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# COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES: DEFLECTION OR DEPARTURE?

## ESTRATEGIAS DE COMUNICACIÓN: DESVIACIONES O SALIDAS

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**Abstract**
This empirical study investigates the possibilities of enhancing the EFL students' communicative competence and self-confidence through the teaching of communicative strategies. It was conducted in a 7 semester course of continuous work on various aspects of oral discourse. 24 students from La Universidad de Salamanca between 18 and 22 years old participated in the research. 12 of them were in their 1st year, and 12 in their 4th year. The findings confirm that the teaching of communicative strategies enhances learners' communicative skills and their self-confidence while communicating in English as well as their accuracy and fluency.

**Key Words:** Second language acquisition; communication strategies; applied linguistics and EFL teaching.

**Resumen**
Este estudio empírico investiga la posibilidad de mejorar la confianza en sí mismo y la competencia comunicativa de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera a través de la enseñanza de las estrategias de comunicación. Se llevó a cabo con 24 estudiantes de la Universidad de Salamanca en un curso de siete semanas de clase en el que se realizó trabajo continuo sobre varios aspectos del discurso oral. Los resultados confirman que la enseñanza de estrategias de comunicación mejora la habilidad comunicativa de los alumnos y la confianza en sí mismos al comunicarse en inglés, así como su precisión y la fluidez. El estudio también revela que el grupo más competente se benefició más de la formación que el menos competente.

**Palabras clave:** Aprendizaje de una segunda lengua; estrategias de comunicación; lingüística aplicada; enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Communication strategies (CSs) have recently became the center of interest, especially in areas of language teaching, since language and communication are lately considered as parts of one another. A further development in teaching is the growing assumption that teachers should adapt pedagogies which promote learner's autonomy by making the students aware of their learning processes and teaching them strategies they may use to improve their competences (Ataollah, 2010; Cohen and Macaro, 2009; Galotti, 2011; Nakatani, 2010; Oxford, 2003; Salvin, 1990; Yang, 2014). In foreign language education different frameworks for learner's autonomy and competences development are being incorporated into teaching approaches together with strong appeals to make the student learn to communicate through listening (The Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, Teaching, Assessment, 2011). However, teachers still center their interest on the global form of spoken language, and on consciousness or proficiency as the basic tool for developing the communicative ability; disregarding the importance of teaching specific aspects of the oral discourse in developing the students fluency. This is precisely what raised the question about the teachability of these communication strategies, which has always been a controversial subject in the literature. Viewpoints differ from pros that defend the teaching of CSs, and cons that reject it. Arguments against the teaching of CSs are based on the notion that strategic competence develops in the speaker's L1 and is freely transferable to target language use (Bongaerts and Poulisse, 1989; Bongaerts, Kellerman & Bentlage, 1987; Paribakht, 1985; Poulisse, 1990). That is, language learners have their applicable CSs repertoire already developed regardless of their L2 proficiency level (Bialystock and Kellerman, 1987). So, rather than teaching CSs, what may be useful to the learners is to provide them with more linguistic baggage as Kellerman concluded: "there is no justification for providing training in compensatory strategies in the classroom … teach the learners more language and let the strategies look after themselves" (1991:158).

Following this stream of thought, Bialystock (1990) argued that CSs are the reflection of the underlying cognitive processes, and therefore, it would be useless to focus on surface structures to improve strategy use or communicative competence. She pointed out that "the more language the learner knows, the more possibilities exist for the system to be flexible and to adjust itself to meet the demands of the learner. What one must teach students of a language is not the strategy, but language" (1990:147). Canale and Swain (1980) also supported the same idea since according to them CSs are to be acquired in real-life interaction and not to be learned in classroom tasks.

Other researchers, notwithstanding, believe in the effectiveness of strategy training (Chen, 1990; Faerch and Kasper, 1983; Paribakht, 1985; Rost and Ross, 1991; Tarone and Yule, 1989; Willems, 1987) although very few strategy training researches have been conducted to investigate the teachability of CSs as Bialystock pointed out "there is little empirical research investigating the pedagogy of CSs, so descriptions and evaluations of any procedure are somewhat speculative" (1990:149). Still, there are some studies that

confirm the validity of strategy training like the ones reported on by Faerch and Kasper (1986), Rost and Ross (1991), and Tarone and Yule (1989) who all gave an evidence of the teachability of CSs, and supported the idea of strategy training as a means "to allow the learner to operate with a small vocabulary, and permit speech to remain fluent" (Nation, 1990, in Kellerman, 1998:97).

Others go further to stress the fact that teaching CSs may be useful if it is implemented with the objective of raising the learner's metacognitive awareness (Kellerman, 1998). This concept was elaborated by Faerch and Kasper who provoked a theoretical shift in defining the act of teaching by explaining that "if by teaching we also mean making learners conscious about aspects of their (already existing) behavior, it is obvious that we should teach them about strategies, in particular, how to use communication strategies most appropriately" (1980:98).

From the aforementioned interpretations of the notion of teaching, we can conclude that the acceptance or rejection of CSs training is basically based on the belief of what teaching is. It is obvious that the ones who argue against the teaching of CSs have a narrow view of teaching, namely, that of passing on new information. Bialystock and Kellerman provided a good example of the reason behind the controversy on teaching CSs by explaining that "it is one thing to encourage their use (and create the conditions in which they can be used), and quite another to actively teach communication strategies in the classroom" (1978:172).

However, for the supporters of CSs training, teaching in a broader sense includes what Dörnyei (1995:62-64) limited in six interrelated strategy training procedures:

1. Raising learner's awareness about the nature and communicative potential of CSs: "Making the learners conscious of strategies already in their repertoire, sensitizing them to the appropriate situations where these could actually work" (62).
2. Encouraging students to be willing to take risks and use CSs: To manipulate available language without being afraid of making errors.
3. Providing L2 models of the use of certain CSs: Using listening and visual materials and guiding the learners to identify, categorize and evaluate CSs used by other speakers.
4. Highlighting cross-cultural differences in CSs use: It includes the teaching of stylistic appropriateness of CSs explaining both use and usage.
5. Teaching communication strategies directly: Providing CSs and the possible use of those structures by "presenting linguistic devices to verbalize CSs which have a finite range of surface structure realizations" (64).
6. Providing opportunities for practice in strategy use: Practicing CSs is essential because they "can only fulfill their function as immediate first aid devices if their use has reached an automatic stage" and "this automatization will not always occur without specific focused practice" (64).

Summing up, teaching CSs can be either making the learners aware of their already existing CSs or introducing new strategies through a training course which, as Oxford

stated, should indicate "why the strategy is useful, how it can be transferred to different tasks, and how learners can evaluate the success of this strategy" (1990:207).

Although communicative competence has been the center of interest of many second language acquisition researchers (Long, 1996; Pica, 2002), little attention has been given to the ability of employing different tactics by language users in achieving communicative competence and the teachability of these strategies. This competence has been defined by many researchers in different ways by including various sub-skills; however in this research we opt for the definition given by Canale and Swain (1980) since it is believed to be the most complete one, as far the objectives of this investigation are concerned. Communicative competence, then, is the ability to use the linguistic system appropriately in a specific situation using linguistic, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence. The difference between sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence is that in the first one speakers respect the norms of the speech community with whom they are communicating; whereas, the second enables them to use certain strategies to compensate for their lack of knowledge.

The actual paper examines this neglected area of communication strategies, and their implications for research and teaching as a practical way to develop the student's communicative competence to cope with the unpredictable communicative problems.

Based on oral data gathered from a semester course of continuous teaching of communication strategies as an essential aspect of a successful oral performance, this study investigates the possibility of improving the subjects communicative competence by guiding them towards the discovery, awareness, and the use of CSs. The experiment was guided by the following hypotheses:

1- Teaching CSs will enhance the students' communicative competence.
2- The students will get more confident speaking in English by the end of the strategy training.
3- The training will improve the subjects' oral fluency.

## 2. BASIC CONCEPTS IN TEACHING AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

### 2.1. Teaching vs. Training in Communicative Strategies

The teachability of communication strategies has been controversial during many decades; therefore many researchers have opted for strategy training as a substitution of the teaching act, in terms of terminology, since it does not provide a different meaning from that of teaching. The proponents of the notion that CSs are not teachable, or do not worth being taught, hold the fact that all the learners of a SL/FL do already have their strategic competence built. That is, the cognitive mechanisms are already available in the repertoire of the CSs, and what students need is the language to shape them. For Kellerman (1991), if a student shows that she/he is not good strategy user, this is due to his/her poor linguistic means that hinder his/her strategic behavior. Accordingly, Kellerman insists that "there is no justification for providing training in compensatory

strategies in the classroom (…). Teach the learner more language and make the strategies look after themselves" (1991:158).

Others researchers, consider that the strategy training is essential not with the aim of making the students use CSs, but with that of making them better users of these strategies (Chen, 1990; Dörnyei, 1995; Faerch and Kasper, 1983; Haastrup and Philipson, 1983; Tarone, 1984). Faerch and Kasper, for example, suggested teaching the learners CSs as a way of making them aware of their already existing strategies and guiding them towards the correct use of these communicative strategies. This idea introduced by Faerch and Kasper (1983) proved to be effective in many studies conducted by different investigators in the field (Cohen, 1998; Nakatani, 2005; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1999).

Therefore, many researchers, like Cohen (1998), support the notion of raising the learners' consciousness of the nature and the communicative potential of CSs to familiarize the students with the CSs through illustrative examples that enable them to be more receptive and to make a better use of CSs. The strategy training as Cohen explained:

> (…) predicated on the assumption that if learners are conscious about and become responsible for the selection, use, and evaluation of their learning strategies, they will become more successful language learners by (...) taking more responsibility for their own language learning, and enhancing their use of the target language out of class. In other words, the ultimate goal of strategy training is to empower students by allowing them to take control of the language learning process (1998:70).

Thus, since it is impossible to teach learners all the linguistic tools they might need in the future, it is essential to teach them how to deal with CSs to help them overcome, as McDonough (1995:82) stated, "the possible breakdowns in communication and therefore keeping the channel of communication open. Their use should not be seen as an admission of failure but rather as an achievement." Following the same stream, the current research involves the two experimental groups into the strategy training with the aim of making them better users of these strategies and granting them a sense of security in using the TL in its oral form.

It is usual of learners of English to find difficulties with vocabulary and to feel that they do not have enough words to express their ideas. Our subjects were sensitized that they were not the only ones to have this weakness at spoken English by bringing into the classroom some parts of authentic speech, where some famous people from different parts of the world show the difficulties they face while speaking in English. In this way, students were made aware of the importance of improving their CSs.

### 2.2. Fluency or accuracy?

The most common measures used to capture the differences in the quality of performance in written and oral mediums are those of fluency and accuracy. This special issue addresses a general question that is at the heart of much research in applied linguistics and second language acquisition: What makes a second or a foreign language user a more or less proficient language user? Fluency is the aim of many English learners since it has been always regarded as the most important characteristic of native speakers.

This basic term was defined in second language acquisition (SLA) as the ability to get across communicative intent without too much hesitation and too many pauses to cause barriers or a breakdown in communication (Byrne, 1988; Hakdins, Lewis and Budden, 2011; Nation, 1990; Thanesh, 2013). Fluency and accuracy have been first used in the field of L2 pedagogy where in the 1980s a distinction was made between fluent versus accurate L2 usage to investigate the development of oral L2 proficiency in classroom contexts. One of the first to use this dichotomy was Brumfit (1984), who distinguished between fluency-oriented activities, which foster spontaneous oral L2 production, and accuracy-oriented activities, which focus on linguistic form and on the controlled production of grammatically correct linguistic structures in the L2. The terms, since then, were widely used both as performance descriptors for the oral and written assessment of language learners as well as indicators of learners' proficiency underlying their performance; they have also been used for measuring progress in language learning. Spoken fluency means being able to communicate ideas without having to break the flow of the speech to formulate a message. By contrast, spoken accuracy refers to the correct use of forms where utterances do not contain errors affecting the phonological, syntactic, and semantic or discourse features of a language (Byrne, 1988).

The way to measure fluency, one of the main points of this investigation, has been a matter of debate for years (Koponen and Riggenbach, 2000). Four different approaches describing the measurement of fluency mark the literature of Second and Foreign Language learner's oral production. The first trend of research focuses on the temporal aspect of oral production (Lenon, 1990). The second add interactive characteristics to this communicative competence (Riggenbach, 1991), the third digs into its phonological features (Wennerstrom, 2000) and finally the fourth adds the concept of formulaic speech to the studies of fluency in oral production (Ejzenberg, 2000).

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at the University of Salamanca. The investigator was the teacher of the two groups which were selected setting the following criteria: That they were full-time university students, non-repeaters, never been to English speaking countries, never received English private classes, have no native speakers friends or English speaking family members. The characteristics of the subjects were settled before hand as a way to control any possible intervening variable and to be sure of the homogeneity of the participating groups.

### 3.1. Participants

The participants were 24 Spanish university students from the English Department between the age of 18 and 22 years old. Divided as, 12 students in their 1st year and other 12 students in their 4th year. At the time of the research they were coursing their studies of English studies at the University of Salamanca. They are believed to form homogenous groups of low-proficient and high-proficient students, since the members of each group share the same academic experience due to the fact that they have the same proficiency

level at the university and they are all non-repeaters and they were divided following their results in the placement test (Quick Oxford Placement Test). Moreover, a number of variables that were assumed to have an effect on the learner's target language (TL) and their linguistic performance were also controlled. Thus, the selected subjects had to respond to the previously mentioned criteria (they were full-time university students, non-repeaters, never been to English speaking countries, never received English private classes, have no native speakers friends or English speaking family members). These criteria were controlled by asking all the subjects to answer some oral questions about their personal information related to their language learning and experiences.

### 3.2. Data collection and research instrument

The research was conducted in three related phases which included the following research instruments as a means of data collection:

- *Pre-test:* Interview, pair-conversation, and self-confidence questionnaire.
- *During the training***:** The practice part of each CS (interviews and conversations).
- *Post-test:*

  *At the end of the training*: The self-confidence questionnaire.

It is completely oral data gathered as part of the CSs training, in form of interviews and conversations carried out to practice the taught strategies, and as answers to questionnaires about self-confidence. Generally, all the conditions of the pre-test including the timing and the sequencing of the tasks were strictly respected in the process of collecting data for the post-test. That is, subjects had to do similar tasks in similar conditions during different sessions to make the comparison reliable and valid. Consequently, the data of the post-test were collected through the use of similar tasks to the ones implemented in the pre-test data collection.

## 4. RESEARCH DESIGN

### 4.1. Preparing the ground

I. Confidence building

The first step that seemed compulsory was confidence-building, since it is very important to reduce the reluctance of our subjects to participate in English conversations. The students were very worried about their grammatical and pronunciation mistakes, so during this phase the basic objective of the investigator was to make the subjects feel more relaxed and more confident. Various pieces of natural English were exposed during the 1st two classes (2 hours for the low proficient and a similar session for the high proficient group); students were asked to listen to interviews with famous football and tennis players (see appendix 1). After listening, there was an attempted to raise their consciousness about the imperfect English used by the interviewees by asking them the following questions:

1. How do the interviewees express their feelings/point of views/plans? Which words give you the information?
2. Listen again and pay attention to the following gap-fillers: ... er ..., you know …, I mean ..., I was …, I am …, this is …, it is ...
3. What's the function of these expressions?
4. What's the reason behind the use of these words?

The next part of the lesson was dedicated to answer the previous questions as a means to explain that although message is not grammatically correct, there is always a possibility to convey it to the interlocutor. Moreover, the objective of this session was to make the participants aware of the importance of using repetitions and some sounds or gap-fillers to gain time and to sound both natural and confident. The listener will not worry about the mistakes that can appear in the conversations if the message is conveyed in a confident way. So, having in mind that it is necessary:

- To think of their message rather than of grammar rules.
- To rehearse what they want to say.
- To have some expectations of their interlocutors.
- To have possible responses.
- To prepare some answers or spoken reactions.
- To practice often.

The subjects were guided to do the designed practice with the objective of building their self- confidence.

Practice1: (5min each subject)

Subjects were asked to practice what we explained through introducing themselves to the group and asking questions about the others. This task has the principle of making the subjects more confident while speaking in English which will facilitate the implementation of the coming tasks.

To make our subjects aware of those two markers of a good or bad use of second or foreign language (SL/FL) this pre-training phase included a detailed explanation of the differences between fluency and accuracy and the importance of both in communication. However, our subjects were made to recognize that in the process of interlanguage (IL) development it is not feasible to work on both at the same time. The context of learning, the objectives and the needs of language users are believed to be influential in determining the point of focus in a teaching/learning process that might be either fluency, accuracy or both. Nevertheless, even though when fluency and accuracy are both essential in the performance of the SL/FL users, which is the most dominant case, it is not possible to focus on both at the same time, and the process of teaching/learning should be organized to give clues and practice of each skill at a time. The subjects in this part of the research were made to contemplate their target (Fluency, Accuracy or both) by listening to different English learners explaining the problems they have with spoken English. Students were asked to listen carefully and answer two questions:

1. What does she/he think is the cause of the problem?
2. Do you have the same problem?

- *Identify your style*

The students were required to identify their style (accuracy or fluency) by answering the following questions:

1. Is being correct the most important thing for you?
2. Do you always take risks trying new vocabulary even though it might not be correct?

Then, after making them recognize what is easy for them, they were advised to work always on what is difficult, and never forget to focus on one area at a time (Nijva, Groenhout, Schoonen and Hulstijn, 2013; Harmer, 2010).

Practice 2: (10min each subject)

Subjects were recorded speaking on different topics: conversations about the new educational system, job opportunities in Spain, the sufficiency of the offered scholarships, etc. Later on, they had the possibility to listen to themselves and were guided to detect their main problems (tenses, modal verbs, question forms, hesitation, etc.) then, each one was helped while speaking to overcome his/her problems. The teacher had a list with the names of the participants and the problems that each one had, and worked with each one in accordance with his/her necessity. It was necessary to interrupt them and encourage them to forget about their mistakes, especially for those who sounded non-fluent just because they stopped too many times to correct their grammatical mistakes.

### 4.2. The research taxonomy

We based our study on Faerch and Kasper's taxonomy (1983) for both the training stage and the data analysis since it is considered to be "the most carefully set up taxonomy" (Kellerman, Amerlaan and Poulisse, 1990:165). However, this taxonomy has been alerted to fit the objectives and the methodological framework of the study. Since the experiment aims at enhancing the subjects' fluency and self-confidence in using English, we considered it trivial to deal with reduction strategies (nonproductive strategies) that cannot serve the aims of the actual study since they are not productive ones and do not help students to be active participants. Such was, also, the case of some compensatory strategies through which speakers of SL/FL make use of their L1 to solve their communicative problems. That is, this study includes only the following part of what Faerch and Kasper defined as achievement strategies: I) Strategies to Substitute the Missing Words (Paraphrasing, Restructuring and Cooperative strategies). This taxonomy also included the use of II) Chunks and III) Signposting as two relevant communicative strategies that are believed to be good tools for non-native speakers to solve their communicative problems. According to Erman and Warren (2000), the prefabricated chunks are utilized as a sign of fluent performance, which largely depends on automatic processing of stored units. Whereas, signposting are discourse markers which help the listener follow the speech and make the speaker sound more fluent. Moreover, the taxonomy of this study includes two more general types of strategies, which were further subcategorized into two groupings each, based on previous representative studies (Bialystock, 1980; Dörnyei and Scott, 1997; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Tarone, 1984).

These two main strategies are IV) Time-gaining Strategies (Gap-fillers), and V**)** Maintenance Strategies (Providing active response and shadowing).

*I. Strategies to substitute the missing words*

These strategies help the speaker to explain what she/he means.

1. *Paraphrasing* is achieved by giving a description or a definition of the target item using the speaker's own words. It usually results in an elaboration of the speech. This strategy has three sub-classifications:

   a. General physical properties. They refer to universal features of objects (color, size, material, and special dimensions).
   b. Specific features. They are usually marked by the surface structure "has".
   c. Functional description. It indicates the function of an object, and the actions that can be performed with it.

2. Restructuring: it is a good strategy to avoid communication breakdowns just because the speaker is unable to find the correct word. To gain time to think of synonyms or a specific description, the speaker can start again from the beginning. It is not unusual to hear native speakers of English saying (what was I saying? what I mean is, I just wanted to say that ...).
3. A cooperative Strategy

- Appeal for authority: Asking the interlocutor to supply a lexical item, or asking about its correctness, to be used only in case the speaker gets stuck and cannot produce the needed word. "I cannot think of the word I need ...", "How do you say this in English …", "I cannot find the word ...," etc.

Practice 3: (5min)

The practice of the previous strategies was done through a list of vocabulary handled to each participant who had the responsibility of conveying the meaning of each word, to his/her partner, without pronouncing it through definition, explanation or even an appeal for authority when necessary (examples of the used words are: fluency, malice, hesitation, confusion, rice, computer, shower, grass, etc.).

*II. Language chunks*

Chunks entail that knowing the meaning of the words is useful, but knowing their collocations is necessary. It is the use of already learnt expression to solve a communicative problem or just to sound fluent. Since words do not appear in isolation, our experimental groups were taught to learn them in phrases or groups of words which go together all the time, and to use them as chunks to make their speech sound fluent and natural. This is basically learnt through listening out for fixed phrases, recording collocations and idioms and introducing them into their daily conversations. This repertoire could be helpful to gain time for more thinking and to express a big mass of information with short and concentrated sentences, which is energy saving. This is what Peters explained: "if I find an especially felicitous way of expressing an idea, I may store up that turn of phrase so that the next time I need it. It will come forth as a prefabricated chunk, even though to my hearer it may not be distinguishable from newly generated speech" (1983: 3).

Practice 4: (5min each group)

Subjects listened to various natural conversations and were asked to look for chunks like "Live life to the full"; "Take it or leave it"; "Take it as it comes"; "Came up with"; "Every now and then"; "That's quite right"; "On a voluntary basis"; Then to group them into categories depending on how they would use them. The groups had to challenge each other to use all the found phrases in a conversation about the English classes actually coursed at the university.

*III. Signposting*

Showing how the given information is relevant, and highlighting the important points of the talk is an essential feature of spoken English that keeps the listener's interest and guides him/her throughout the whole speech into the selection of the basic message to be conveyed. Phrases such as *so*, *now*, *firstly*, *moreover*, and *anyways* can be used as discourse markers (Schiffrin, 1987). Those discourse markers are used in both written and spoken English to link what comes before to what comes next. Therefore, to improve fluency skills it is necessary to use those discourse markers that Schiffrin defines as bracketing units of speech that operate to relate the discourse units and give sense to what the speaker is expressing.

Practice 5: (5min for the whole group)

The participants were asked to listen for the linking words that mark the outline of each one of the talks provided by the researcher. Then, they had to apply this to their speech. The individuals' speeches were exposed to the group and feedback was offered by their classmates to evaluate the flow of the talk and the coherence of the ideas.

*IV. Time gaining strategies*

To be an effective speaker is to be able to involve the listener and create the willingness of listening through the choice of the language. It is essential to avoid the dullness of repetition by using gap-fillers, which are defined as filling words or gambits to fill pauses and to gain time to think. When the speakers have difficulties expressing an idea, they use these strategies to give themselves time to think and to keep the communicative channel open. Another CS that guarantees capturing the interest of the listen is asking him/her questions to make him/her follow the talk.

Practice 6: (10min for the whole group)

Our participants listened to various radio programs, and had to note down all the used gap-fillers, as well as, the questions directed to the listeners to involve them into the speech. Eventually, the students were given the opportunity to practice the last activity by making group conversations about different topics of their interest, where they had to debate and express their points of views in an effective way to involve their listeners. The students were given a mark by their classmates in a range from 1-10 points depending on the frequency of the used questions and gap-fillers. At the end of the activity the subjects could listen to themselves, and the whole group dedicated a short time to listen to the best students, and highlight their effort in being interesting speakers who attract the attention of their listeners.

*V. Maintenance strategies*

Listening is the same in all languages, so speakers of SL/FL can transfer their way of listening in their mother tongue to that of English. In this session the researcher

included two types of CSs which were providing active response and shadowing. The former entailed being an effective listener by making positive comments or using other conversation gambits that show interest in the speech. The latter type presents exact, partial or expanded repetitions of the interlocutor's preceding utterance in order to show the listeners' understanding of important issues. That is, the listener is expected to show she/he is interested in the speech by asking questions or giving help, when necessary, bearing in mind that the success of the conversation is always a shared responsibility between the speaker and the listener.

Practice 7: (5min for the whole group)

To recognize the difference between an effective and a passive listener, students made couple conversations about the same topic (See appendix 2) and half of our listeners were to act as passive ones who did not show any interest in the speech while the second half were active listeners who questioned the ideas, asked for explanations and made noises to express their agreement when necessary. The recorded conversations were studied in the classroom; eventually, the subjects recognized the extreme difference between the two types of interlocutors.

### 4.3. Research instruments and tasks administration

The following research instruments were used to conduct the study:

A pre-test to analyze the communicative problems of our subjects, a questionnaire to make sure of the real needs of the study corpus, instructions for the experiment, short natural conversations, a productive post-test after each part of the study, a final and general productive post-test, and a post questionnaire. (See appendixes from 1 to 10).

The following procedures were accomplished:

1. Each two participants completed a pre-test: They talked during 15min about a subject of their interest which they had to choose from a list of subjects, or to propose it in case they did not like any.
2. All the participants answered the questionnaire to form an idea about the reasons behind their communicative problems.
3. Each group received the necessary instructions about how to fulfill a talk, and a simple explanation of each strategy.
4. All the participants listened to the natural conversations used to back the explanation of the studied CSs.
5. Each participant produced a speech using the studied CSs at the end of the lesson.
6. Each couple of participants did the post-test to fulfill the requirements they had to participate in a conversation during 15mns.

### 4.4. Data analysis

I. Data analysis

- *The pre-training*: We analyzed the pre-tests (Interview, pair-conversation and the self-confidence questionnaire) for the needs and the problems of communication, and we modified some aspects of the strategy training following the results of the

three tasks, previously mentioned. There was a great consciousness of the need to develop the communicative competence, and we noticed a strong need for learning CSs.

- *During the training*: The continuous practice of the taught CSs was an interesting source of information for this study. It was analyzed constantly to have a control of the students' progress and to concrete the points which would need more emphasis. The taught CSs (interlanguage based strategies; cooperative strategies; time gaining strategies; maintenance strategies; structural strategies) were worked twice as a whole chunk after finishing the designed classes.
- *After the training:* The subjects of the high and low proficient groups had to practice all the CSs during 2 sessions. It is believed to be an opportunity to construct a general framework and a good way to help the subjects put into practice all the CSs at the same time. This practice helped them conceptualize an overall scheme that they can bear in mind during any conversation. The pair-conversations and the interviews of the two last sessions were studied in detail to see whether the subjects were able to use the taught CSs and compare their pre-test conversation with the post-test. We also analyzed the post-test self-confidence questionnaire that was compared to the pre-test self-confidence questionnaire to see the effect of the study on the subjects' self-confidence.

II. The Scoring:

The tasks (Interviews and pair-conversations) and the self-confidence questionnaires were analyzed for the produced CSs and for the level of the subjects' self-confidence. First, the data were primarily analyzed for the identification and categorization of CSs; then, the elicited strategies were numerically interpreted to answer the research questions and to prove or reject the research hypotheses. In this research, the frequencies of CSs were manually calculated by counting the number of CSs used by each subject per task. A score of 1 was assigned once to any used CS at a single task, and another score from 0 to 10 was assigned to the whole conversation or interview regarding the degree of effectiveness of the used CSs. The judgment of the effectiveness of the used CSs was based on a rank order provided on a 5 point scale that was adapted from Chen (1990). The researcher rated the degree of effectiveness of the used items. Each interval on the rank is given a numerical value as follows:

5 Effective ---------- Conveying clearly the meaning/idea intended that goes with the context (5).

4 Quite effective ---------- Conveying the meaning/idea though wrongly expressed (4).

3 Moderately effective ---------- The meaning/idea is ambiguous (3).

2 Less effective ---------- Very hard to convey meaning /item (2).

1 Not effective at all ---------- Unable to convey the meaning/item (0).

To analyze the effect of the strategy training on the subjects' communicative competence and self-confidence, the pre-test and the post-test were compared to get the results of the study.

To measure fluency we consider it more adequate for this type of research that focuses on productive communication strategies to consider production (number of syllables) and not the average of pauses with the aim of highlighting the effect of the training on the use of communication strategies on the learners' oral productivity. In calculating the articulation rate the total number of syllables produced in a given speech sample was divided by the amount of time taken to produce them in seconds, which was then multiplied by sixty. Unlike in the calculation of speech rate, pause time was excluded. Articulation rate is expressed as the mean number of syllables produced per minute over the total amount of time spent speaking when producing the speech sample. Following Riggenbach (1991), in the articulation rate all semantic units were counted, "including filled pauses and partial words (using the criterion that partial words contain not just an initial consonant but also a vowel and thus are recognizable as words)" (p.428), which goes hand in hand with this study that teaches productive CSs, including gap fillers, as stated in the above detailed research taxonomy.

## 5. THE RESULTS

### 5.1. Use of CSs by the Low and the High proficient groups in the pre-test

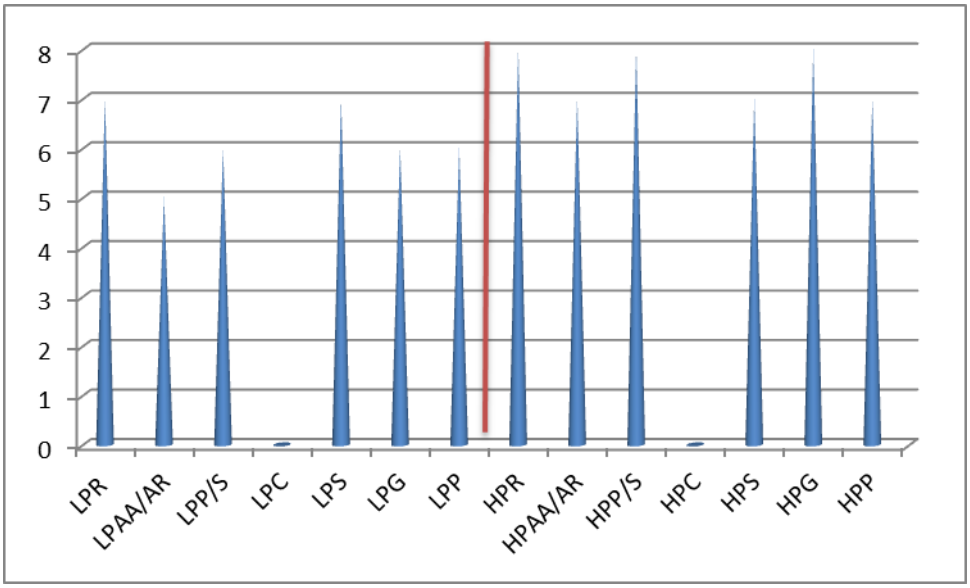



*Figure 1*. The number of oral communication strategies produced by the high and low proficient groups in the pre-tests.

*Nota*. R= Restructuring, AA=appeal for authority AR= Asking for repetition, C= Chunks, S= signposting, P/S= Providing active responses & shadowing, G= Gap fillers P= Paraphrasing.

From the graphic above we can generally assume that there is a lack of use of CSs, and that there is no difference between the high and the low proficient groups, which may be an indicator of unconsciousness about the existing CSs and a low level of practice of spoken English. This makes of the actual investigation an interesting issue that brings to the field of ESL/EFL teaching another perspective of introducing the language into the classroom. It is worth mentioning that the current study has as a nucleus aim the

demonstration of the teachability of oral communication strategies and as a result it also has the objective of investigating the possible effects of introducing oral communication strategies into the S/FL teaching contexts.

### 5.2. Fluency and self-confidence of the High and the Low proficient groups in the pre-test

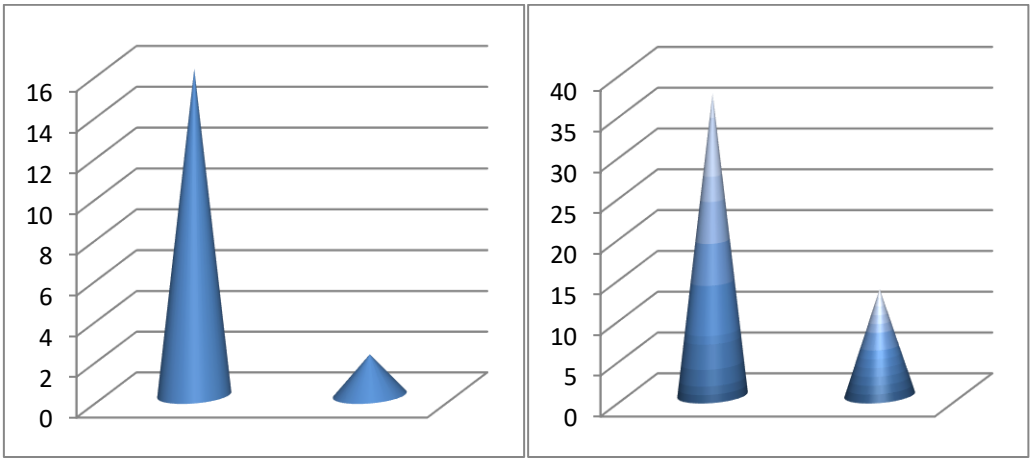



*Figure 2*. LP Fluency LP Self-confidence *Figure 3*. HP Fluency HP Self-confidence

[The number of words produced per-minute by the high and the low proficient groups in the pre-tests and their level of self-confidence LP= Low-proficient, HP= high-proficient].

Subjects' fluency was measured by counting the number of words produced by each subject per second in the pre and post-tests as explained at the end of the scoring part of this study. During the pre-test the subjects of the two groups did not show themselves to be fluent speakers of English. The high proficient group was better than the low proficient one to a certain level, but they both displayed their need to work on fluency through the analyzed data. The high proficient group showed a certain degree of accuracy and self-confidence as opposite to the low proficient group that was null at the three aspects which we considered relevant to spoken English. Nevertheless, we cannot deny the need of both to improve their spoken English.

### 5.3. Use of CSs by the Low and the High proficient groups in the post-test

The results of the training were clearly reflected in the data of the post-tests, and the two groups developed their use of oral CSs as a result of teaching and practice. Both levels benefited from the training and demonstrated a higher degree of use of oral communication strategies. The slight difference, reflected in the graphic above, between the high and the low proficient groups although not of great importance it believed to be due to the level of proficiency that naturally affects the level of development of the subjects' IL.

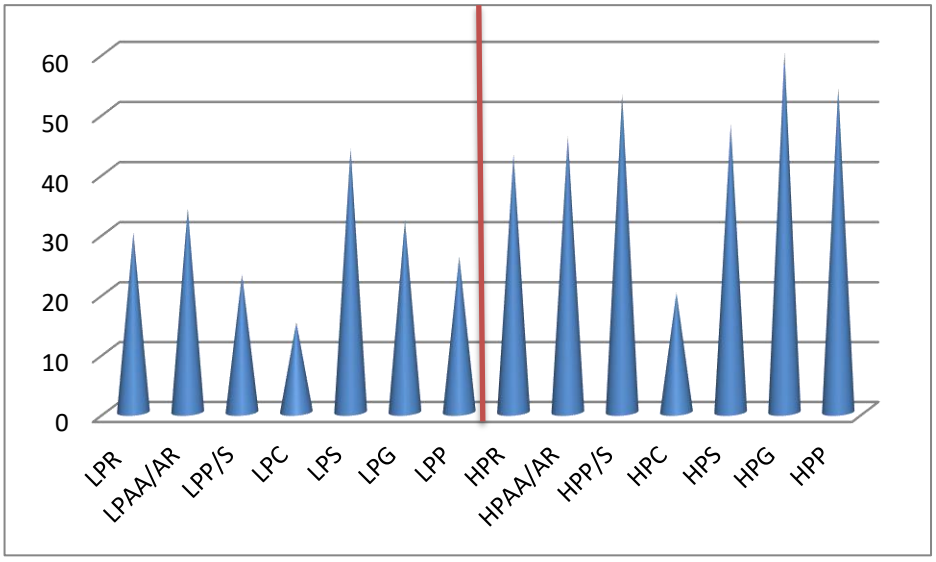
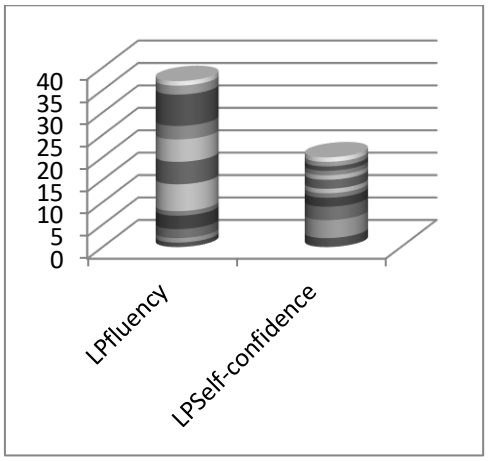



*Figure 4*. The number of oral communication strategies used by the high and the low proficient groups used in the post-tests.

[LP= Low proficient. HP= high proficient. R= Restructuring, AA=appeal for authority AR= Asking for repetition, C= Chunks, S= signposting, P/S= Providing active responses & shadowing, G= Gap fillers P= Paraphrasing].

### 5.4. Fluency and self-confidence of the High and the Low proficient groups in the post-test



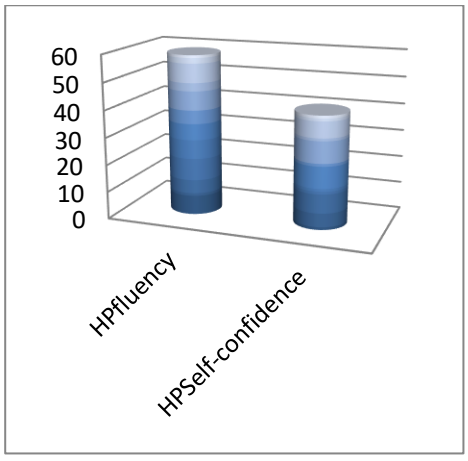




*Figure 5 & Figure 6.*

[The number of words used produced per-minute by the high and the low proficient groups in the post tests and their level of self-confidence in the post-tests.

LP= Level of proficiency, HP= high proficient group].

All the groups developed their degree of fluency and self-confidence which was expected to occur after the training, since the use of CSs is highly related to the level of fluency and consequently is a step towards self-confidence building. The most surprising result of the study is the unexpected development of accuracy that is mostly seen with the low proficient group. This improvement can be explained as a result of the continuous exposure to the language and the perpetual correction done during the classes. It also

worth mentioning that the high-proficient group developed its level of accuracy, which can be considered as an effect of the training and the continuous contact with the language in its oral form. The investigation demonstrates that strategy training can directly affect the subjects' self-confidence, their level of fluency and also their accuracy as far as the oral performance is concerned.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The data of the post-test indicated that the learners were generally successful in the use of communicative strategies, and consequently, in developing their fluency and self-confidence. This was the case of the two different groups which proved also; even it was not an objective in this phase of the study, to achieve a better level of accuracy, as a result of the received training. Eventually, the two hypotheses of the study were confirmed and the teaching of CSs resulted to be effective in enhancing the communicative competence of our subjects, and in making them more self-confident while conveying a message in English.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The present study was successful since the two hypotheses were confirmed. The main findings were that accuracy was found to benefit from repetition, correction and the simple exposure or use of language in a guided context. Fluency showed a more steady growth with the use of CSs. For self-confidence, it was a natural result of the mere practice and training. More generally, our findings reinforce the point that teaching CSs is useful and essential and that focusing on fluency for a better transition of the intended meaning could result in what Tarone (1980) called a repair in both form (fluency) and content (accuracy) even though they are considered as different aspects of SL/FL teaching that which according to Tarone overlap somewhat. Thus, the results of this investigation assure the possibility of developing both fluency and accuracy in IL through the same strategy training.

Regarding pedagogical implications, the obvious conclusion from this study is that teachers should provide learners with opportunities to study CSs and to practice repeatedly what they learn. The substantial improvement occurs with increasing exposure and use. Thus, it is essential to have as part of the curriculum the fitting methodology and resource materials to teach CSs as a vital skill of a second or a foreign language.

The limitations of the study can be specified in the relative lack of control over the individual's characteristics of the subjects and the small number of the sample under study. Nevertheless, studies on language teaching and language learning can benefit from the findings of the study to develop new methods and to set new objectives. Further empirical studies, however, are needed to replicate the findings in different contexts and languages.

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## APPENDIX 1

*Confidence Building Tasks:*

Short natural conversations used in the two phases of the investigation:

Confidence building:

"This was my dream, all my life and ... er … you know ... to serve for the match, suddenly I have a match point out of nowhere, you know ... I came here, nobody even talked about me and now I'm holding this trophy. And it's, it's just … this support today

is like ... er ... I mean ... I was ... er... three times in the final but this, this is just unbelievable, this is too good ...".

Listen to this piece of real English- taken from an interview with the tennis star Goran Ivanisevic just after he had won the Wimbledon tennis championship.

1. How does the interviewee express his feelings?
2. Listen again and pay attention to the following words, sounds or phrases: er ... you know ... this is ... it's ... why do you think he repeats these words?

The speaker used many expressions which are grammatically incorrect, repeated words and also used gap fillers to give him time to think. Although there were some grammatical mistakes we managed to understand what the speaker wanted to convey. If the message is given confidently, the listener will not worry about any mistakes.

To sound more confident:

1. Practice often.
2. Relax and think about the message.
3. Rehearse what you want to say.

## APPENDIX 2

*Appendix 2*

*The oral pre-test:*

Choose a topic from the list or suggest your own topic to discuss with your partner:

1. Gender roles.
2. The new educational system in Europe BOLOGNA.
3. Do domestic animals really exist?
4. Gossip and rumors.
5. Unemployment in Spain.
6. Drugs.
7. Unhealthy diets.
8. Generation gaps.
9. Annoying things.
10. Prejudices.

Establish a 30 minutes conversation where each one has to speak for 15 minutes to express his/her point of view concerning the selected topic.

## APPENDIX 3

*A questionnaire to test the level of self- confidence and to get an idea about the needs of the subjects:*

*1. Do you feel self-confident when you speak in English?*

O Yes O NO

*2. Which aspect of the English language do you need to improve?*

O Vocabulary O Grammar O Oral O Written

*3. What is the reason behind this?*

O You were not thought this aspect of the language O There was no practice
O The practice was not enough

*4. Do you think that you could improve this aspect of the English language?*

O Yes O No

5. How could you improve it?

**APPENDIX 4:**

*The strategy training and the tasks used as post-test:*

Fluency or Accuracy?

Listen to Sophie Sheldon a French student of English talking about her difficulties.

"Well, I have always studied English as a foreign language at school, and I think I have enough grammar and vocabulary knowledge that help me understand written texts in English, but the problem is that I can't understand people speaking in English , and I can't express myself in a good way. I would try anything to help me achieve that because I feel unhappy ... at school they just focus on grammar and vocabulary …"

1. What does she think is the reason of her problem?
2. Do you have the same problem?
3. Do you agree with her?

To improve your spoken English you should first decide what is important for you "fluency or accuracy", then focus on one area at a time and vary your practice if you are interested in improving both.

**APPENDIX 5**

*Listen to a Moroccan student telling us how he feels speaking in English:*

" I don't know how to explain it it's just that feeling that make you stop talking because you can't find the correct word you know it's annoying you just feel less confident and I think you prefer to stop talking because you can't express your ideas ..."

1. What do you think is the problem of the speaker?
2. Do you have the same problem?

3. Can you think of any solution to this problem?

Even if you do not have a wide vocabulary you can use some strategies that may help you to substitute the missing word, to continue speaking and feel more confident and more fluent:

- Use paraphrasing to explain what you mean.
- Start your sentence again to gain more time for thinking.
- Ask your interlocutor for help.

## APPENDIX 6

*Learning language in Chunks:*

A chunk is a phrase or a group of words which go together. Listen to this piece of natural English and try to find chunks and to paraphrase them.

"Yes … that's quite right … if you … I mean it would be pretty realistic to organize something like this … between … in breaks or I don't know and it would be of course all on a voluntary basis you wouldn't … wouldn't be forced to work at full time or anything like that, but it's impossible so just take or live it and if I were you I would live my life to the full and take it as it comes ..."

Using chunks or collocations makes you sound fluent and saves you time and energy; so to use them you first listen out for fixed chunks in conversations, record them and practice them.

## APPENDIX 7

***Signposting*** is showing how the information you give is relevant to the talk, and the important point that the listener should pay attention to. Listen to this piece of natural English and find the ways he asks his listener to concentrate on a specific piece of information.

"First of all, I want to express my disagreement with that notion of assessment without making clear the criteria of judgment because the students don't know what is expected from them, and that's why they may not give a good performance according to what the teacher wants. One of the things I always say is that the criteria of assessment are on one hand essential for the assessment to be reliable and on the other hand helpful to the students to know what is expected from them ..."

To signpost correctly you should first be aware of the general plan of your talk and to have it well-structured in your mind, then use the appropriate connectors to give a logical flow to your speech for your listener to be able to catch the important ideas of your message.

## APPENDIX 8

It is important to think of your listener and to keep him involved during the whole speech to avoid dullness and to assure that your listener will not stop listening at any time of the talk.

Listen to Richard Hallows talking about a speech made by Kofi Anan, Secretary General of the United Nations.

"He is a really effective speaker of English. He really knows how to involve the listener, to make us want to listen through the language he chooses. For example, he avoids using the same words all the time. Sometimes he uses alternative words- so, for example, in one sentence he says 'human beings' and in the next 'humanity'. And he interacts with the listener, asking us all to do something. So he says 'Try to imagine what life is like ...' , and we all start to think. All of this helps to involve the listener- to make us want to listen."

1. What are the techniques that Richard mentioned for keeping the listener involved?

To be an effective speaker you should vary your vocabulary, plan what you want to say and always involve your listener in your speech by asking questions.

## APPENDIX 9

To be a supportive listener you have to keep in mind that you have an important role to play while listening to keep the conversation and to assure that the speaker's message is clear and interesting. This makes you sound natural and helps developing the conversation.

Listen to this conversation and imagine how it would sound without the participation of the listener:

- A: "When I'm speaking in English I feel nervous because I can't express my ideas correctly and I use a lot of sounds like … er ... well ..."
- B: "Don't worry that makes you sound natural."
- A: "Thank you that's very nice of you, but I need to practice more ... er ... and to have some contact with ... I mean ..."
- B: "Yeah ..."
- A: "I think it will come with the time ..."
- B: "Absolutely."

Thus, the most important things to do are to recognize how you listen in your own language and to transfer it to English, to show your interest and to ask for clarification when necessary.

## APPENDIX 10

*Post questionnaire self-confidence test:*

1. *Do you feel more self-confident while speaking in English 8after the training?*

   O Yes O No

2. *Do you think you your spoken English has improved?*

   O Yes O No

3. *Which aspects of your communicative competence improved after the training?*

4. *Why do you feel more self-confident after the training?*