The Need to Teach Communication Strategies in the Foreign Language Classroom

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In this article we argue for the need for instruction in lexical communication strategies in foreign language classes. After comparing opposing views on communication strategies and instruction, we recommend instruction in second-language-based lexical communication strategies ("recommended strategies") for students who do not use them. We then report a study about the manner in which our first year Japanese university students of English as a foreign language conceptualized their communicative options in two situations in which they lacked specific vocabulary. Since results suggest that many of our students think of using first-language-based or non-linguistic strategies, we argue that these students would benefit from instruction in the use of second-language-based strategies.

本論文では、外国語授業において語彙のコミュニケーション・ストラテジーを教える有効性・必要性を論じる。まずコミュニケーション・ストラテジーと教授法について、対立するこれまでの見解を比較・検討した後、「第２言語に基づく語彙のコミュニケーション・ストラテジー」を教授すべきとの議論を展開する。大学１回生である日本人英語学習者を被験者にし、未習得の英単語に直面する２つの状況を与え、それぞれの状況において被験者がどのようなコミュニケーションの方法を用いたかを分析した。結果、被験者の多くが、第２言語語彙に基づくストラテジーではなく、第１言語を利用したストラテジーや非言語的ストラテジーの利用を考えていることが判明した。この結果を基に、第２言語に基づく語彙のコミュニケーション・ストラテジーを教授することが、円滑なコミュニケーション能力の習得に有効であることを議論する。

Considering the issue of instruction in communication strategies from our perspective as teachers of English as a foreign language to Japanese university students, we assessed our students' need for such instruction by asking several classes what they would do in two target-language communication situations in which they lacked

specific English vocabulary items. Below, we explain the rationale for our study by examining research on second language (L2) communication strategies and their instruction. Then we report how our students responded to the two situations and give our interpretation.

What are Communication Strategies?

The concept of "communication strategies" (CS) reflects the idea of communicative competence proposed by Canale and Swain (1980), who viewed it as comprised of three specific types: grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic. Strategic competence is the ability of a speaker to manage a breakdown in communication. In L2 production, our focus here, strategic competence has been considered largely a matter of a speaker's ability to use CS (Swain, 1984, p. 189). Nonetheless, defining CS has been problematic. Numerous papers have offered definitions (see, particularly, Bialystok, 1983; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Poulisse, Bongaerts, & Kellerman, 1984; Tarone, 1977; Tarone, 1983). Faerch and Kasper noted that all previous definitions contained two key elements: consciousness and problem-solving. However, they also noted that CS could include production plans that were not necessarily conscious, and finally hedged by describing CS as "potentially conscious" (p. 31). Questions as to the necessity of both consciousness and problem-solving in CS were raised by Bialystok (1990). Nevertheless, we concur with Poulisse (1990), whose definition of CS (like Faerch & Kasper's) includes two key features: 1) speech planning difficulties, and 2) some speaker awareness of those difficulties. Regarding the first feature, it is clear that CS are useful when there are breakdowns in communication, and therefore speech planning difficulties are at least a sufficient condition for the occurrence of CS. Second, by "awareness" we mean, specifically, that the speaker is attending to his/her speech production. The degree of attention to a mental process is closely related to both its degree of automaticity and to task difficulty (Shiffrin & Schneider, 1977; Cohen, Dunbar, & McClelland, 1990; Posner, 1994). L2 learners who have not automatized speech in the target language must use controlled attentive processes (McLaughlin, Rossman, & McLeod, 1983) and when difficulties arise, such as the inability to retrieve a needed lexical item, L2 learners are forced to pay even more attention. Thus, while attention is not necessary for the occurrence of CS, the probability of attending to CS production is extremely high for L2 learners.

Should CS Be Taught?

The Case Against Teaching CS

It is agreed that CS help speakers to communicate, but there is contention concerning the teaching of strategies to second or foreign language learners. The case against instruction is espoused by Kellerman and colleagues at Nijmegen University in the Netherlands, particularly in the Nijmegen Project (see Bongaerts & Poulisse, 1989; Poulisse, 1987; Poulisse, 1990; Poulisse, et al., 1984; Poulisse & Schils, 1989). The Nijmegen studies claim to show that the general cognitive processes involved in both native language (L1) and L2 CS are identical. Since the processes are the same, CS use is fundamentally the same whichever language is used. Thus, there is no need to teach CS in an L2 classroom. Kellerman (1991) concludes, "teach the learners more language, and let the strategies look after themselves" (p. 158).

Kellerman (1991) even implies that strategy use interferes with vocabulary learning, quoting an anecdote (from Faerch & Kasper, 1986) in which a teacher said his students could paraphrase to compensate for unknown words but still needed to learn vocabulary. However, there is no hard evidence of a negative relationship between CS use and L2 acquisition.

The Case For Teaching CS

There is a movement supporting the teaching of learning strategies to L2 learners (see Oxford, Lavine, & Crookall, 1989). The authors' typology of learning strategies includes a category termed "compensation strategies" (Oxford, et al., 1989), seemingly influenced by Tarone's (1977) early CS typology. The authors claim that teachers should teach, explicitly, not only learning strategies, including compensation strategies, but also how to transfer these strategies to other learning situations.

The authors, however, do not address the argument against instruction from the Nijmegen group. For those who take this criticism seriously but still want to argue for CS instruction, the more limited stance developed earlier by Faerch and Kasper (1983) is appealing. If there is no need to teach language learners new behavior, they argue, a teacher can nonetheless remind them of what they already do in their L1, and urge them to use it in their L2, not only for communication but also for learning the target language.

Even among those who believe that CS have value for L2 learning there is a question as to whether all strategies are equally beneficial. Oxford, et al. (1989) seem to claim learning value for all of their compensation strat-

egies. Dörnyei (1995) speculates that strategies are not equally desirable in a language course, and surmises that the preferable ones are those that associate naturally with certain vocabulary and grammatical structures (p. 62), though this idea is not developed in detail. Faerch and Kasper (1983) make the most thoughtful argument regarding the learning value of different types of CS. A learner develops L2 ability, they claim, by forming hypotheses about the target language and producing utterances to test these hypotheses. Through positive and negative feedback, hypotheses are strengthened, weakened, or revised. As a learner uses language forms repeatedly, the forms are automatized.

Faerch and Kasper (1983) argue that only those CS which involve these three aspects of language learning—hypothesis formation, hypothesis testing, and automatization—are useful for learning. *The strategies employed for hypothesis testing and/or automatization are those strategies which require L2 production.* We designate these strategies as "recommended strategies"; that is, strategies we recommend for classroom practice, and relegate other strategies, such as those using the L1 or non-verbal means, as non-recommended strategies. (See Method, below, for category details.)

While there is little research focusing on whether or not attention to strategies in the classroom increases strategy use, some studies suggest that such attention does have benefits. Faerch and Kasper (1986) reported on a course in Denmark, which included a pre-test, three months of strategy training, and a post-test. The course did not seem to change the habits of the most or the least accomplished L2 learners, but those learners at the middle level improved in strategy use. Dörnyei (1995) describes a six-week course of strategy training in Hungary which also used pre- and post-tests. Dörnyei's study compared a treatment group with two control groups, one taking the usual course at the particular school involved and the other receiving instruction in conversational techniques. Included in the treatment group training was practice in giving definitions, of interest to the present study. Dörnyei found that the CS instruction group showed greater improvement in making definitions than did the normal instruction group; the comparison with the conversation instruction group was not significant. As Dörnyei admits, however, the curriculum for the conversation instruction group may have included activities helpful for forming definitions, thus narrowing the difference between this group and the treatment group. Most recently, Kitajima (1997) reports on an experiment in strategy training in Japan very similar to Dörnyei's. A control group given traditional English instruction focusing on linguistic forms performed significantly more poorly on two communicative tasks than did two experimental groups, one given instruction in expressing meaning and the

other specifically instructed in CS use. The two experimental groups did not differ from each other. This situation, however, compares with that of Dörnyei's study; the meaning-instructed group could have performed activities that facilitate CS use.

The Study

We view our study as consistent with principles espoused by proponents of action research (see Crookes, 1993; Nunan, 1992; Sagor, 1993). Specifically, we were motivated by our perception of a problem among the Japanese university students we were teaching. Both of us observed that many of our students did not seem to realize their L1 strategic competence was also applicable to their L2, and, further, for many, the strategies they did use (L1-based or non-verbal) were not beneficial to language learning. We assessed the arguments regarding communication strategies and instruction with these observations in mind, and collaborated on this study as working teachers sharing information to overcome a problem we had in common. Our added hope was to persuade other teachers of the same type of student population to consider the need for CS training in their classrooms.

In order to understand more clearly how our students conceptualized their L2 communicative potential and to determine students' conceptions of CS use in different situations, especially as certain situations allow for more L2 avoidance than others, we proposed the following research questions:

1. When faced with the problem of not knowing an English word, will our students first consider using those strategies that have a positive potential for the development of their language proficiency? and
2. Will students' responses differ between situations in which they can easily avoid using their L2 and situations in which they cannot? If so, how?

Method

Materials: We asked our students to imagine themselves in two situations in which they lacked, in L2, a certain low frequency noun. In the first situation, a student practicing English in a classroom wants to describe fixing a faucet but does not know the word "valve." In the other, a student traveling in Los Angeles calls a drugstore to ask for a nail clipper, but does not know that English word. The first situation—a typical English as a Foreign Language classroom situation, hereinafter "the classroom

situation"—allows students to avoid their L2 by using their L1 or non-verbal communication. In the second—in a foreign country, on the telephone, hereinafter "the telephone situation"—they are more dependent on their L2. (See Appendix A for copies of the two situations and their English translations.)

The subjects both read the situations and wrote what they would do in Japanese. We had them use their native language to ensure that they would express themselves precisely.

Some readers may criticize our method of data collection as indirect, and argue that observation of actual CS use yields more valuable data. While we recognize the value of elicited speech data, we feel data such as those we collected are valuable within certain constraints. First, as noted earlier, we consider speakers' attention to their language production to be an important component of CS use. With attention comes the potential for introspection. In this case, we wanted to know which strategies our students would think of using when they encountered an L2 communication problem. Such ideas could later be addressed through explicit instruction. Further, time and personnel constraints would permit us to tape, transcribe, and analyze the data from only a few students using CS, while our survey obtained a broad view of the beliefs about strategies of a large number of our students.

Subjects and Data Collection: All 161 subjects participating in this study were Japanese university freshmen taking non-major English courses. Of these, 141 were economics, business or law majors at Nanzan University and 20 were science majors at Kyushu Institute of Technology.

The two situations were handed out in the students' English classes, and were counterbalanced to discourage students from copying. Each student wrote about one situation. Half the students in each class ($n = 80$) wrote about the classroom situation, and the other half ($n = 81$) wrote about the telephone situation. Both researchers read all of the writings and classified the strategies reported, checking each other's work and discussing discrepancies until we could agree.

Before describing the strategy classifications we used in this study, we must acknowledge that there are many typologies (e.g. see Bialystok, 1983; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Paribahkt, 1985; Poulisse, et al., 1984; Tarone, 1977), a phenomenon criticized as a weakness in the field of CS because it hinders comparisons across studies (see Poulisse, et al.). Globally considered, our typology uses that of Faerch and Kasper as a framework, since we have used their ideas concerning strategies and language learning in arguing for instruction. However, our subcatego-

ries are largely adopted from Poulisse, et al. (1984) (though changing some terms for ease of understanding), because they offer a simple set of categories intended for cross-study comparison.

Faerch and Kasper's (1983) chief distinction is between *achievement strategies*, in which a speaker attempts to communicate a message despite language difficulties, and *reduction strategies*, in which a speaker reduces a message (or part of it) due to lacking language or a concern for formal correctness. The largest category of achievement strategies is *compensatory strategies*, classified according to the resource used: L1, interlanguage together with L1, interlanguage, interaction with the hearer, and non-linguistic resources (Faerch & Kasper, 1983, pp. 36-55).

Poulisse, et al. (1984) accept Faerch and Kasper's (1983) division of reduction and achievement, and identify the latter with compensatory strategies. In our study, we also adopted Poulisse, et al.'s distinction between first and second language (L1 and L2) based strategies. Of the strategies classified as *L1-based*, we adopted two categories: *L1 switch*, where the speaker uses an L1 word or phrase in the midst of L2 production, and *direct translation*, where the speaker translates, word for word, an L1 word or phrase into L2. As for the L2-based strategy categories, we adopted five (using their terms): "approximation," "word coinage," "description," "mime," and "appeals." However, since the distinction between L2-based strategies and others is important to our argument for instruction, we reclassified mime and divided appeals.

"Mime" is the use of hand or body movements to convey a meaning. We put this category into a larger set, separate from both L1- and L2-based strategies, using Faerch and Kasper's (1983) term *non-linguistic strategies*. We distinguished between using gestures to give the impression of an object (*mime*) and pointing to an object (*point to object*), and included drawing a picture of an object (*picture*) as a third category in this set.

Two factors were involved in classifying "appeals": (a) to whom the speaker appeals, and (b) how the appeal is made. First, the speaker could appeal to the hearer (*appeal to interlocutor*) or to someone or something else (*outside appeal*). Second, an appeal to an interlocutor could use L1-based, L2-based, or non-linguistic strategies, and an outside appeal could be made by using a dictionary (*dictionary*) or asking a third person (*appeal to other*). We categorized those appeals to interlocutor which use L2-based strategies as a subset of the overall category of L2-based strategies, and listed appeals using L1-based or non-linguistic strategies separately.

As for the categories we have kept intact, *approximation* is the use of a target language word or phrase which does not exactly express the

speaker's intended meaning but is close enough for the listener to understand. An example (from our data, as are all examples) is "water pipe" used for "valve." In *word coinage*, the speaker creates a new word or phrase from elements in the target language, such as "waterstopper" for "valve." In *description*, the speaker describes an object or an idea to convey an impression, such as describing a valve as "the thing that stops water." Finally, we added the category of *general L2-based strategies*, a catchall category used when subjects reported that they would use their English, but did not say specifically how.

As for reduction strategies, we used two categories from Faerch and Kasper (1983): *avoidance*, where the speaker avoids a topic because of a language problem, and *abandonment*, where the speaker abandons a topic when a language problem is encountered.

Table 1 displays our categories. We list L2-based strategies in the left-hand column, with the heading "Recommended Strategies," and all other strategies in the right-hand column, with the heading "Non-recommended Strategies."

Table 1: Categories of CS

Recommended Strategies	Non-recommended Strategies
L2-Based	L1-Based
1. approximation	1. L1 switch
2. word coinage	2. direct translation
3. description	3. appeal to interlocutor:
4. appeal to interlocutor:	A. L1 switch
A. approximation	B. direct translation
B. word coinage	Non-linguistic
C. description	1. mime
D. general	2. point to object
5. general	3. picture
	4. appeal to interlocutor:
	A. mime
	B. point to object
	C. picture
	Outside Appeal
	1. dictionary
	2. appeal to other
	Reduction
	1. avoidance
	2. abandonment

Recommended and Non-recommended Strategies: We categorize L1-based and non-linguistic strategies as non-recommended because we believe they do not need attention in an L2 classroom. We want to encourage our students to start solving communication problems by using their L2, since we believe that L2 develops through use. We realize that non-linguistic strategies (e.g., mime) may be necessary for communicative purposes when L2-based strategies fail, but we suggest to our students that they resort to them only after trying L2-based strategies. As for L1 use, Faerch and Kasper (1986) note that in some cases a strategy such as L1 switch may have communicative value. Words from popular culture, such as "disco," are used internationally, while Indo-European cognates, such as "idealism," are found in a variety of related languages. Our Japanese students may know the popular culture words, but since Japanese is not an Indo-European language, they do not have access to the cognates. Thus, for Japanese learners of English, L1 switch is not useful for communicative purposes. The strategy of direct translation is similarly problematic. While a Japanese student in an English class may successfully convey a meaning to another Japanese student directly translating from L1, this strategy may not be helpful in communicating with a person unfamiliar with Japanese. For example, the meaning of "faucet" will not be communicated by directly translating *ja-guchi* as "snake-mouth." Because L1-based strategies are not likely to be generalizable to interactions with English speakers who do not speak Japanese, we do not recommend them.

While dictionary use helps students learning new words, it breaks face-to-face communication, perhaps requiring repair (e.g., "I don't know how to say. . . . Excuse me while I check my dictionary."), which may be stressful for an L2 speaker. Further, a dictionary may yield a word which is not the best for the specific context, and a pocket dictionary, in fact, may not even contain the word. Because such problems may occur with a dictionary, L2-based strategies are often more effective for communication.

Having distinguished recommended and non-recommended strategies, we argue that implementing a CS training program should depend upon whether students already use the recommended strategies or not. Each teacher first needs to assess his or her particular student population. This paper reports our assessment, and results suggest that our students do need strategy training.

Results

Many students listed more than one strategy that they would use. We decided to consider the strategies in the order listed, assuming that the order represented which strategies were thought of first, next, and later. Indeed, many students indicated an order of preference with phrases that may be translated as "First I would. . . . If that didn't work, I would . . ." Others seemed to list strategies as equivalent choices, but nonetheless given in a particular order. In these cases, students used language translatable as "I would. . . . Another possibility is. . . . " We analyzed only the strategies they listed first.

Although students were not randomly assigned to the two situations (but, rather, were interleaved) we took the liberty of violating this statistical assumption and performed a Chi-square analysis of our data. The

Table 2: Chi-square Analyses of Recommended Versus Non-recommended Strategies in Two Situations.

	The Telephone Situation				
Strategies	Obs	Exp	O-E	2	2/E
Recommended	42	40.5	+1.5	2.25	0.05
Non-recommended	39	40.5	-1.5	2.25	0.05

$\chi 2$ (1, N=81) = 0.1, n.s.

	The Classroom Situation				
Strategies	Obs	Exp	O-E	2	2/E
Recommended	26	40	-14	196	4.9
Non-recommended	54	40	+14	196	4.9

$\chi 2$ (1, N = 80) = 9.8, $p < .005$

	Situations Compared		
Strategies	Telephone	Classroom	Both
Recommended	42	26	68
Non-recommended	39	54	93
Total	81	80	161

$\chi 2$ (1, N = 161) = 6.178, $p < .025$

statistic allowed us to determine if the difference in responses between students in the two situations was reliable or not. We set the criterion for statistical significance at $p < .05$.

For the telephone situation, the number of students who first said they would use a recommended strategy was nearly equal to the number of those who first said they would use a non-recommended one. As shown in Table 2, an analysis using a one-way Chi-square statistic revealed no significant difference between the types at the $p < .05$ level ($\chi 2$ (1, $n = 81$) = 0.1, n.s.). On the other hand, for the classroom situation, we found a preponderance greater than 2:1 of non-recommended to recommended strategies, a significant difference ($\chi 2$ (1, $n = 80$) = 9.8, $p <$. 005). Thus, students' responses to the two situations appeared to vary. A two-way Chi-square shows that the difference between selection of recommended or non-recommended strategies across the two situations was statistically significant ($\chi 2$ (1, $N = 161$) = 6.178, $p < .025$).

In the telephone situation, most students first said they would (a) use an L2-based strategy (mostly description, 22 of the 42 L2-based strategy choices), or (b) abandon communication (31 of the 39 non-recommended strategy choices). In the classroom situation, the largest group said they would use a non-linguistic strategy (primarily mime, and secondarily drawing a picture, together comprising 30 of 38 non-linguistic strategy choices). The second largest group said they would use an L2-based strategy (again, mostly description, 19 of the 26 L2-based strategy choices). Finally, a third group said they would use a dictionary (11 of 12 outside appeals).

Discussion

Students' Strategy Choices in Two Situations

The different responses to the two situations suggest that if these students know that they can use a non-verbal CS (e.g., in face-to-face communication) nearly half of them (the largest single group) will list one as their first choice. When they have no such recourse to the non-verbal channel (e.g., over the phone), the number of students who first choose to abandon the conversation dramatically increases. The students seem to avoid a perceived weakness in L2 competence, relying, whenever possible, on other perceived non-linguistic strengths. At least in the case of concrete nouns (and probably many basic verbs and adjectives as well), it seems easier for them to communicate by non-verbal means than to use the L2. As we argued earlier, we doubt if strategies such as gestures, drawing, or pointing at objects do much to develop students' linguistic abilities.

We designed the telephone situation to force students either to use their L2 or to abandon communication. Students never listed mime as a first-choice strategy, since mime cannot be done over the phone; the person in the situation has to abandon the telephone conversation and then seek face-to-face contact with the pharmacist (indeed, the students who listed mime second or later described what they needed to do before they could use mime). In the telephone situation, about half the students take a chance and speak in English while the other half hang up the phone. Should the evidence that about 50% of our subjects already have L2-based CS in mind compel us to say that such strategies need not be taught, or should we say that since about 50% do not have these strategies in mind, some classroom work devoted to strategy use may be beneficial? Pedagogically, a passing grade for only half of one's class is unacceptable. Furthermore, we see that as other, seemingly easier, options are made available in class, our students are less likely to use L2-based strategies.

The number of students who opted to abandon communication or use either non-linguistic or L1-based strategies might suggest that the situations were too difficult for our students' L2 abilities. However, looking at the L2-based strategies described by other students in our data, we do not think so. For example, two students wrote, in English, "the thing to cut off my nails," and "I need to cut my nail. Do you have something to?" We would like to take classroom opportunities to encourage learners to use these kinds of strategies and to give them relevant structures to increase their range of expression.

Conclusion

We accept Faerch and Kasper's (1983) proposal that L2-based CS are involved in a speaker's hypothesis testing and automatization of an L2, and therefore can help the speaker learn the language. Our students' responses to our two situations suggest that quite a few students do not first think of using an L2-based strategy to counter an L2 communication problem, especially when they can choose a non-verbal strategy. Therefore, we need to encourage our students to use those strategies which benefit language learning. While the relationship between strategies and learning and/or proficiency needs further study, we believe our work supports the idea that CS training is valuable for foreign language learners if the following conditions are met: (a) the strategies practiced in class are chosen for learning as well as communication value, and (b) the learners in question do not yet realize the value of using L2-based strategies.

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Appendix: The Two Situations, English and Japanese Versions

The Classroom Situation

あなたは大学の英語の教室にいます。英会話の練習のために、もう一人の学生と英語で話しています。話題は土曜日や日曜日のできごとです。「土曜日の朝は大変でした。水道の蛇口から水がもれたから、二、三時間も栓を直していました。」と言いたいです。しかし、「栓」と英語で言う方法がわかりません。その時、あなたはどうしますか。

You are in a college English classroom. To practice English conversation, you are speaking in English to another student. The topic of conversation is what you did over the weekend. You want to say, "Saturday morning I was really busy. Because water was leaking out of a faucet, I spent two or three hours fixing the valve." However, you do not know how to say the word "valve" in English. In this situation, what would you do?

The Telephone Situation

ロスへ海外旅行にいった。ロスに着いた後、指の爪が割れて爪切りが必要になった。しかし、自分の爪切りは日本の住宅においてきた事に気付いた。買い物の時間を無駄にしないように、イエローページを使って、ある薬局に 電話した。薬局にかけると、爪切りは英語で何と言うか知らない事を思い出した。その時、あなたはどうしますか。

You are on a trip to Los Angeles. A fingernail breaks and you need a nailclipper. However, you realize that you have left your nailclipper at home in Japan. To avoid wasting time shopping, you check the yellow pages and call up a pharmacy. When the pharmacist answers, you remember that you do not know how to say "nailclipper" in English. In this situation, what would you do?