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### **THE USE OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN ORAL INTERACTION**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

If language learners or non-native speakers all over the world don't know how to express any word expression in the target language (in this study- in the English language) they can effectively substitute those words using different strategies. This way of communicating is considered as communication strategies. Communication strategies attempt to fill the gaps in the speaker's linguistic knowledge and significantly define the speaker's fluency and communication skills. Teaching the use of communication strategies has been studied in the United States and Great Britain since the 1980's. However, not in all of the countries teachers are aware of the importance of teaching communication strategies, as well as not all the language learners are trained explicitly to use some strategies to express themselves in the face of difficulties and limited linguistic competences. As Nunan (1987, p. 137) has stated, 'While a great deal has been written on the theory and practice of communicative language teaching, there have been comparatively few studies of actual communicative language practices'. As a response to Nunan's statement this research study intends to attract attention to the crucial and not yet much investigated issue in the communicative language teaching. So by providing the overview of what communication strategies involve this study aims to investigate how communication strategies can contribute to the development of an overall communicative competence and to examine which communication strategies are taught mostly in the foreign language classrooms in Azerbaijan.

#### **STRUCTURED ABSTRACT**

Lots of research studies have been carried out on how students cope with developing communicative competence while learning the linguistic structures of the target language. However, we have very little information about how teachers enable their learners to develop communicative strategies that will help them to get handle with the speaking problems inside and outside the language classroom.

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Since each language has its own structures and rules of interaction learning to speak a certain foreign language requires a lot of effort, commitment, and developing the necessary awareness. This process becomes especially hard when this learning takes place in a context where the target language is not commonly used in the speech community the learner lives. It is now well-acknowledged that in order to communicate successfully in any foreign language we need to develop not only the necessary linguistic competence but also the appropriate communicative competence. In other words, pronouncing words correctly, using appropriate grammar rules and having an adequate vocabulary is not sufficient to speak a foreign language effectively. We also should know what and how to say something according to different situations, as well as, whom we are speaking to, where we are speaking and what we are speaking about. So by providing the overview of what communication strategies involve this study aims to investigate how communication strategies can contribute to the development of an overall communicative competence and to examine which communication strategies are taught mostly in the foreign language classrooms in Azerbaijan.

Data of this study came from two sources, questionnaire sent to the teachers and video-recordings of naturally occurring classroom interactions. Results from the questionnaire indicated that the communication strategy most frequently used in school and university groups was literal translation, asking for confirmation, asking for clarification and circumlocution. The communication strategies that are rarely used are use of fillers, word coinage, message abandonment, topic avoidance (see Table 1). Unfortunately, the questionnaire results and observation notes from the video-recordings approved that although the teachers are aware of communication strategies and its benefits they very rarely teach them explicitly to the learners. And the reason for it they mention the curriculum designed by the language center departments.

Findings also displayed that the first-year students at the university feel most vulnerable while communicating in English. This is the issue of the practice. Since throughout their school life there were few opportunities to practice their speaking skills, there is an actual need to improve their strategic competence. Thus, increasing student talking time and decreasing teacher talking time using different speaking activities would be advisable method for foreign language teaching. It would establish a successful atmosphere for developing students' strategic competence.

In spite of the limited scope of this study several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, language center departments should plan language curriculums more manageable in order to give students more opportunities for interaction and speaking based activities. Language teachers, as well as, should frequently change the seating arrangements to enable students to know each other better which would led to more interaction throughout teaching and learning process. By planning more speaking based activities teachers can facilitate communication among students and develop students' communication competences. Due to the today's globalization world, school activities should focus on not only textbook exercises, but also on the development of different types of

abilities or performances. Textbooks can be very useful for foreign language learning and for developing students' linguistic competences, but there is a need for other activities to be able to practice different real-life language competencies. Teachers should also apply more techniques and adapt more materials to the language lesson to attract students' attention and facilitate their target language learning.

Unfortunately, the research scope and data collection instrument didn't allow examining the effects of communication strategies on the students' communicative competence. However, it is obvious that the students' positive attitude to strategy training and their confidence in its beneficial effects on their ability help to get handle with real life communication procedures. It would be advisable to do a detailed research about the effects of communication strategies on the effectiveness of the students' performance in the target language. Furthermore, a carefully designed syllabus that can be implemented as part of foreign language and literature program could increase the benefits of the strategy use. These recommendations are expected to improve language teaching and learning, and particularly to increase the use of communication strategies in the foreign language classrooms. It is also expected that this study encourages other linguistics researchers to continue examining the use of communication strategies in different contexts.

**Keywords:** Communication strategies, communicative competence, linguistic competence, explicit teaching.

## **İLETİŞİM STRATEJİLERİNİN SÖZLÜ ETKİLEŞİMDE KULLANIMI**

### **ÖZET**

Dünyanın dört bir tarafındaki dil öğrenenler veya anadilleri olmayan bir dilde konuşan bireyler herhangi bir kelimeyi ve ya deyimini bu dilde nasıl ifade edeceklerini bilmediklerinde (bu çalışmada – İngilizce) onlar bu sözcüğü farklı stratejiler kullanarak doğru ve etkili bir şekilde ifade edebilirler. İletişimin bu şekli iletişim stratejilerinin bir parçası olarak kabul edilmektedir. İletişim stratejileri başarılı bir şekilde kullanıldığında dil bilgisindeki eksiklikleri gidermeye yardımcı olmakla birlikte bu stratejiler konuşmacının iletişim becerilerinin akıcı olmasına da önemli katkı sağlamaktadır. İletişim stratejilerinin kullanımı Birleşik Devletler ve Büyük Britanya'da 1980'li yıllardan itibaren öğretilmektedir. Ama ne yazık ki, tüm ülkelerdeki öğretmenler iletişim stratejileri eğitiminin önemini farkında değiller ve bunun yanı sıra yabancı dil öğrenenler sınırlı dil yeterliliklerine sahip oldukları gerçeğine paralel olarak bazı stratejileri öğrenmek için yeterli eğitimi de alamamaktadırlar. Nunan'ın da (1987, s.137) söylediği gibi " İletişimsel dil öğretiminin teori ve uygulamaları konusunda çokça araştırmalar yayınlanmış olsa da, iletişimsel dil uygulamaları konusunda göreceli olarak daha az çalışma yapılmıştır. Nunan'ın bu bildirisine yanıt olarak bu çalışma iletişimsel dil öğretiminde önemli olmasına rağmen henüz çok araştırılmamış bir konuya dikkat çekmektedir. Böylelikle, bu çalışma iletişim stratejilerinin

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kapsamlarını inceleyerek bu stratejilerin genel iletişim yetkinliklerinin geliştirilmesine nasıl katkı sağladığını ve Azerbaycan'da yabancı dil sınıflarında daha çok hangi iletişim stratejilerinin öğretildiğini incelemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** iletişim stratejileri, iletişimsel yetkinlik, dilsel yetkinlik, bariz öğrenme

## Introduction

In the most language books the component of communicative competence is neglected as strategic competence. This was defined by Canale and Swain (1980, p.30) as 'verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence'. When problems or some misunderstandings arise throughout the communication process the ability to get the speaker's meaning across successfully to partners is referred as strategic competence. Actually, communication breakdowns may occur in both L1 and L2, therefore strategic competence is relevant not only to the foreign language, but also one's mother tongue as well. However this type of competence is of crucial importance for foreign language learners. A lack of strategic competence may account for situations when students with a good knowledge of grammar and a wide range of word stock get stuck and are unable to carry out their communication. At oral exams such students may even fail, and their teachers often are disappointed about how that could happen to their 'best students'. In other words, there are learners who can communicate effectively with a few number of words, in this case they rely almost entirely on their strategic competence.

As mentioned above the use of communication strategies in the foreign language teaching has been studied in the United States and Great Britain since the 1980's and recently in some Arabian countries (Rababah, 2003; 2005). This type of strategies attempt to fill the gap between the linguistic knowledge of the speaker and his/her interlocutor in real communication situations. Researches have displayed that strategic competence unconsciously used in the mother tongue, but unfortunately cannot be automatically transferred to the foreign language. However communication strategies should be explicitly taught for students to develop their accuracy and especially fluency (Dornyei, 1995).

Communicative strategies provide the learners more opportunities to hear input and produce new utterances. Consequently, the use of communicative strategies has an inevitable learning effect on foreign language learners. Thus, communicative strategies should be considered as a subset of learning-teaching strategies, which includes both competences for learning the certain language and applications of them in real life circumstances. Unfortunately, the majority of teachers all over the world are not always aware of the importance of teaching communication strategies to their students or even they are aware, they do not explicitly motivate the students to use them. To abandon the given message or switch to the native language to avoid communication difficulties can cause much more problems in the future educational and personal life of the students.

## Literature Review

This section includes the detailed literature review, as well as the studies considered as a basis for the current study.

The notion of communication strategies attempt to bridge the gap between the speaker's linguistic competence and his/her performance in real contexts. Approximation, mime and gestures, circumlocution (paraphrasing) asking for repetition, asking for clarification and others may be used

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to bridge this gap. In case of unbridgeable situations message abandonment or avoidance may be used.

Faerch and Kasper (1984) who emphasized the planning and execution of speech production proposed a broad definition for the concept of communication strategies. These scholars claimed that while solving linguistic problems throughout the communication, a learner does not only cooperate with the talker, but also finds a solution to the problematic situation without the help of others. This point of view led to further study focusing on learners' internal mental activities, such as using strategies for solving lexical problems (Poulisse, 1987). Faerch and Kasper (1984) mention that there are two types of communicative strategies: achievement strategies and reduction strategies. According to these researchers achievement strategies enable learners to achieve the target goal using the resources that are available during conversation. Whereas, reduction strategies do not focus on solving the communication problems and instead of it try to avoid them, the learners give up on conveying an original message. Achievement strategies are grouped under two classifications which are compensatory strategies and retrieval strategies. Code-switching, inter language-based strategies, inter-lingual transfer, cooperative strategies and nonlinguistic strategies are compensatory strategies. Retrieval strategies are applied when difficulties in retrieving specific inter-language items occur. When it comes reduction strategies, this type of strategies consist of formal reduction strategies that are used to avoid producing non-fluent or incorrect utterances and function reduction strategies that used to give up on sending a message or avoiding a certain topic. To sum up, in case of any misunderstandings or problematic situations throughout the conversation the mentioned strategies are used to bridge the gap between one's linguistic competence and the ability to use these competences.

Focusing on the teachable features of communication strategies, scholars agreed that the learner who improves the strategic competence in their mother tongue can easily transfer them to their foreign language use (Bongaerts & Poulisse, 1989; Kellerman, Ammerlaan, Bongaerts, & Poulisse, 1990). It means that foreign language learners already have a repertoire of communicative strategies in their L1 use, regardless of their level of L2 proficiency. Kellerman (1991), for instance, approved that if the cognitive processes are familiar to the learners from their mother tongue, there was no point in teaching these strategies in the foreign language classrooms, and concluded that "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" (p. 158).

Hungarian scholar and at the same time professor of psycholinguistics at the University of Nottingham Dornyei (1995) not only claimed that communication strategies should be taught in foreign language teaching, but he also proposed some procedures for strategy training. The six strategy training procedures that he provided were the following:

1. To enable learners aware of the nature and advantages of communication strategies by making learners conscious of communicative strategies already in their L1 use, applying them to the appropriate situations where these strategies could be useful and helpful, as well as enabling them to realize that how they could actually work successfully.
2. Inspiring students to be eager to take risks and use communicative strategies or, in other words, to encourage available language without being afraid of making mistakes.
3. Presenting successful and effective models of the use of certain communication strategies through different techniques, and getting learners to define, analyze, and appreciate strategies used by native speakers or other L2 speakers. Conversations between the students and native speakers can be recorded, and then by analyzing their own recordings, students can realize their own strategy use.

4. Paying attention to the cross-cultural differences in communication strategy use because in some languages particular communication strategies may be totally different in other language strategies.
5. Teaching communicative strategies directly by providing linguistic devices to verbalize them.
6. Highlighting opportunities for practice in strategy use is inevitable, since communication strategies can only fulfill their function if the learners' use of communication strategies has reached an automatic stage.

Unfortunately the problem is that many teacher education programs do not include communication strategy competence to make teachers aware of the importance of communication strategies in language teaching and learning process. Some teaching training programs include communication strategy training contents; however, teachers not always use of this knowledge or strategies in their everyday practice. This study sets out to investigate how communication strategies can contribute to the development of an overall communicative competence and specifically, the study is guided to examine which communication strategies are taught mostly in the foreign language classrooms in Azerbaijan.

### **Methodology**

The participants of this study were twenty teachers from different universities and schools of Azerbaijan who teach beginner and pre-intermediate level classes. The composition of the participants was mixed, some were high school teachers, but some were university teachers. The ages of teachers were in the range of 27 to 38, although the majority was between 27 and 30 years old.

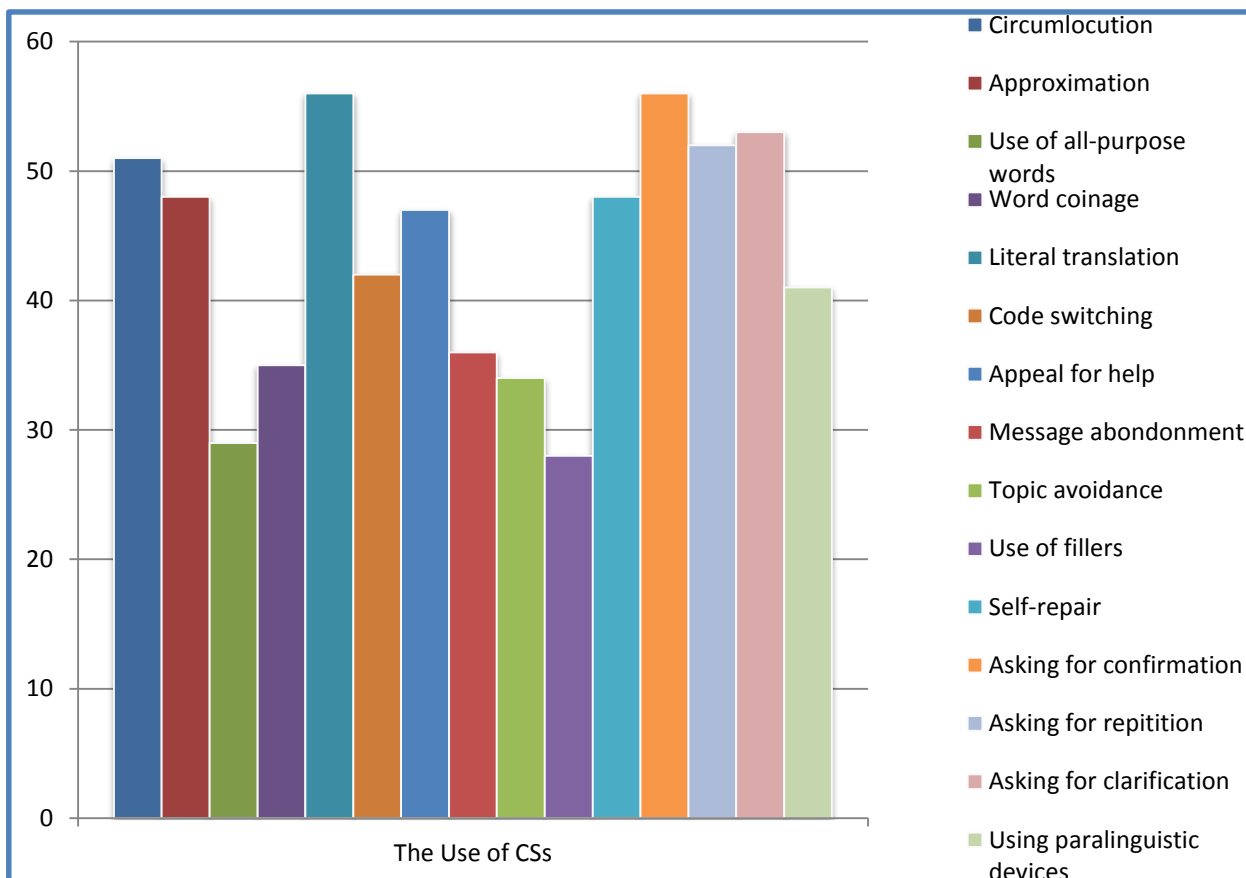
Data for this study came from two sources: questionnaire sent to the teachers and video-recordings of classroom interactions. Classroom interactions were recorded without previous preparation of students. The purpose was to identify and quantify the communication strategies they spontaneously used throughout teaching and learning process. As well as, I sent a questionnaire to the teachers to know their opinions about teaching communication strategies explicitly, and to be sure whether they have enough information about the importance of teaching strategies or not. Questions included in the survey referred to communication strategies of circumlocution, approximation, use of all-purpose words, word coinage, using paralinguistic devices, literal translation, code switching, appeal for help, message abandonment, topic avoidance, use of fillers, self-repair, asking for confirmation, asking for repetition and asking for clarification. Since not all of my participants sent a video recording of their lesson, this survey was the main data collecting tool throughout finding answers to my research questions. Thus, Teachers were given a choice of three options for the mentioned strategies: rare use (1), average use (2) and frequent use (3). The questionnaire table was originated from the table mentioned by Nino Nijaradze (2005) (Appendix 1)

### **Results and Findings**

Data came from two sources, questionnaire sent to the teachers and video-recordings of naturally occurring classroom interactions. Results from the questionnaire indicated that the communication strategy most frequently used in school and university groups was literal translation, asking for confirmation, asking for clarification and circumlocution. The communication strategies that are rarely used are use of fillers, word coinage, message abandonment, topic avoidance (see Table 1). According to the video-recordings it was observed that teachers who seemed more involved with students used the strategies like circumlocution, word coinage, code switching, whereas teachers who appeared more distant from students used message abandonment, repetition and clarification strategies. Some external and internal factors, like students number, seating arrangements, the relationship between the teacher and students influenced the communication strategies used. Unfortunately, the questionnaire results and observation notes from the video-recordings approved

that although the teachers are aware of communication strategies and its benefits they very rarely teach them explicitly to the learners. And the reason for it they mention the curriculum designed by the language center departments.

Table 1.



Findings also displayed that the first-year students at the university feel most vulnerable while communicating in English. This is the issue of the practice. Since throughout their school life there were few opportunities to practice their speaking skills, there is an actual need to improve their strategic competence. Thus, increasing student talking time and decreasing teacher talking time using different speaking activities would be advisable method for foreign language teaching. It would establish a successful atmosphere for developing students' strategic competence. Additionally, since in the foreign language classrooms the input is adjusted to the students' language level and age there are relatively few occasions to use communication strategies, or in other words applying various types of communication strategies are limited. So, due to lack of experience students cannot develop their speaking strategies, or cannot realize its importance throughout communication process.

**Conclusion and Further Recommendations**

In spite of the limited scope of this study several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, language center departments should plan language curriculums more manageable in order to give students

more opportunities for interaction and speaking based activities. Language teachers, as well as, should frequently change the seating arrangements to enable students to know each other better which would lead to more interaction throughout teaching and learning process. By planning more speaking based activities teachers can facilitate communication among students and develop students' communication competences. Due to the today's globalization world, school activities should focus on not only textbook exercises, but also on the development of different types of abilities or performances. Textbooks can be very useful for foreign language learning and for developing students' linguistic competences, but there is a need for other activities to be able to practice different real-life language competencies. Teachers should also apply more techniques and adapt more materials to the language lesson to attract students' attention and facilitate their target language learning.

Unfortunately, the research scope and data collection instrument didn't allow examining the effects of communication strategies on the students' communicative competence. However, it is obvious that the students' positive attitude to strategy training and their confidence in its beneficial effects on their ability help to get handle with real life communication procedures. It would be advisable to do a detailed research about the effects of communication strategies on the effectiveness of the students' performance in the target language. Furthermore, a carefully designed syllabus that can be implemented as part of foreign language and literature program could increase the benefits of the strategy use. These recommendations are expected to improve language teaching and learning, and particularly to increase the use of communication strategies in the foreign language classrooms. It is also expected that this study encourages other linguistics researchers to continue examining the use of communication strategies in different contexts.

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**APPENDIX 1**

N	THE DESCRIPTION OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES	HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE?		
		Rare Use (1)	Average Use (2)	Frequent Use (3)
1	If I don't know the English word for something, I describe it according to its features like size, color, taste or explain its usage			
2	If I do not know how to express something in English I use a word that has roughly the same meaning, e.g. 'plane' instead of 'helicopter'			
3	I use general words like 'thing', 'stuff' to refer to the English word I do not know			
4	I make a new English word by adding suffixes or prefixes to familiar English words, or changing the beginning or the ending of the words I do not know			
5	I use mime, gestures or facial expressions when I do not know how to express something in English.			
6	If I do not know the word in English, I translate word for word from Azerbaijani into English.			
7	If I cannot say a word in English I use an Azerbaijani word or words.			
8	If I cannot say a word in English, I turn to the interlocutor for assistance by asking an explicit question "How do you say ...?", "What do you call...?"			
9	I leave a conversation incomplete due to some speaking difficulty			
10	I avoid talking about concepts for which the vocabulary or the meaning structure is not known			
11	I use 'stalling strategies' like 'Well', 'Now, let me see', 'As a matter of fact' etc.			
12	I make self-initiated corrections while speaking English.			
13	I ask questions 'Do you follow me?' 'Do you understand?' etc. to check whether an interlocutor understands what I have said or not.			
14	I repeat the words the interlocutor says in order to confirm what I have heard is correct or not			

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15	I use 'Pardon?' 'Sorry?', 'Could you say that again, please?!' to ask the interlocutor to explain an unfamiliar word			
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