that ongoing research is essential to uncover additional test-unwiseness strategies across various test formats and language skills, aiming to comprehend and address these strategies effectively.

### 3) Cognitive and metacognitive strategies

In TTS research, a contentious distinction revolves around cognitive and metacognitive strategies. While this study refrains from rigidly classifying into these two domains, shedding light on this topic is essential, given our anticipation of the inclusion of both types in our taxonomy. Cognitive strategies, involving mental processes, and metacognitive strategies, encompassing central control and evaluation of these processes, are fundamental features. For instance, retrieval strategies necessitate learners to exert mental effort to recall language features, with the learner unconsciously evaluating the strategy's effectiveness.

Metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating used strategies. An alternate view in L2 testing and strategy research suggests cognitive strategies as the executive function for metacognitive strategies. However, our perspective aligns with the notion that metacognitive strategies manage strategies, while all others are cognitive. This definition resonates with our conceptualization: cognitive strategies aim to facilitate problem-solving, while metacognitive strategies aim to manage and evaluate strategies.

Metacognition involves “thinking about thinking,” considering the appropriacy of strategy use as metacognitive. Purpura's (1997) detailed exploration, employing a structural equation model on data from a questionnaire among Thai students, established a link. While subsequent studies have expanded on Purpura's work, our focus remains on avoiding the rigid classification of strategies. Nevertheless, Phakiti's (2003b) study, investigating cognitive and metacognitive strategy use in an ESL reading achievement test, provides insights into strategy correlation. The study discovered a positive correlation ( $=0.76$ ) between the use of the two types of strategies. However, the conclusion that a cognitive strategy can be metacognitive contradicts earlier definitions. Criticisms include the reliance on questionnaires in strategies research, considered less accurate than verbal protocols.

Beyond cognitive and metacognitive strategies, diverse classifications exist in L2 strategy research. Cohen (2008) suggests classifying strategies by skill area—receptive (reading and listening), productive (speaking, communication, writing), and skill-related (vocabulary, translation, grammar). Communication strategies, primarily used to solve problems while speaking, may also be relevant. A problem-solving continuum ranges from avoiding a problem to seeking help from a teacher, peer, dictionary, or oneself. Self-appeal involves circumlocution, approximation, coinage, or transfer from L1. These strategies are expected in a vocabulary test, particularly those involving meaning-form pairing. Reading strategies, especially those involving cloze tests, are most relevant to our test tasks.

Within the diverse realm of language learning strategies, a distinctive prominence

is accorded to metacognitive approaches, recognized for their pivotal role in nurturing learners' skills (Anderson, 1991). Echoing this sentiment, O'Malley et al. (1985) emphasize the indispensable nature of metacognitive strategies, contending that learners devoid of these cognitive tools navigate without a clear direction, impeding their ability to monitor progress and accomplishments, and chart future learning trajectories. Building on this foundation, Hauck (2005) underscores the transformative potential of well-developed metacognitive awareness, asserting that such learners are more inclined to evolve into autonomous language learners. In tandem, Chamot (2005) and Chamot et al. (1999) draw attention to the deficiency in metacognitive knowledge among less successful language learners, hindering their capacity to select appropriate strategies. Expanding the discourse, Goh (2002, 2008) and Goh and Yusnita (2006) articulate the intricate connection between learners' metacognitive awareness and effective learning, stressing its relevance across diverse contexts. This interplay between metacognition and language acquisition aligns with Krashen's Monitor theory, which posits the role of conscious monitoring in language development. The argument gains specificity as Goh and Yusnita (2006) pinpoint the domain of L2 listening, highlighting the direct and positive influence of metacognitive strategies on listening performance. Yang (2009) further enriches this perspective by discerning successful listeners from unsuccessful ones based on their adept use of metacognitive strategies, advocating for the integration of metacognition into L2 listening pedagogy. In light of these insights, COŞKUN (2010) and Luo (2005) advocate for increased discussion to heighten learners' metacognitive awareness, creating a bridge to Krashen's Monitor theory and its implications for language learning.

Cognitive and metacognitive strategies are integral components of the Monitor Theory, the widely known concept developed by Stephen Krashen. In the context of language learning, cognitive strategies involve the actual processes learners use to understand and remember information, while metacognitive strategies involve higher-order thinking and awareness of one's learning processes. In the Monitor Theory, Krashen proposes that the Monitor, a learned language editor, oversees language production using conscious, learned rules. Both cognitive and metacognitive strategies play a role in language acquisition, as learners apply these strategies to understand and use the language, aligning with the principles of the Monitor Theory.

### **1.5. Teaching of test taking strategies**

It has been long seen that teaching test-taking skills is a legitimate way to test preparations (Crocker, 2005; Millman and Pauk, 1969; Xie, 2013). Amer (1993) identified a positive correlation between test-takers performance on tests and their proficiency in test-taking skills, suggesting the need for increased emphasis on test-taking training. Hu et al. (2021) found that repeated TTS instruction leads to better test scores. While some may think that TTS training is needed for students with low English proficiency levels or less skilled, Crocker (2005) asserts that TTS training extends beyond low-level students and encompasses those at higher proficiency levels as well. Bond (2008) posits a crucial distinction between coaching test-wiseness strategies that may inadvertently contribute to the production of invalid test results and the more nuanced approach of test-taking strategies coaching, which is designed to

foster genuine understanding. This assertion underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of the impact that coaching interventions can have on test outcomes. By highlighting this difference, Bond emphasizes the importance of adopting coaching methodologies that go beyond mere test-wiseness and instead focus on cultivating a deeper, more authentic comprehension of the subject matter. This insight becomes particularly relevant in the exploration of effective educational practices, shedding light on the potential pitfalls associated with test-wiseness coaching and advocating for a more holistic and meaningful approach to enhancing students' test-taking abilities.

The exploration of TTS teaching as a manifestation of washback, the impact of tests on teaching, has been a subject of interest among researchers. Washback refers to the influence that tests can have on instructional practices and learning behaviors. Notably, scholars like Alderson and Wall (1993) as well as Prodromou (1995) have delved into the examination of how TTS teaching methodologies may be influenced by the tests used to assess language proficiency.

In the realm of washback studies related to TTS teaching, there has been a prevalent methodological approach. Researchers often conduct studies comparing two groups to assess the impact of TTS test preparations (e.g., Elder and O'Loughlin, 2003; Green, 2007). Certain studies (for instance, Gan (2009), and Green (2007)) have assessed the overall impact of strategy use without delving into the specific effects of subcategories within strategies. The challenge arises from the fact that the outcomes of distinct strategy uses can vary, having either positive or negative effects. Consequently, when these effects are combined, the aggregate result may give a misleading impression, potentially minimizing or exaggerating the overall impact. However, despite these efforts, the findings in the field have been inconclusive (Xie, 2013). This lack of consensus and the apparent contradiction in views regarding the impact of TTS teaching on language learning remain areas that are yet to be thoroughly investigated.

The contradiction in views could stem from various factors, such as differences in study design, participant characteristics, or variations in the TTS teaching methods employed. Additionally, the complex interplay between teaching, testing, and learning may contribute to the nuanced and varied outcomes observed in different studies.

The under investigation of this contradiction highlights a gap in the current understanding of the washback effect specifically within the context of TTS teaching. Further research is needed to explore the intricacies of how TTS assessments shape instructional practices and impact the learning process. Such investigations could contribute valuable insights to language education by shedding light on the relationship between testing methodologies, teaching approaches, and the overall language learning experience in the context of TTS instruction.

Rather than dismissing the existence of test-taking strategies in instruction, it is crucial for educators to acknowledge their presence and incorporate them into instructional practices. Understanding these strategies as a two-edged tool, capable of both positive and negative outcomes, emphasizes the need for teachers to guide students in using them ethically. Teachers should refrain from encouraging students to employ these strategies merely to compensate for language deficiencies or navigate challenging test items. Instead, these strategies should be presented as supportive tools



that contribute to achieving deserved results, fostering a balanced and ethical approach to their utilization.

The content-independent nature of TTS is very useful because, first of all, it preserves the validity and reliability of the test results since the same content is not revealed and since all the students will have the opportunity to deal with the kind of questions they are going to face in the test. Moreover, teaching test-taking strategies will enable students to get more comprehensible input about tests they are going to face and, importantly, more reasons to exercise ‘thinking’, which has been discussed above, to be very useful for adding opportunities for more learning and better acquisition of the second language on the basis of Krashen’s Monitor Theory.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research design**

This study employs a retrospective approach, integrating insights from existing literature and the researcher’s professional experience in language education and assessment. By synthesizing these sources, the study aims to develop practical suggestions and models for educators grounded in Monitor Theory principles.

### **2.2. Data collection**

Data collection involved conducting a comprehensive review of scholarly articles, books, and reports pertinent to Monitor Theory, language assessment, and test-taking strategies. Additionally, the researcher critically examined their own professional experience and observations in language education and assessment, considering real-world insights alongside academic literature.

### **2.3. Data analysis**

Thematic analysis was employed to systematically identify recurring themes, theoretical insights, and practical implications from the literature review. Through this process, key concepts and findings were synthesized to inform the development of practical suggestions for educators. The researcher’s own experiences and observations were also analyzed and integrated with the literature findings to enrich the analysis.

#### **2.3.1. Development of practical suggestions**

Based on the thematic analysis of literature and synthesis of researcher experience, a set of practical suggestions for educators was formulated. These suggestions aim to provide actionable strategies grounded in Monitor Theory principles to enhance language learners’ test-taking skills and overall language proficiency. Suggestions were developed iteratively, considering the relevance, feasibility, and effectiveness of proposed strategies.

#### **2.3.2. Review and validation**

The developed practical suggestions underwent review and validation by experts in the field of language education and assessment. Feedback from peer reviewers was sought and incorporated to ensure the relevance, clarity, and effectiveness of the recommendations. The review process involved assessing the practicality and

applicability of the suggestions in diverse educational contexts.

#### **2.4. Limitations of methodology**

While efforts were made to comprehensively review relevant literature and draw upon extensive professional experience, the study is subject to certain limitations. These include potential biases in the selection and interpretation of literature, as well as the retrospective nature of the analysis. The generalizability of findings may be influenced by the scope and depth of the literature review and researcher experience. Additionally, the practical suggestions developed may require adaptation to suit specific educational.

### **3. Applying Monitor Theory to teach test-taking strategies**

When approaching any form of second language testing, second language learners already possess some knowledge of the language at hand. They require triggering data in the test's input to stimulate further thinking, leading to increased language acquisition. This suggests that the key clues taught in preceding instructional lessons and exemplified in subsequent tests serve as the catalysts for more comprehensible input.

To substantiate the idea that teaching test-taking strategies is superior, the acquisition-learning hypothesis, a related hypothesis of the theory, is selected. This hypothesis argues that second language learners naturally acquire language better when they gain knowledge in a natural way—such as inferring and critically thinking through interactions. By introducing test-taking strategies in a natural manner, learners can notice and later apply these strategies. Subsequently, learning can be employed to enhance acquisition.

Alharbi (2024) claims that there is little empirical research on this hypothesis. The findings of her studies showed that student-centered learning can offer meaningful developments in students' academic performance.

For instance, students can be tasked with inferring salient aspects in test formats that lead to improved answers. They are then prompted to articulate clear statements about these inferences, demonstrating a genuine understanding and learning of these strategies.

The following is a suggested framework for educators and instructors to implement Monitor Theory in the context of TTS.

#### 1) Understanding Monitor Theory in the context of second language learning

Monitor Theory, proposed by Stephen Krashen, consists of several hypotheses, one of which is the acquisition-learning hypothesis. This hypothesis posits that language acquisition (gaining language naturally through exposure and interaction) is more effective than language learning (explicit instruction and rule-based learning) (Schutz, 2019).

The theory underscores the integration of various language skills in authentic contexts, mirroring real-life language use (Bailey and Fahad, 2021). This insight is invaluable for designing test-taking strategies that align with the holistic development of language skills knowledge of Monitor Theory enables educators to tailor test-taking strategies that resonate with how learners naturally acquire language as well as for the

highly proficient ones. Integrating these strategies in language assessments ensures alignment with the underlying principles of language acquisition.

Teaching test-taking strategies within the framework of Monitor Theory aims not only to prepare learners for assessments but also to enhance their overall language proficiency. It acknowledges the interconnectedness of language skills and their application in real-world scenarios. Monitor Theory emphasizes the role of the monitor, the conscious editor, as a self-check mechanism (Hunkler, 2016). Teaching test-taking strategies based on this theory empowers learners to become autonomous language users who can self-regulate and evaluate their language output. Recognizing the importance of comprehensible input, educators can design test-taking strategies that ensure learners receive input that is slightly beyond their current proficiency level. This aligns with Krashen’s notion of pushing learners gently into the zone of proximal development, fostering long-term language development.

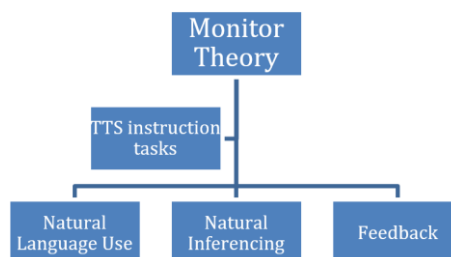
## 2) Linking test-taking strategies with acquisition-learning hypothesis

In the realm of language education, the acquisition-learning hypothesis, a fundamental component of Stephen Krashen’s Monitor Theory, stands as a guiding principle that distinguishes between natural language acquisition and explicit language learning. As educators strive to create an environment that nurtures language development, the interplay between this hypothesis and practical language applications, such as test-taking strategies, becomes a pivotal avenue for exploration.

This section delves into the intricate connection between test-taking strategies and the acquisition-learning hypothesis. By unraveling the layers of this relationship, we seek to illuminate how the deliberate integration of strategies aligns with the hypothesis, ultimately fostering a more profound and natural language acquisition process. As we navigate through this linkage, the aim is to provide educators with insights and practical approaches that not only enhance language proficiency in testing scenarios but also contribute to the broader landscape of language acquisition.

## Practical ideas for teachers

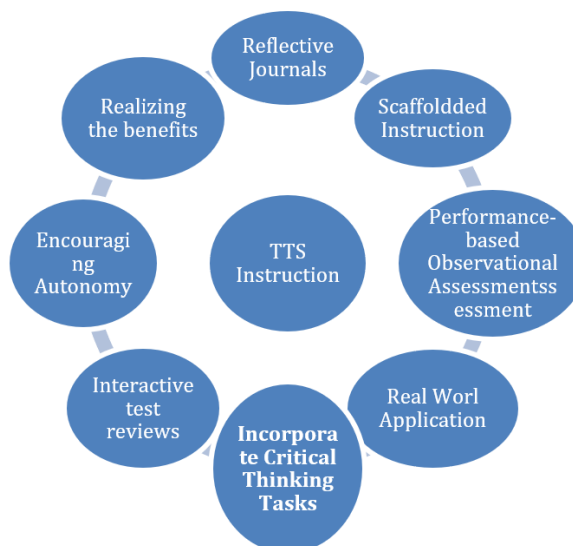
It has been previously found that incorporating strategies instruction and different types of feedback could result in additive and reducing effects on learning (Wagner et al., 2024). The author suggests a relationship model to be implemented by instructors or educators to facilitate the design of TTS instruction activities with different types of feedback, in the light of the Monitor Theory. The author suggests three general approaches to task design as shown in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** A proposed model for the design stage of TTS instruction tasks through the Monitor Theory.

- 1) Triggering natural language use: learners come to language tests with some existing knowledge. Thus, we can treat test inputs act as triggers, prompting learners to engage in natural language use, similar to how they would in authentic, real-life situations. Evidence from research highlights the transformative potential of authentic learning experiences, enabling learners to engage in genuine communication. The works of Nunan and Richards (2015) and Phung et al. (2023) emphasize the pivotal role of authentic learning in creating opportunities for meaningful interactions and encounters with the language in real-life contexts. Additionally, this approach positions learners as active agents in their own learning journey, aligning with the principles of learner autonomy and self-directed learning as articulated by Reinders and Benson (2017). By extending the authentic learning environment in the classroom, learners are afforded the chance to apply their language skills in authentic scenarios, enhancing their overall proficiency and comprehension. This paradigm shift underscores the importance of considering learning tasks to trigger more natural use as a complementary and enriching component of language education.
- 2) Acquisition through natural inference: Emphasize the importance of natural inference and critical thinking during test scenarios. Encourage learners to infer meanings, understand context, and deduce answers by applying their existing language knowledge.
- 3) The alignment of Monitor theory and the utilization of natural inferencing in the context of strategy learning and teaching has been substantiated by various prior studies. Notably, research by Alahmadi et al. (2018), Alahmadi and Flotz (2020), and Alsaif (2011) revealed a significant positive correlation between learners' use of inferencing strategies and improvement in their English language learning at different proficiency levels. This finding echoes the idea that learners with a greater TTS reserve might be inclined to employ inferencing more frequently, potentially leveraging their broader linguistic knowledge for enhanced contextual understanding (Garza and Harris, 2017). It remains unclear whether learners with a larger number of TTS naturally gravitate towards more frequent inferencing, possibly due to their heightened awareness of some skills in the immediate context, or if learners who actively engage in inferencing more often subsequently expand their linguistic knowledge through this deeper interaction with the test.
- 4) Varying feedback: Just as comprehensible input is vital for language acquisition, feedback provided during test-taking strategies instruction should be clear, relevant, and easily understandable. This aligns with the principles of the acquired system, promoting a more natural and intuitive understanding of effective test-taking approaches. The acquired system is associated with implicit learning, where learners unconsciously absorb language patterns and strategies. Varying feedback can incorporate implicit learning by exposing learners to different types of test scenarios, allowing them to develop intuitive problem-solving approaches without solely relying on explicit instructions. The following is a proposed model of how can be TTS instruction and tasks can be designed in the light of the Monitor Theory. Matcha et al. (2019) established a positive correlation between personalized

feedback and the utilization of effective learning strategies. Building on this foundation, the current study endeavors to discern the relationship between the application of various types of feedback and teaching test-taking strategies, further contributing to our understanding of the intricate interplay between feedback and strategic learning approaches. Furthermore, **Figure 2** below propose a practical model to design different TTS activities in the light of Monitor Theory.



**Figure 2.** A proposed practical model to design TTS instruction activities in the light of the Monitor Theory.

- 1) Interactive test reviews
  - Conduct interactive test reviews where students collaboratively analyze test formats. Discuss the reasoning behind correct answers and encourage students to infer strategies for approaching similar questions in the future.
- 2) Incorporate critical thinking tasks
  - Integrate critical thinking tasks into test preparation. For example, provide a sample question and ask students to articulate the underlying strategies they would use to arrive at the correct answer. This can be done through group discussions or written reflections.
- 3) Real-world application
  - Relate test-taking strategies to real-world language use. Illustrate how the strategies employed in a test mirror the skills needed in practical scenarios, such as understanding instructions, inferring meaning, and applying language knowledge.
- 4) Reflective journals
  - Implement reflective journals where students document their test-taking experiences. Encourage them to reflect on the strategies they employed, whether successful or not, and propose alternative approaches. This fosters metacognition and self-awareness.
- 5) Scaffolded instruction
  - Provide scaffolding for learners by gradually introducing and reinforcing test-taking strategies. Begin with simpler tasks, guiding students through the

process, and gradually increasing the complexity as their language acquisition progresses.

- 6) Performance-based observational assessments
  - Design assessments that evaluate language performance rather than mere memorization of rules. For instance, create tasks that simulate real-life language use, requiring students to apply acquired knowledge naturally.
  - Observe students during test-taking situations to gain insights into their natural language use. Note instances of successful application of strategies and areas where further support may be needed.
  - Provide individualized feedback that emphasizes not only correctness but also the effectiveness of applied strategies. Acknowledge instances where learners naturally employ language skills and guide them on refining these strategies.
  - Continuously adapt teaching strategies based on observations and feedback. If certain test-taking strategies prove challenging for a group of learners, adjust instructional methods to address specific needs and enhance acquisition.
- 7) Encouraging autonomy
  - Foster autonomy by encouraging students to self-assess their test-taking strategies. Provide checklists or rubrics that guide them in evaluating their approach, identifying strengths, and setting goals for improvement.
  - Facilitate peer collaboration where students share successful strategies with their peers. This not only promotes a collaborative learning environment but also allows for the exchange of diverse language acquisition techniques.
- 8) Realizing the benefits
  - Emphasize that the test-taking strategies learned in the classroom are applicable in authentic contexts. For example, understanding test instructions mirrors comprehending real-world instructions, reinforcing the practicality of language acquisition.
  - Highlight that the goal is not just success in tests but overall language development. Encourage learners to view test-taking strategies as tools that contribute to their language proficiency in various communication scenarios.

The preceding model establishes a foundational framework for text designers, instructors, and educators, providing valuable insights for the creation of effective text-to-speech (TTS) instruction tasks accompanied by diverse forms of feedback. In their recent work, Wagner et al. (2024) succinctly express.

“It can be assumed that changing the sequence of instruction and feedback may contribute to learning. If students are engaged in a practice phase at the beginning of their studying, they could be more reliant on the additional feedback information to correctly solve the problems in the practice phase. The subsequent instruction phase would then serve as an additional scaffold to consolidate the previously acquired strategies during the practice phase (see productive failure approach (Kapur, 2008)).”

## **4. Discussion**

The proposed two models for designing test-taking strategies (TTS) instruction activities are integral to the present study's objectives as they provide practical frameworks grounded in Monitor Theory to guide educators and instructors in teaching test-taking strategies effectively.

### **4.1. Framework for implementing Monitor Theory in TTS instruction activities**

This model outlines a structured approach to incorporate Monitor Theory principles into the design of TTS instruction tasks. It emphasizes understanding Monitor Theory in the context of second language learning and highlights the interplay between natural language acquisition and explicit language learning. By aligning TTS instruction with Monitor Theory, educators can create activities that resonate with how learners naturally acquire language, enhancing the authenticity and effectiveness of strategy instruction.

The framework's emphasis on triggering natural language use, acquisition through natural inference, and varying feedback aligns with Monitor Theory's principles of providing comprehensible input, promoting active engagement, and fostering implicit learning. By integrating these principles into TTS instruction, educators can create meaningful learning experiences that facilitate language acquisition while simultaneously preparing learners for language assessments.

### **4.2. Practical model for designing TTS instruction activities**

This model offers practical strategies and activities derived from Monitor Theory to facilitate the acquisition of test-taking strategies. It provides specific suggestions for educators to incorporate interactive test reviews, critical thinking tasks, real-world applications, reflective journals, scaffolded instruction, and performance-based observational assessments into their TTS instruction.

The model's emphasis on interactive and collaborative learning, critical thinking, and real-world application aligns with Monitor Theory's emphasis on authentic language use and meaningful interactions. By implementing these strategies, educators can create an immersive learning environment that mirrors real-life language situations, enabling learners to develop test-taking strategies in a natural and intuitive manner.

### **4.3. Alignment with Monitor Theory**

Both models are rooted in Monitor Theory and are designed to complement each other in providing a comprehensive framework for TTS instruction. The first model provides a theoretical foundation by outlining key principles of Monitor Theory, while the second model offers practical strategies and activities derived from these principles.

### **4.4. Enhanced language acquisition**

By incorporating Monitor Theory principles into TTS instruction, educators can create learning experiences that not only prepare learners for language assessments

but also foster language acquisition. The emphasis on authentic language use, natural inference, and varying feedback promotes active engagement and facilitates the development of test-taking strategies in a manner that aligns with how learners naturally acquire language.

#### **4.5. Practical implementation**

The second model provides educators with practical strategies and activities that can be readily implemented in the classroom. These activities are designed to promote learner autonomy, critical thinking, and reflective practice, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of TTS instruction. The first model complements this by providing a theoretical framework that informs the design and implementation of these activities.

In essence, the proposed models work synergistically to guide educators in designing and implementing TTS instruction activities that are grounded in Monitor Theory, thereby facilitating language acquisition and enhancing learners' test-taking skills.

#### **5. Conclusion**

This paper critically analyzes language test-taking strategies, focusing on the advisability of explicit teaching. This paper advocates for teaching these strategies, recommending Monitor Theory as an optimal model for pedagogical integration. The exploration aims to refine language assessment practices, ensuring alignment with language acquisition principles. The paper delves into content-independent strategies, maintaining test validity and offering opportunities for comprehensible input. Monitor Theory's practical application in teaching these strategies is discussed, emphasizing natural language use, acquisition through inference, and learner autonomy. The paper provides practical ideas for teachers, linking test-taking strategies with the acquisition-learning hypothesis.

In conclusion, the paper advocates for integrating test-taking strategies into language education, emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between these strategies and language acquisition. Aligning with the Monitor Theory, the paper proposes that understanding the nature of test-taking strategies is crucial for optimizing language assessment practices. The acquisition-learning hypothesis is employed to underscore the importance of natural language use and inference in teaching these strategies. Practical suggestions for educators, such as interactive test reviews and reflective journals, aim to create a language learning environment that fosters critical thinking and learner autonomy.

The next phase of TTS research should include diversifying samples to encompass learners from various proficiency levels and linguistic backgrounds. Exploring test-unwiseness strategies in different language skills assessments and incorporating quantitative methods could enhance the study's robustness. Comparative analyses with standardized tests would provide a more comprehensive understanding of test-taking strategies' ubiquity.

Further investigation into the interplay between cognitive and metacognitive strategies, particularly their impact on language performance, could deepen our understanding. Longitudinal studies tracking learners' development of test-taking



strategies over time would offer insights into the evolving nature of these skills.

To sum up, future research should strive for broader contexts, diverse samples, and a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies to advance our understanding of language test-taking strategies and their implications for language acquisition.

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