

# Overview of Communication Strategy Classifications

## コミュニケーション戦略分類の概観

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**Abstract** : This paper provides an overview of communication strategy classifications and the theoretical justifications for such appropriations. The paper will cover linearly from early isolation and categorisation, to more recent expansive definitions, and show how this transition has allowed a more incorporative approach to discourse analysis.

### INTRODUCTION

As no one individual's linguistic repertoire or command of the language is flawless, interlocutors can encounter difficulty producing the appropriate expression or grammatical construction during interaction. Affecting also native speakers of languages, such instances do not exclusively originate from lack of linguistic proficiency but represent a 'linguistic, retrieval, or proficiency shortfall' (Oxford, 1990, p. 18). The means in which an individual manages to compensate between their communicate goal and their immediately available linguistic resources are known as communication strategies (henceforth CSs). Symbolising attempts to incorporate a competence into the *interlanguage* (Selinker, 1972) they allow the interlocutor to transcend communication barriers and represent a subset of language-use strategies which deal with language production problems. Proponents of CSs (Bialystok, 1990; Dörnyei, 1995; McDonough, 1995; Cohen, 1998) advocate their effectiveness in improving communicative proficiency by relating language competence, or knowledge of language, to the speaker's knowledge of structures and features of the context in which communication occurs. Additional abilities are required that endow learners

the capability to be able to use language proficiently and effectively determine the most effective means of achieving a communicative goal.

### Research Objectives

Recognition of particular language learners' ability to develop linguistically prompted studies to attempt the identification of techniques employed to assist with the cognitive, behavioural, and linguistic demands of language learning. Isolating these skills resulted in the identification, classification, and description of CSs. Subsequent research focused on the extent to which CSs could be acquired, in addition to their precise influence on linguistic improvement. Research findings acknowledged the constructive influence CSs exerted in aiding assorted features of linguistic development and improvement in overall communicative competence. CS research has predominantly been conducted with learners whose L1 (both grammatically and typologically) and learning experience share common features with those from the L2 country. The similarity could account for the success learners display in adjusting to the teaching methodology, and ultimately the acquisition of the strategies themselves.

### Background of CS research

It has been over 30 years since studies highlighted transitional competences (Corder, 1967; Selinker, 1972) employed during interaction to compensate for lack of language ability. Mostly addressing gaps in learner lexis and language production problems, few attempted to measure learner CSs during authentic, meaningful interaction. Research highlighting the beneficial influence CSs exert on communicative performance has primarily been conducted with elicitation techniques that can unduly influence both the type and quantity of CSs employed. Nakano (1996) shows restrictions imposed by the features of the task results in certain types of CSs being employed more than others. For ease of quantitative and qualitative assessment, studies have mostly restricted observation to quantifiable activities despite the type of activity unduly influencing CSs use and frequency of use. The reduction of tasks to inauthentic interaction exposes researchers to the criticism that temptation to reduce language data to measureable entities, despite awareness of how the very process can distort the data. Among Japanese EFL learners, although considerable CS research has been conducted (cf., Sato, 1987; Iwai, 1992) much has restrictively employed tasks (e.g., picture description) that elicit task-dependent, referent-determined CSs. Although the validity and reliability of using established strategy surveys has been discussed (cf., Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Oxford, 1996; Hsiao & Oxford, 2002) few studies (cf., Sato, 2008) have dealt with reliable and valid strategy inventory for authentic interaction, when interlocutors are

linguistically and strategically unrestricted when facing communication problems.

### Overview of communication strategy analytic frameworks

Research has assessed second language strategic use through contrasting CS definitions, in addition to assorted methods of elicitation, identification, and classification. The divergence in analytic perspectives has produced contrasting frameworks reflecting individual research ambition. Each distinctive conceptual perspective reflects progression away from original CS isolation and classification, to analysis of the functional, and then psycholinguistic aspects of oral communication. The perspectives are summarised in table 1.1.

#### Initial classification of communication strategies

Recognition of variance within 'transitional competence' (Corder, 1967, p. 166) prompted initial research into learner techniques employed during language development. Theses error identification studies (Corder, 1967; Selinker, 1972; Våradi, 1983, originally 1973) primarily posited features of interlanguage (Selinker, 1972<sup>1+2</sup>) during the second language learning process. Their objective was to improve understanding of psycholinguistic structures and processes underlying L2 performance through the identification of temporal or makeshift behavioural events (Selinker, 1972, p. 210). Identification of the relevant internal strategies through observable data, however, proved ineffective as it afforded only a descriptive nature of speech production rather than the psychologically

Table 1. 1 The four distinct perspectives of CS research

Perspective	Research objective	Researchers	Papers
1. Initial classification	Classification & description	Selinker	1972
2. Interactional perspective	Discourse analysis	Tarone	1978
3. Psycholinguistic perspective	Cognitive processing	Poullisse	1990
4. Expanded approach	Product/process assessment	Dörnyei	1994

<sup>1</sup> Selinker's paper is largely restricted to descriptive aspects of 'interlingual identifications'.

<sup>2</sup> Corder (1967) uses 'transitional competence', and Nemser terms this competence 'approximate systems'

relevant data pertaining to second language learning (ibid., p. 211). Selinker's principal contribution to early CS research comprised a classification of five processes (mainly borrowed from L1) adopted as an interlanguage and recognised as fundamental aspects of second language learning between the mother tongue and target language. Initial labelling of behavioural events attempted during communication identified a linguistic competence selected upon recognition of an impediment to a communicative goal (Corder, 1967, 1983; Selinker, 1972; Våradi, 1983, originally 1973). As a transitional competence (Corder, 1967) it demonstrates an underdeveloped linguistic repertoire resulting in a reliance on compensatory strategies to be able to accomplish a communicative intention. Selinker's (1972) five central procedures are:

1. Language transfer
2. Transfer of training
3. Strategies of second language learning
4. Strategies of second language communication
5. Overgeneralization

(adopted from Selinker, 1972)

The focus of subsequent empirical-based studies (cf., Tarone, 1977; Våradi, 1983) shifted from identification of problem-solving devices to evaluation of communication-enhancing strategic language behaviour by assessing variability in linguistic performance. Studies confirmed *a priori* assumptions that insufficient linguistic resource necessitates utterances or message modification to achieve a communicative goal. Through structural or descriptive measurement of error analysis and dysfluency, the ways learners compensated for linguistic insufficiency produced the first CS systematic taxonomy (Tarone, 1977), in addition to an early definition of what constitutes a 'communication strategy'. Concepts of 'systematic attempt' and 'problematicty' were introduced as prerequisite conditions, recognition of which lead to the inclusion of CSs in models of communicative competence as constituents of strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983).

### *The interactional perspective*

Following initial classification and empirical analysis, the focus of research moved from early conceptualisation of compensatory strategic language tools, to address the social and interactional function CSs play in the second language learning process (Tarone, 1983). Reflecting practical usefulness the 'inter-individual' approach (Kasper & Kellerman, 1997, p. 2) recognises 'tools used in joint negotiation of meaning' (Tarone, 1980, p. 20) and assesses observable behaviour in developing taxonomies 'with implicit inferences being made about the differences in the psychological processing that produced them' (Yule & Tarone, 1997, p. 19). The interactive nature of communication requires the inclusion of productive and receptive strategies of communication, thereby broadening initial classifications from word production exclusively to incorporating comprehension in phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical elements of language production. Subsequent frameworks incorporated elements of interactional function, with Tarone recognising a mutuality as joint efforts are made 'to agree on a meaning where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared' (Tarone, 1980, p. 178). Contrasting from early taxonomies, and distinguished from alternative problem-solving devices, they involve handling problems which have already manifested during the course of communication (Dörnyei & Scott, 1995, p. 177) by integrating requests for clarification and comprehension that seek to 'clarify intended meaning rather than simply correct linguistic form' (Tarone, 1980, p. 424). Related to the *interaction hypothesis* (Long, 1983) the perspective predicts that interaction causes systematic interlanguage change by prompting discovery of gaps between learners' knowledge and the input from interlocutors (cf., *input hypothesis* by Krashen, 1985; Krashen & Terrell, 1983) to produce comprehensible output. Canale (1983) eventually extends the parameters to incorporate every potential interactional attempt to cope with any language-related problem which enhances the effectiveness of communication (ibid. p.11). Although this definition is broader than

restricting CSs to problem solving devices, the indefiniteness of 'strategies in communication' does not exclude such an extension. In contrast to the problem-orientdness of early taxonomies, while not necessarily linked to the manifestation of problems by specifying '...do not seem to be shared' hints at problematicity also as a required condition.

### ***The psycholinguistic perspective***

Criticism that theoretical discussion predominated over empirical CS research emerged highlighting the paucity of research assessing underlying processing mechanisms of language, thought, and communication (Ellis, 1985; Poulisse, 1990). Early studies, psycholinguistics argued, insufficiently related to theories of language use or development, and consequently failed to provide insight into the cognitive processes underlying CS use. This paradigm shift in language theoretical perspectives reflected increasing interest in the cognitive processes involved in foreign language learning. Inadequacies of product-orientated taxonomies restrictively focused on the surface linguistic structures of more complex, strategic language behaviour. Without understanding the cognitive-psychological dimension, it was argued, produced a proliferation of taxonomies of 'ambiguous validity' (Kellerman, 1991; Poulisse, 1987; Cook, 1993). The 'intra-individual' psycholinguistic view (Kasper & Kellerman, 1997, p. 2) focuses on cognitive mechanisms of referential strategies and aims to provide process-orientated (Kellerman, et al., 1990) or psychologically plausible (Poulisse, 1993, p.163) descriptions of CSs (e.g. Poulisse et al., 1987; Kellerman et al., 1990; Kellerman, 1991; Bialystok, 1990; Poulisse, 1993; Kellerman & Bialystok, 1997) to assess '[t]he process of the selection of the properties of the referent that the speaker then encodes in order to solve his lexical problem and maintain his communicative intent' (ibid., pp. 164-165). Arguing that language use is fundamentally strategic (cf., Kellerman & Bialystok, 1997) CSs are governed by the same principles operative in normal language use. Specifically, psycholinguistics compared L2 CSs to the referential strategies used by L1 users,

concluding that L2 CSs constitute a sub-set of referential strategies (Bialystok 1984). Research at the University of Nijmegen (The Netherlands) argued the research 'should reach beyond description to prediction and explanation' (Kellerman et al., 1990, p. 164) to produce a process-based taxonomy characterised by being parsimonious (fewer categories), generalisable (independent of variations across speakers, tasks, languages and levels of proficiency) and psychologically plausible (Kellerman and Bialystok, 1997). Their taxonomies incorporate the planning preceding oral production in addition to the effects on the execution.

### ***The Expanded approach***

A more expansive framework offered a comprehensive assessment means of product and process analysis. The expanded approach attempted to integrate previous perspectives by linking underlying mental operations (the psycholinguistic perspective) with the observable features of CS use (the product perspective). In accordance with Færch and Kasper's framework (1983b) CSs constitute problem-management efforts that deal with language production problems at the planning stage of production. Problem-solving devices, however, are restricted to problems which have manifested themselves in speech. The integration provides a holistic framework for analysis and description of L2 communication problems and related behaviour.

### ***Definitional criteria of communication strategies***

Distinction in contrasting concepts of CSs, discussed during early formulation of defining criterion (cf., Færch & Kasper, 1984), focused on delimiting theoretical conceptualisation of strategic aspects considered necessary in coping with L2 demands (Savignon, 1972, p. 54). Subsequent confusion over the psychological processes of language production, and the linguistic products on which interactions rely, has contributed to a diversity of CS conceptualisation. Principally constituting linguistic responses through the selection of alternative structures, their primary function is the transcendence of difficulties

(Tarone, 1980, p. 418) with language production problems between available linguistic resources and communicative intention. The definitional criteria of problemat�city, learner awareness, and subsequent response has remained *sine qua non* for the majority of subsequent CS definitions.

### Clarification of problem-orientedness

Symbolising insufficient linguistic resource (Corder, 1983, p. 103; Våradi, 1983, p. 82; Fårch & Kasper, 1983a, p. 33; Poullisse, 1990, p. 22) adoption of problem-orientedness as a defining criterion is based on learners' underdeveloped linguistic resource. Demonstrating 'communicative ends outrunning communicative means' (Fårch & Kasper, 1983, p. 123) it has become *the* primary defining criterion of CSs (Dårnyei & Scott, 1997, p. 182). Essentially lexical in nature, precise explication of 'difficulty' extends from 'a lexical shortcoming' (i.e., a 'gap', Våradi, 1983, originally 1973, p. 79) to more substantial 'insufficiently developed interlanguage structures' (Selinker, 1972, p. 212)<sup>3</sup>. Indirectly, linguistic knowledge deficit can cover the myriad of potentialities for language breakdown. The potential scope demonstrates difficulties arising not from limited linguistic knowledge exclusively, but also pertains to general cognitive (Fårch & Kasper, 1983b, p. 33) and retrieval difficulties. Instead of demonstrating a resourcefulness and determination to proceed, it has been stigmatized as indication of learner inadequacy and dysfluency in interlanguage competency. Attempting precise distinction of the causes for the occurrence of CSs, Bachman's model (1990) covers inadequacies of the *when* and *how* CSs are used without clarifying for *what* problem(s) they are employed. As Cook (1993) highlights, previous types of CSs 'seem to reflect types of solution rather than types of problem' (ibid. p. 124). Backman's (1990) model includes:

1. Resource deficit: e.g. insufficient linguistic resource
2. Processing time pressure: e.g., fillers.

3. Own-performance problems: e.g., self-repair, self-rephrasing and self-editing
4. Other-performance problems: e.g., negotiation strategies

Opponents of specifying problemat�city as a defining criterion (cf., Bialystok, 1990) argue no distinct difference exists in the cognitive processes involved in communication (whether problems exist or not) as strategic use is not restricted to problem solving instances, but continuous with 'ordinary' language processing' (ibid., p. 5). Although recognition is made that 'clearly problematic' (ibid., p. 4) they are typically used for problem-solving purposes in L2 communication which supports its use as a defining criterion. Poullisse (1990, p. 193) explicitly argues against this by emphasising 'alternative means of expression' can be employed even without recognition of a problem (ibid., p.194). However, she rationalizes they are employed 'when linguistic shortcomings make it impossible for them to communicate their intended meanings', which seems to indicate the existence of a problem or deficiency. Whether these are noticed or not relates to the issue of consciousness.

### Issues of user consciousness

Recognition of CSs as plans intended to achieve a communicative goal (Fårch & Kasper, 1983) has resulted in consciousness being considered a defining feature of CS use. Although stated as a requisite condition in the majority of main studies (Tarone, 1977; Våradi, 1980; Fårch & Kasper, 1983a; Poullisse, 1990) ambiguity still remains of exact terminological usage. To regard CSs as 'consciously used devices' compounds several interpretations of 'consciousness' as it can refer to an awareness of a language problem (cf. Våradi, 1983, originally 1973); the intent to solve the problem, or the repertoire of CS and the goal they may achieve. Våradi (ibid.) argued the awareness is of a disparity or gap<sup>4</sup> accompanied by a conscious attempt to overcome the obstacle

<sup>3</sup> For Selinker CS-use are restricted to successful students only.

<sup>4</sup> His terminology is *hiatis*

through CS use. Similarly, Tarone (1977), although lacking clear terminological clarification, refers to a consciousness in terms of a choice being made upon realisation of insufficient linguistic competence. This represents an attempt to distinguish processes consciously selected from those that may have become automated or routinised devices (i.e., lacking full consciousness). Rather than existing or not, Færch and Kasper argue consciousness 'is more a matter of degree than either-or' (1983b, p.35) with the degree of attention closely related to both the extent of automaticity and inherent task difficulty (Shiffrin & Schneider 1977; Cohen, Dunbar & McClelland, 1990; Posner, 1994). This contributed to Oxford's (1990a, p. 12) observation that eventually they become automatic (i.e. unconscious) and mirror related strategic skills, such as language learning strategies (LLSs) which can be similarly exist 'either within the focal attention of the learners or within their peripheral attention (Cohen, 1998). The Nijmegen project reached identical findings via retrospection support showing that advanced learners can anticipate and solve problems 'before they even started encoding their messages' (Poulisse, 1993, p. 179). For Færch and Kasper (1983b) the potential for consciousness represents the degree of automaticity allowed by learner proficiency and leads to their distinction of the 'potentiality' (ibid., p. 36) of consciousness plan for coping with communicative problems.

Clarification of the different applications of 'consciousness' and exclusion of 'control' is required to help reduce confusion of the use of consciousness as a defining criterion. Within the field of cognition the role of consciousness in behaviour in general is still an unresolved issue, and although it appears accurate strategic language behaviour can be captured, lack of explicitness has caused diversity in CS research (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). The broad and multiple meanings of consciousness demand more accurate typology (cf. McLaughlin et. al.) which Schmidt (1994) demonstrates through deconstruction of 'consciousness' into four basic senses:

1. Awareness of a problem

2. Intentionality

3. Awareness of strategic language use

4. Control (conscious attention and effort)

### ***The issue of responding***

Instigated by recognition (i.e. 'awareness') of a problem the resulting plan of action is devised to overcome the barrier to the communicative intention. The CS most appropriate to construct (in terms of achievability of goal) must first be determined before the execution phase conveys the message. Linguistic resource or lack of salience will be influential in which option is chosen and dictate which plans of action can be realistically converted into verbal plans (Corder, 1983, p. 15) and how successfully they can be executed. Exclusively reserved for linguistic difficulties (Færch & Kasper, 1983) this plan is separate from other problem solving devices (i.e., meaning negotiation, and repair mechanisms) which must be managed after the problem has surfaced during communication.

### ***The working definition of communication strategies used in the research***

Constructing the definition of CSs on problematicity and consciousness has been methodologically effective in delimiting and enhancing their usefulness, but taking them as defining criteria is controversial. As Bialystok (1990, p. 4) points out they can be employed in situations where no sign of problematicity exists. Although she (ibid.) argues these criteria are inadequate, she acknowledges the use of language strategically can be distinguished from ordinary usage. It is these three features which this research paper uses as a working definition of a communication strategy: first becoming aware of a linguistic obstacle, the subsequent plan to overcome this impediment, before finally executing the plan through CS use. As highlighted in the previous section, the degree of cognitive resource consumed by the application of CSs is directly related to learner ability to produce the forms (i.e. automaticity). If CSs are proceduralised until learners are no longer conscious of employing them they are no longer accessible



for description though verbal reports and lose their significance as strategies (Ellis, 1994). They will be employed effortlessly by more proficient speakers and unperceived as overcoming speech problems when utilised. Conversely, less proficient speakers will employ more cognitive resource to compensate for the lack of automaticity (i.e. proficiency), making it easier to perceive when and why they are being employed and which CSs are employed. They have come to represent not an overarching tactic, but a technique of choosing the best linguistic resources to advance communication, accordingly, they represent an offensive role (Little, 1999) in maintaining interaction and avoiding communication breakdown.

### ***The notion of communication strategy teachability***

Theoretical CS perspectives also diverge pertaining to the desirability and attainability of formal CS teaching. The question of CS training and development through formal classroom instruction to increase awareness of their potential in solving communication problems remains a largely theoretical discussion as few studies in Japan have specifically considered CSs from a pedagogical point of view. Lack of valid and reliable empirical evidence limits knowledge of the pedagogic effectiveness of CS instruction for Japanese EFL learners. Belief in the value of CSs as a prominent element in speech production (c.f., Bialystok, 1990; Cohen, 1998; McDonough, 1995) and consequently an important element of natural discourse (Wagner & Firth, 1997, p. 342) requires they play a prominent role in language learning. Initial studies that identified and isolated characteristics of learners in their adoption of techniques to assist with the demands of language learning recognised that language, in addition to individual strategies, should be taught to equip learners of limited resources with the knowledge of 'how good learners arrive at their answers' (Rubin, 1990, p. 282). Proponents (Færch & Kasper, 1983, 1986; Wenden, 1985; Tarone & Yule, 1989, p114; Chen, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991; Mariani, 1994; Rost, 1994; Dörnyei, 1995) therefore argue that pedagogically CS training is effective and beneficial in fostering awareness of

CS use and developing strategic competence (Cohen 1990; Oxford 1990; Mendelsohn, 1994). Advocating the promotion of 'greater awareness, less inhibition and purposeful language practice' (Tarone & Yule 1997, p. 29) yet also recognising (ibid., p. 110) the pedagogical goal must be to teach not only practical nominal expressions, but also the linguistic resources needed to be able to employ CSs (i.e., knowledge). Opponents however, see little value of teaching skills which are considered essentially cognitive processes that have already matured through L1 experience, and therefore unteachable (Yule & Tarone, 1997, p. 28). The divergence of opinion regarding the desirability of directing teaching CSs revolves around two central arguments.

### ***Argument No. 1: Natural transferability***

Despite learner ability to use CS effectively in L1, lack of salience in L2 necessitates training or 'noticing' (Najar, 1990) the repertoire of strategies available. Learner awareness and insight into L1 performance and CS instruction aids strategic transfer by providing training and opportunities for practice (Dörnyei, 1995, pp. 62-64). Opponents (Bialystok, 1990; Kellerman et al., 1990; Kellerman, 1991) believe cognition remains unaffected by instruction as adult learners have already developed strategic, transferable competence in L1. Furthermore, since transfer occurs automatically from L1 to L2, CSs transfer will also naturally occur without the need for concocted classroom instruction. In addition, as CSs represent reflections of underlying psychological processes, focusing on the surface structure will not enhance their use. Bialystok (1990) advocates development through 'training aimed at mastering of analysis and control over the target language' (ibid., p. 145) as 'there is no justification for training in compensatory strategies in the classroom' (Kellerman, 1991, p. 158).

### ***Argument No. 2: Teachability***

CS-based instruction represents the intentional CS instruction alongside the L2 itself. Discussion originates from different interpretations of the notion of teaching and how explicitly CSs are

taught. Proponents (Chamot et al., 1999; Cohen, 1998; Nunan, 1997; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford & Leaver, 1996; Shen, 2003) agree on the importance of explicitness in their teaching. Although learners possess implicit CS knowledge, making them recognise aspects of their existing CSs use requires instruction (Færch & Kasper, 1983, p. 55). By learning *how* to use CSs appropriately develops an ability to bridge gaps between formal and informal leaning situations, between pedagogic and non-pedagogic communicative situations (ibid., p. 56) developing overall skills in conveying information (Tarone, 1984, p. 129). These instructional models share many features and concur on the importance of:

1. Awareness-raising: heighten awareness of the nature and potential of CSs.
2. Risk-taking: encourage risk-taking and CSs use, without apprehension of making errors (Færch & Kasper, 1986).
3. Modelling: teacher demonstrations externalise the thinking process of CS use, in addition to highlighting cross-cultural differences.
4. Direct teaching: providing learners with linguistic devices to verbalize CSs.
5. Practice: adequate opportunities for practice “to help learners perform their competence rather than build it up” (Kellerman, 1991, p. 160).

### Conclusion

The scope of CS classification has evolved from initial isolation and classification, to a more extensive overarching tactic incorporating numerous deliberations during the speech production process. This allows for more detailed interpretation and detailing of discourse analysis.

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