

# The Use of Compensation Strategies in the Iranian EFL Learners' Speaking and its Relationship with Their Foreign Language Proficiency

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## Abstract

Compensation Strategies (CpSs) are strategies which a language user employs in order to achieve his intended meaning when precise linguistic forms are for some reasons not available at that point of communication. Different factors may influence the use of CpSs, among which the level of language proficiency is one of the most important ones. The present study attempts to investigate the relationship between compensation strategies use and the level of language proficiency and gender. In order to explore this relationship, four distinct groups of learners – advanced male, advanced female, intermediate male, and intermediate female, each containing 12 members– participated in the study. The participants were interviewed individually and their performances were tape-recorded and then transcribed. The findings of the study indicates that "self-repetition", "direct appeal for help", and "approximation" are the most frequently used strategies; there is a significant relationship between the frequency of compensation strategies use and proficiency i.e. the frequency of compensation strategies use increases as the level of language proficiency develops whereas no significant relationship was observed between strategy frequency and gender.

**Keywords:** Compensation Strategies, Approximation, Circumlocution, Fillers, Repetition, Language Proficiency.

## 1. Introduction

Some people can communicate effectively in an L2 with only 100 words. How can they do it? They use their hands, they imitate the sound or movement of things, they mix languages, they create new words, and they describe or engage in circumlocution when they do not know the right word. In short, they use compensation strategies. The concept of compensation strategies (CpSs) or communication strategies (CSs) - different terms which refer to the same concept - came into existence as a result of the inadequacies of the old theories to offer a clear conception of what it means to know a language. Chomsky's (1965, cited in Karimnia & Salehizade, 2007) view of the linguistic theories is primarily concerned with "an ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly..." (p.3). Hymes (1967, 1972, cited in Brown, 2000) on the other hand, questioned the relevance of Chomsky's view to real life situations. Therefore, he used the term 'communicative competence' to refer to that aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific context.

Canale & Swain (1980) proposed four components which make up communicative competence. They are as follow: 1) grammatical competence 2) discourse competence 3) sociolinguistic competence and 4) strategic competence. Strategic competence refers to the individual's ability to use compensation strategies, e.g., *paraphrase*, *circumlocution*, *literal translation*, *lexical approximation*, and *mime* to get their message across and to compensate for a limited or imperfect knowledge of rules or the interference of factors such as fatigue, distraction or inattention (Rababah, 2002). Both native and non-native speakers' use CpSs, but non-native speakers use them more frequently. Language learners often use CpSs to cope with problems they encounter while attempting to speak a second or foreign language.

It is evident that no individual's linguistic repertoire is perfect. Both non-native and native speakers of a given language resort to compensation strategies when there is a mismatch between their available linguistic resources and intended meaning. Most researchers agree that CpSs are used to bridge the gap that exists between the speakers' linguistic competence in the target language and their communicative needs. Strategies, in general, are the moment by moment techniques that learners employ to solve problems posed by second language input and output. The field of second language acquisition has recognized two types of strategy: learning strategies and compensation strategies. The former relates to input – to processing, storage and retrieval-- while the later pertains to output, how we productively express meaning, how we deliver messages to others (Brown, 2000). The issue whether these are two distinct strategies or are complementary has not been resolved yet.

## Research Questions

On the basis of the results of previous research and with the purpose of the clarification of the aforementioned ambiguities, 3 research questions are investigated:

- Q1. Which compensation strategies are used more frequently by intermediate and advanced Iranian EFL learners?
- Q2. Is there a significant relationship between the frequency of compensation strategies use and the learners' foreign language proficiency?
- Q3. Is there a significant relationship between the frequency of compensation strategies use and the learners' gender?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Compensation Strategies

Researchers first raised the notion of compensation strategies (CpSs) at the beginning of the 1970s, following the recognition that the mismatch between L2 speakers' linguistic resources and communicative intentions leads to a number of systematic language phenomena whose main function is to handle difficulties or breakdowns in communication (Dornyei, 1997). These speakers spend a great deal of time and effort struggling to make up their L2 deficiencies. Therefore, considerable amount of research during the last 3 decades has concentrated on the CpSs notion, attempting to understand strategic language use and investigating the nature of CpSs, taxonomies of strategic language devices, variation in CpSs use, and the practical implications of CpSs research.

### 2.2 Research on Compensation Strategies, Attitudes and Interests

Research on compensation strategies has been developed mainly in terms of the identification and classification of these strategies; investigation into the specific individual CpSs and the influence of task type and proficiency related factors on CpSs choice. The prominent researchers in this field of study have drawn a clear distinction between learning and compensation strategies. Focusing on CpSs, they have attempted to identify various compensation strategies using different elicitation techniques and propose strategy taxonomies. Different taxonomies of CpSs mentioned in previous section were the results of such studies.

Rababah & Bulut (2007) investigated the compensatory strategies used in the oral discourse of second year students studying Arabic as a second language (ASL) in the Arabic Language Institute at King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The study examined the various strategies used by a sample of 24 male learners who were all high school graduates from 8 different countries and speaking 8 different languages. To elicit the compensatory strategies used, the subjects were audio-recorded while performing two tasks: an interview and a role-play. The data were transcribed and analyzed. The results showed that the subjects used a range of compensatory strategies in their oral production, where "paraphrase" was used as the most frequent and "coinage" and "asking for repetition" as the least frequent strategies. Moreover, there were differences between the individual learners' strategies according to their native language. The findings of the study showed that ASL learners were risk-takers, and they expanded their limited linguistic resources to achieve their communicative goals.

Margolis (2001) aimed to provide an empirical foundation of student strategies to compensate for missing knowledge or deficiencies in speaking and listening ability while undertaking an oral exam interview. It was attempted to indicate what compensation strategies Korean students most utilized, least utilized, and relationships between strategies, test scores, gender, and age. Participants included 72 1st year Tourism Information Management students in a Seoul area college required English Conversation course. Their levels ranged from beginner to pre-intermediate. The results indicated that students most often utilize the strategy of seeking help—asking for confirmation or more information. Making guesses was the second most often observed strategy. A range of other strategies, such as using gestures and mime, synonyms and antonyms, coining words, circumlocutions, etc., as a combined category were the least observed strategy utilized.

As it was mentioned before, investigation into the specific individual CpSs has attracted the attention of some researchers. Liskin-Gasparro (1996) designed a study to analyze the use of CpSs, particularly circumlocution, by speakers at the intermediate-high and advanced levels of oral proficiency in Spanish. The analysis of learners' discourse showed that advanced speakers, more than intermediate- high speakers rely on a range of second-language-based strategies that included, but was not limited to circumlocution.

One of the most favorite subjects in the realm of CpSs research was that of levels of language proficiency and task type and their relationship with strategy use. In general, learner's use of CpSs undergoes considerable restructuring and reorganization as proficiency increases. Littlemore(2003) discovered that higher proficiency learners tend to employ more 'achievement' strategies, such as paraphrase and word coinage, and that lower proficiency learners tend to employ more 'reduction' strategies, such as word abandonment and word avoidance, and that the former are more effective.

Young (1992) noted that there was indeed an inverse relationship between the number of compensatory strategies used and the proficiency level of Dutch subjects learning English as a foreign language. She suggested

a fairly straightforward explanation of this fact, namely that low proficiency learners encounter more lexical problems and therefore need to resort to compensatory strategies more often. However she also noted that on some tasks high proficiency learners used more kinds of CpSs than low proficiency learners. High proficiency learners tend to use more holistic conceptual strategies, typically involving semantic approximation by means of words or gestures. On the other hand, low proficiency learners tended to use more transfer-based strategies.

As it was reported before, the effectiveness of learning strategies has been confirmed by different studies but the case is not so straightforward about compensation strategies. Compensation strategies, by filling the gaps during the course of communication, will result in more input which in its turn may lead to learning. Opposing this view, Ellis (1986, cited in Griffiths, 2004) argued that it is possible that successful use of compensation strategies may actually prevent language learning since skillful compensation for lack of linguistic knowledge may obviate the need for learning. Gregersen et al (2001) stated the case as follow:

For example, one could speculate that compensation strategies, particularly those that help in overcoming limitations in speaking and writing, could have the potential to hold a learner back in the FL acquisition process. While it may be important in the early stages of acquisition to keep a conversation going by switching to the mother tongue, avoiding communication, coining words, or using circumlocution, a learner may become dependent upon these strategies, thus stunting later progress in the target language. This may also be true for a few of the cognitive strategies (p. 106).

Much of CpSs research has been concerned with defining, identifying and classifying compensation strategies. The rest has focused on the effect of different variables on CpSs use and teachability issues. Target language proficiency is one of the most researched variables. The findings of available research suggest that less-proficient learners use more CpSs (Poulisse & Schils 1989; Liskin-Gasparro 1996, Ting & Phan, 2008). They rely more on L1 strategies and in general the pattern of CpSs use differs between less proficient and more proficient learners. The results seem to be logical; less proficient learners are expected to use greater deal of strategies due to less developed repertoire of linguistic knowledge.

As a teacher, the observations and experience gained out of teaching in different levels of language proficiency do not conform to the results obtained in relevant research. The mismatch between the research results and what actually happens in teaching environment was the first stimulus of the present study. On the other hand, the focus of attention on some specific realm of research has led to the paucity of studies on some neglected matters. Iranian EFL learners employ a great deal of strategies. The pattern of Iranian learners strategy use has been investigated several times but it has focused on learning strategies in particular. Compensation strategies, as it had been the current tradition in strategy research field all over the world, have been overlooked by Iranian researchers and attentions have been focused on learning strategies. The most available explanation, justifying this deficiency, is that of research procedures, i.e. data collection, elicitation, and examination is much simpler when concerning with learning strategies. As a result the field of research on CpSs, at least in Iran and about Iranian learners, lacks studies which may shed light on EFL problems and ambiguities.

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1 Participants*

A total of 48 EFL learners took part in this study. Their age ranged from 15 to 27 and their mother tongue is Farsi. Of the 48 subjects, 24 were male and 24 were female. Each group of male and female participants was also divided to 12 learners at the intermediate proficiency level in English and 12 at advanced level. Therefore, four distinct groups of learners participated in the study: 1) advanced male (AM), 2) advanced female (AF), 3) intermediate male (IM), and 4) intermediate female (IF), each consisting of 12 subjects. All the participants were the EFL learners in English department of Iranian Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research (ACECR). Their learning experience differed between 2 to 5 years.

#### *3.2 Learning Context*

Iranian Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research- Jahad Daneshgahi - was founded in 1981. Its English Department (Mashhad Branch) started working in 1992. The main purpose of this department is to nurture learners who are able to communicate effectively in English. This department consists of teenagers and adults branches. In teenagers' group, LET'S GO books are used as the teaching material in 7 terms (each lasts 3 months - 44 hours -). INTERCHANGE and PASSAGES series pursue LET'S GO books during 13 terms in adults' group. There are two ways to sign in English learning courses according to the applicant's age and level of English proficiency: Learners either commence learning English language from the very first ( when they have no knowledge about it ) or take an entrance exam. This placement test will measure their knowledge of English language and according to the results, the applicants will be appointed in the appropriate stage (in teenagers' group) or level (in adults' group). Applicants are permitted to enter teenagers' group after turning 11 and adults' group after turning 15. Learners' progress in each level/stage is measured using this formula: 10 points of a written midterm exam + 30 points of a written final exam + 60 points of students' learning activities – mostly oral – during the term.

### 3.3 Instrumentation

To investigate the frequency of compensation strategies use and its probable relationship with level of language proficiency and gender, two elicitation techniques were used: 1) oral interview – as the main elicitation task- and 2) retrospection

#### 3.3.1 Oral interview

CpSs researchers have used different methods to elicit data needed to study compensation strategies. Some researchers have used tasks which are purposefully designed to elicit CpSs. According to Rababah (2002), these methods include picture description, picture reconstruction, video-taped conversation, narration, instruction, close test, role play and interview. These different methods affect the speaker's selection of a certain strategy.

Despite the fact that all the tasks cited above are successful in eliciting strategic behaviors, many of them seem remote from real-life communication. It is believed that the most naturalistic methods of data collection are oral interviews and conversations (Wongsawang, 2001) which in the optimal way take place between the native speakers of English and the participants of the study. The main drawback in this elicitation technique, however, is that CpSs are rarely found because what the participants may say is less controlled by the experimenters (Kasper & Kellerman, 1997).

#### 3.3.2 Retrospection

This technique is a very useful addition to other research methods as it increases the number of unambiguously identifiable CpSs, allows elimination of incorrectly identified CpSs, and helps validate many of the CpSs set up (Dornnyei & Scott, 1995). In addition, in the identification of some CpSs, *message reduction* in particular, the researcher has to rely almost entirely on retrospective data (ibid). Retrospection is not, however, an infallible method since retrospective data is incomplete and sometimes inaccurate. On the other hand, retrospection is invaluable in that the type of information we obtain through it cannot be obtained through other methods.

### 3.4 Procedure

The present study aimed at exploring the rate of compensation strategies use in EFL learners' speaking and its probable relationship with language proficiency and gender. The two main phases in the process of study include 1) subject selection and 2) assessment.

#### 3.4.1 Subject selection

As it was mentioned before, all the participants in this study were EFL learners in Iranian Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research- Jahad Daneshgahi. In this center, after studying LET 'S GO books, learners start learning INTERCHANGE (Richards, Hull, & Proctor, 1997) and PASSAGES (Richards et al., 2008) series. Interchange (Third edition) consists of four volumes: Intro, Book 1, Book 2, and Book 3 which aim at developing meaningful communication skills. Passages is a high-intermediate to advanced course which provides a follow up for students who have completed beginning and intermediate courses. It is coordinated to function as a sequel to Interchange series.

At the beginning of subject selection procedure, two selection criteria were specified: 1) the level of learners' English proficiency – intermediate and advanced- on the basis of learning material they are studying and 2) their success in developing speaking skill on the base of their grades in successive terms of learning English and the teachers' overall understanding about them. Then, a large sample of learners – about 100 subjects- were considered. Half of them were studying the third volume of Interchange- Interchange 3- corresponding to an intermediate level of English proficiency and the rest consisted of those who have completed studying Passages 2, corresponding to an advanced level of language proficiency. Next, the list of each learner's grades in English courses during the years of studying English in educational center was used. As it was mentioned before, learners' progress in each level/stage is measured using this formula: 10 points of a written midterm exam + 30 points of a written final exam + 60 points of students' learning activities – mostly oral – during the term.

Since it was predicted that some invitations may be declined due to different reasons, a group of 65 participants who met the main criteria were selected from the first sample. Then, they were invited over the phone to take part in the study. The learners were assured that they were not going to be tested and the interview was going to be done for research purposes. However, as it was predicted before, some invitations were declined and some participants, although agreeing to take part at first, did not attend the interview session who were replaced from participants in the second sample.

### 3.4.2 Assessment

When the subject selection process was completed, the participants were asked to attend the interview session. To each participant, a 20-minute session for interview was allocated. The chronological program of interviews was so designed to prevent any contact between learners, since they might inform each other about the content of interview and this may affect the other participants' performance. The interview was carried on in a 2×3 room and it was seen no external noise interfered in the process of interview. At the beginning, the participant was greeted in Farsi and it was allowed to tape-record the interview. The participant was asked not to be concerned about the cassette-player and try to ignore it. A list of interview topics had been prepared in advance. The topics were elicited from Interchange and Passages books to involve concepts which are either interesting or challenging.

The topics paper was handed to the participant and the participant was asked to have a look at it and decide about the subject of interview. The participant was allowed a maximum time of 3 minutes to think about his/her favorite topic and even take notes. After starting speaking, the participant usually summarized his overall opinion about the topic in two or three minutes and then it was the time for the interviewer to enter the process of conversation and challenge the participant. During the course of interview, as it was tape-recorded, those probable examples of compensation strategies use was recorded too- by the researcher- to be used later in retrospection. The main purpose of taking note was to record those samples of CpSs which are not possible to elicit by tape-recording, i.e. nonlinguistic and paralinguistic strategies such as mime, gesture, and eye contact. It was tried to be done in a way not to distract the speaker or cause a sense of anxiety. The average time of interview for advanced participants was about 10 minutes whereas the time was about 7 minutes for intermediate participants. To carry out the second phase of elicitation, the guidelines of retrospection were followed as closely as possible.

According to Poulisse, Bongarets and Kellerman (1987), the data should be collected immediately after the performance without actually forewarning the participants and the subjects should be provided with contextual information to activate their memories. For the latter purpose, the recording of the interview was played to the participants and their comments were written. During the course of retrospection, some participants tried to skip through some items. It seemed to have two reasons: first, they were reluctant to recall all their thought proceedings, since they think this would reveal a lack of knowledge and they might be belittled. Second, our learners were not trained how to retrospect their thoughts and recall them.

### 3.4.3 Data Analysis

When the elicitation phases were completed, the recordings were transcribed. Then, the researchers went through the transcripts, examining every instance when it was suspected that some sort of CpSs was found. Some performance features may assist in detecting strategic behaviors. For example, noticeable deviation from the native speaker's norm in the interlanguage syntax, word choice and discourse patterns, false starts, pauses, drawls (lengthening the sounds as a time gaining device), fillers (ah, am), repeats, slips of tongue (lapses and speech errors) and self-repair may be evidence of a problem in learner's language proficiency (Faerch & Kasper, 1993, cited in Rababah and Bulut, 2007). These features were used to signal a CpS use.

Inventory of Strategic Language Devices (Dornyei & Scott, 1995) was used as the source of CpSs classification. Their taxonomy – which was mentioned earlier- is considered as a summary of all the taxonomies available in CpSs research where some new strategies are added too. This is the most comprehensive classification of compensation strategies so far and consists of 33 main strategies, some including 2 to 5 subsets. In the first review of transcripts, using performance features, the doubtful areas were detected. In the second one, the inventory of strategic language devices was used to help in marking and labeling different compensation strategies. The third review was also done to assure that all potential cases of CpSs are identified, since the large number of compensation strategies made it difficult to detect them all at the first glance. The strategic utterances were then counted and classified for the purpose of data analysis.

In the present study, two types of nominal variables are involved, each with two levels or categories: level of language proficiency (intermediate and advanced) and gender (male and female). Since the focus of this study is on the frequency of compensation strategies use, that family of analyses can and should be used to address any research questions in which only nominal variables are included and frequencies are compared. Hence, *Chi-square* ( $X^2$ ) is the most appropriate test for analyzing these data. In this procedure, the researcher compares the frequencies observed in a sample with some theoretical or expected frequencies. The frequencies refer to categories used to classify the data, such as male/female, natives/non-natives, monolinguals/bilinguals, or high language learning achievers/low achievers.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

In order to explore the patterns of CpSs use at different stages of the speakers' target language development and the effect of language proficiency and gender on CpSs use frequency, the performance of four groups were examined. The results are presented below with respect to each of the research questions.

##### 4.1 The First Question

Q1: Which compensation strategies are used more frequently by intermediate and advanced Iranian EFL learners?

Frequency counts and percentages are calculated to display the compensation strategies used more frequently by intermediate and advanced Iranian EFL learners. Among the 33 main kind of compensation strategies cited in Dornyei and Scott's (1995) taxonomy, 24 were used by the participants of the study. A total of 395 instances of compensation strategies were identified in the oral performance from the sample of 48 participants. Table 1 shows the frequency of these strategies. Most widely used strategies included "Self-repetition" (64 instances), "Direct appeal for help" (47 instances), and "Approximation" (40 instances). And "Code-switching", "Retrieval", and "Interpretive summary" were the least frequently used strategies. Advanced learners used "Self repetition" (50 instances) as the most frequent and "Interpretive summary", "Retrieval", "Omission", "Use of similar sounding words", "Code switching", and "Word coinage" as the least frequent strategies. Intermediate learners used "Direct appeal for help" (29 instances) as the most frequent and "verbal strategy marker", "over explicitness" and "Word coinage" as the least frequent strategies.

Table 1. Frequency of Strategy Use for All Learners

STRATEGY	FREQUENCY (AM)	FREQUENCY (AF)	FREQUENCY (IM)	FREQUENCY (IF)	TOTAL
Message abandonment	14	4	2	2	22
Message reduction	1	1	2	0	4
Message replacement	4	5	1	3	13
Circumlocution	1	3	3	1	8
Approximation	10	14	8	8	40
Use of all purpose words	15	7	0	2	24
Word coinage	0	1	0	1	2
Restructuring	15	10	4	1	30
Literal translation	4	3	3	4	14
Code switching	0	1	0	0	1
Use of similar sounding words	1	0	1	2	4
Omission	0	1	2	1	4
Retrieval	0	1	0	0	1
Self-repair	13	7	6	3	29
Self-rephrasing	13	12	2	2	29
Over explicitness	1	1	1	0	3
Mime	4	10	2	0	16
Use of fillers	9	11	0	0	20
Self-repetition	24	26	9	5	64
Verbal strategy markers	7	6	0	1	14
Direct appeal for help	12	6	2	27	47
Indirect appeal for help	0	0	1	2	3
Interpretive summary	1	0	0	0	1
Comprehension check	0	2	0	0	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>395</b>

The most frequent used strategies identified in this study are discussed individually and illustrated with examples taken from the data. Foreign/second language learners, adopting CpSs, replace the optimal meaning (actual meaning) with the adjusted meaning (what is actually said when they encounter a difficulty). The optimal meaning for each example of CpSs use is given, when needed, to note the difference.

### Self-Repetition

Learners repeat a word or string of words immediately after they were said in order to gain time to produce a lexical or structural target language item. The most widely used strategy in the present study was "self-repetition", with a total of 64 cases. As it is evident from Table 1, advanced learners used "self-repetition" three times more than intermediate learners. The following examples taken from the corpus show the use of self-repetition strategy, which is italic-typed:

- (1) .... "but I think *it's so hard, it's so hard* ... to decide about this."
- (2) .... "*some of them ... some of them* are shocking ... *some ... some* of the cultures shock me."
- (3) "When they were teenager, *they try. ...they try* to solve this problem."

Optimal meaning: "When they were teenager, they tried to solve this problem."

### Direct appeal for help

This strategy occurs when the speaker turns to the interlocutor for assistance by asking an explicit question concerning a gap in his L2 knowledge. This strategy was the second mostly used with 47 cases out of a total of 395 in which intermediate female learners used most of the cases (27). Most of the cases of direct appeal in the present study were those of asking for a lexical item in learners' native language. Examples of this strategy are as follow:

- (1) ... "when you don't have your friends ... *در دسترس* ... , I have to speak and I ..."
- (2) "I think I choose physics or some majors like mechanics, that are very *کاربردی*.."
- (3) ... "I'm going to robotic class, because I ... really love it, ... I think I won't be... *بیگار*... in future."

### Approximation

The use of a single vocabulary item or structures which shares enough semantic features with the desired item was counted as an approximation strategy. The oral production yielded 40 cases where the frequency in intermediate learners was two-third that of advanced learners. The following utterances taken from the learners' performance are examples of this strategy which are italicized:

- (1) "When she goes back to the USA, he ... she, ... she write ... *a topic*."  
Optimal meaning: "When she went back to the USA, she wrote an article."
- (2) "I just told them I want to go to teacher training center and they become very *surprise*."  
Optimal meaning: "... and they became very shocked."
- (3) .... And say why other, why don't you choose the other, other *subject* and I told that ..."  
Optimal meaning: "And said why didn't you choose another university major and I told that ..."

#### 4.2 The Second Question

Q.2. Is there a significant relationship between the frequency of compensation strategies use and the learners' foreign language proficiency?

The participants of the study were divided in two distinct group of language proficiency: intermediate and advanced, each containing 24 members. As it is displayed in Tables 2 and 3, advanced learners used 281 cases of CpSs where intermediate learners used 114.

Table 2: Frequencies of Compensation Strategies Used by Advanced Learners

Strategy	Frequency	Percent
Self-repetition	50	17.8
Self-rephrasing	25	8.9
Restructuring	25	8.9
Approximation	24	8.5
Use of all purpose words	22	7.8
Use of fillers	20	7.1
Self-repair	20	7.1
Direct appeal for help	18	6.4
Message abandonment	18	6.4
Mime	14	5.0
Verbal strategy markers	13	4.6
Message replacement	9	3.2
Literal translation	7	2.5
Circumlocution	4	1.4
Comprehension check	2	.7
Over explicitness	2	.7
Message reduction	2	.7
Interpretive summary	1	.4
Retrieval	1	.4
Omission	1	.4
Use of similar sounding words	1	.4
Code switching	1	.4
Word coinage	1	.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 3: Frequencies of Compensation Strategies Used by Intermediate Learners

Strategy	Frequency	Percent
Direct appeal for help	29	25.4
Approximation	16	14.0
Self-repetition	14	12.3
Self-repair	9	7.9
Literal translation	7	6.1
Restructuring	5	4.4
Self-rephrasing	4	3.5
Circumlocution	4	3.5
Message replacement	4	3.5
Message abandonment	4	3.5
Indirect appeal for help	3	2.6
Omission	3	2.6
Use of similar sounding words	3	2.6
Mime	2	1.8
Use of all purpose words	2	1.8
Message reduction	2	1.8
Verbal strategy markers	1	.9
Over explicitness	1	.9
Word coinage	1	.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100.0</b>



Figures 1 and 2 display these frequencies schematically.  
 Figure 1: Frequencies of Compensation Strategies Used by Advanced Learners

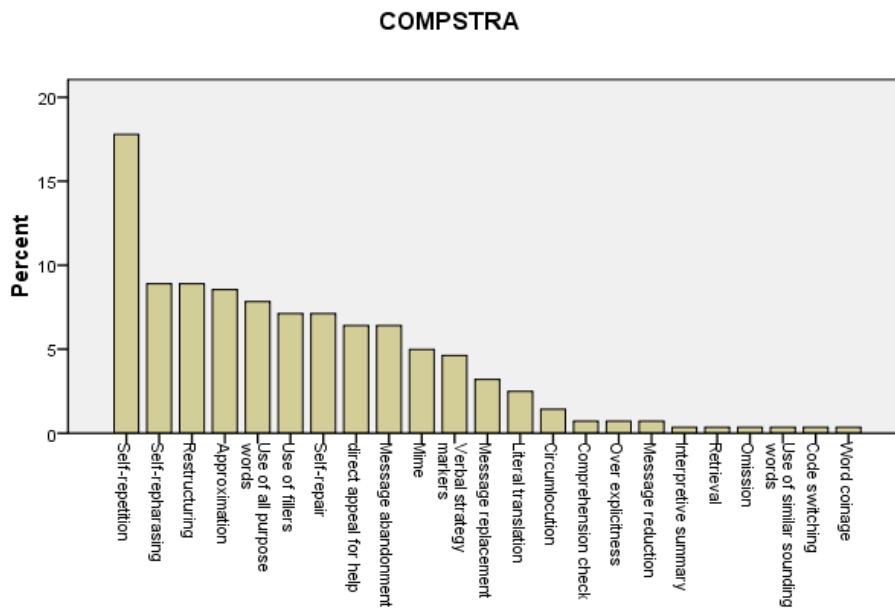
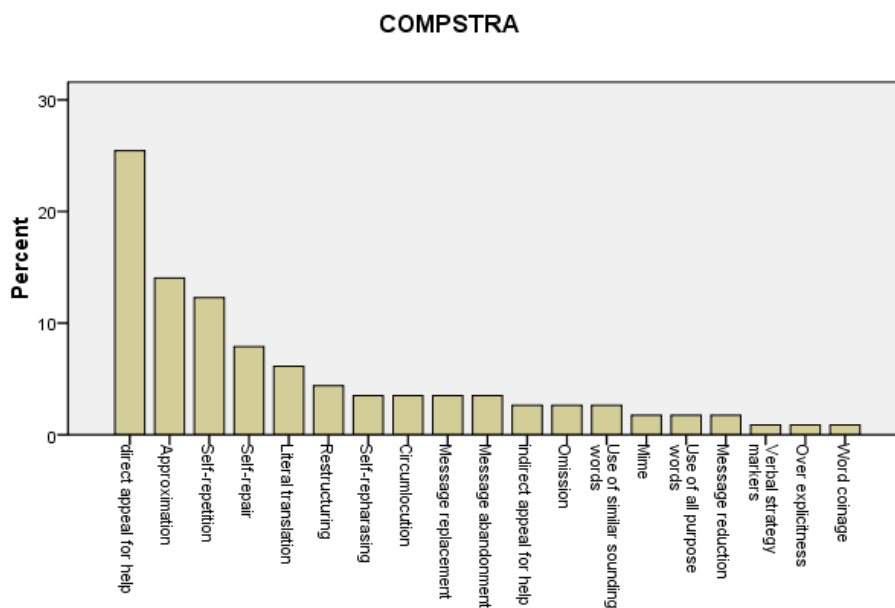


Figure 2: Frequencies of Compensation Strategies Used by Intermediate Learners



An analysis of chi-square was run to investigate the existence of any significant relationship between the frequency of compensation strategies use and the learners' foreign language proficiency. As displayed in Table 4, the chi-square observed value is 70.60. The observed value is greater than the critical value of chi-square at 1 degree of freedom, i.e. 3.84.

Table 4: Chi-square Compensation Strategies by Proficiency

	PROFICIENCY
<b>Chi-Square</b>	<b>70.605<sup>a</sup></b>
<b>Df</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Asymp. Sig.</b>	<b>.000</b>
<b>a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 197.5.</b>	

Based on these observed results, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between the frequency of compensation strategies use and the learners' foreign language proficiency. Thus, the first null-hypothesis as no significant relationship between the frequency of compensation strategies use and the learners' foreign language proficiency is rejected.

Table 5 displays the frequencies of the compensation strategies as used by advanced and intermediate students. The advanced students made more use of the compensation strategies.

Table 5: Frequencies Compensation Strategies by Proficiency

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
<b>ADVANCED</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>197.5</b>	<b>83.5</b>
<b>INTERMEDIATE</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>197.5</b>	<b>-83.5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>395</b>		

#### 4.3 The Third Question

Q3. Is there a significant relationship between the frequency of compensation strategies use and the learners' gender?

As displayed in Tables 6 and 7, 24 male and 24 female participants of the study had similar performance concerning the total number of strategies used.

Table 6: Frequencies of Compensation Strategies Used by Male Learners

Table 7: Frequencies of Compensation Strategies Used by Female Learners

Strategy	Frequency	Percent	Strategy	Frequency	Percent
Self-repetition	33	16.7	Direct appeal for help	33	16.8
Self-repair	19	9.6	Self-repetition	31	15.7
Restructuring	19	9.6	Approximation	22	11.2
Approximation	18	9.1	Self-rephrasing	14	7.1
Message abandonment	16	8.1	Use of fillers	11	5.6
Self-rephrasing	15	7.6	Restructuring	11	5.6
Use of all purpose words	15	7.6	Mime	10	5.1
Direct appeal for help	14	7.1	Self-repair	10	5.1
Use of fillers	9	4.5	Use of all purpose words	9	4.6
Verbal strategy markers	7	3.5	Message replacement	8	4.1
Literal translation	7	3.5	Verbal strategy markers	7	3.6
Mime	6	3.0	Literal translation	7	3.6

<b>Message replacement</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>Message abandonment</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3.0</b>
<b>Circumlocution</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>Circumlocution</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2.0</b>
<b>Message reduction</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>Comprehension check</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.0</b>
<b>Over explicitness</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>indirect appeal for help</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.0</b>
<b>Omission</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>Omission</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.0</b>
<b>Use of similar sounding words</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>Use of similar sounding words</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.0</b>
<b>Interpretive summary</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>.5</b>	<b>Word coinage</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.0</b>
<b>Indirect appeal for help</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>.5</b>	<b>Over explicitness</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>.5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>Retrieval</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>.5</b>
			<b>Code switching</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>.5</b>
			<b>Message reduction</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>.5</b>
			<b>Total</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Figures 3 and 4 display these frequencies schematically.

Figure 3: Frequencies of Compensation Strategies Used by Male Learners

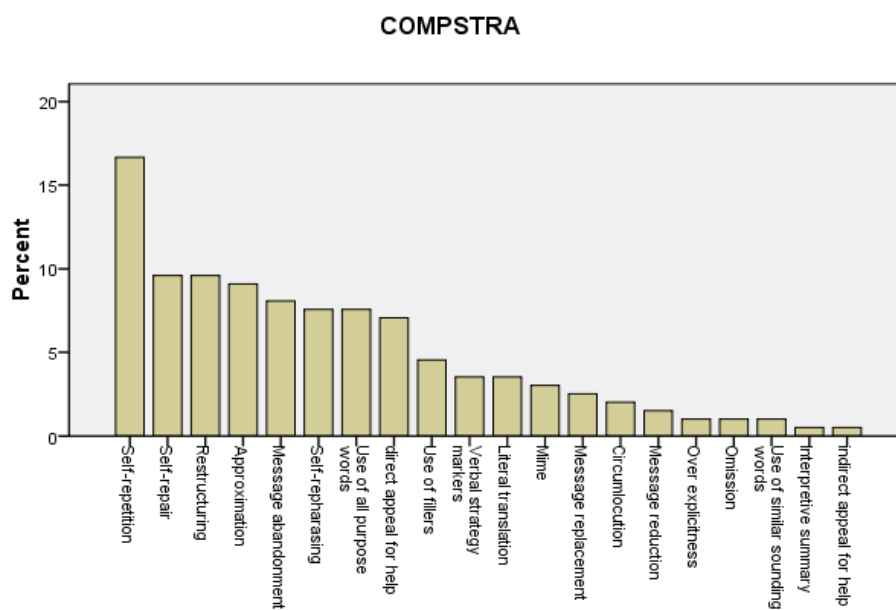
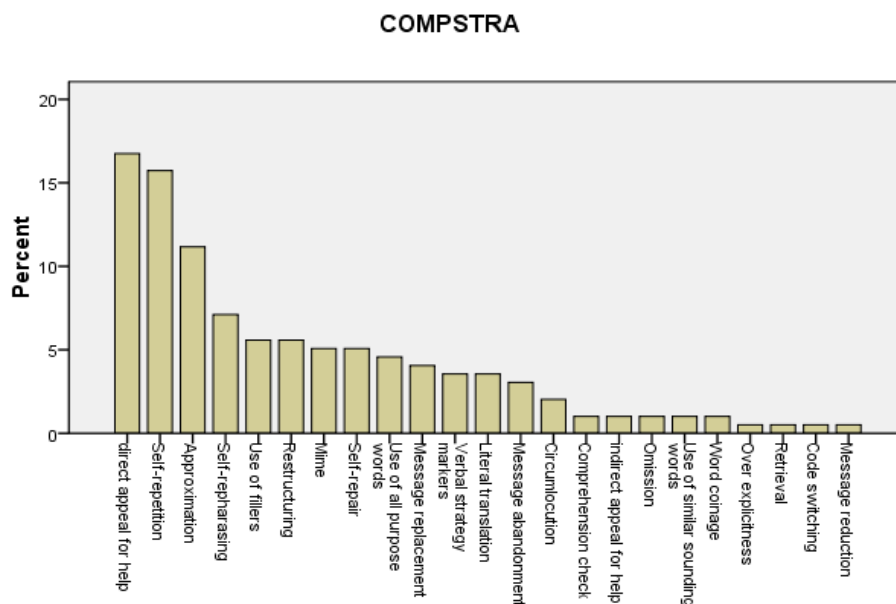


Figure 4: Frequencies of Compensation Strategies Used by Female Learners



An analysis of chi-square was run to investigate the existence of any significant relationship between the frequency of compensation strategies use and the learners' gender. As displayed in Table 8, the chi-square observed value is .003. This value of chi-square value is lower than the critical value of chi-square at 1 degree of freedom, i.e. 3.84.

Table 8: Chi-square Compensation Strategies by Gender

	PROFICIENCY
<b>Chi-Square</b>	<b>.003<sup>a</sup></b>
<b>Df</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Asymp. Sig.</b>	<b>.960</b>
<b>a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 197.5.</b>	

Based on these results, it can be concluded that there is not any significant relationship between the frequency of compensation strategies use and the learners' gender. Thus, the second null-hypothesis indicating no significant relationship between the frequency of compensation strategies use and the learners' gender is retained.

Table 9 displays the frequencies of the compensation strategies as used by male and female students. The male and female students used almost equal number of the compensation strategies.

Table 9: Frequencies Compensation Strategies by Gender

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
<b>MALE</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>197.5</b>	<b>.5</b>
<b>FEMALE</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>197.5</b>	<b>-.5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>395</b>		

### 5. Discussion & Conclusion

The present study attempted to explore the frequency of compensation strategies (CpSs) use by 48 learners from two distinct levels of language proficiency (intermediate and advanced) and gender (male and female) to determine any probable relationship between frequency use and proficiency/gender variables. The 48 participants of the study, distributed in four distinct groups – advanced male, advanced female, intermediate male, and intermediate female, each including 12 subjects – were interviewed one by one and the oral performance (tape-recorded during interview) was then transcribed. Afterwards, the instances of strategic

behaviors were detected on the basis of Dornyei's & Scott's (1997) taxonomy. Frequency counts and percentages were calculated to display the compensation strategies used more frequently by intermediate and advanced learners and the analysis of chi-square was run to investigate any significant relationship between the frequency of CpSs use and the level of language proficiency and gender. According to the results, "self-repetition", "direct appeal for help", and "approximation" are the most frequently used strategies. It was found that there is a significant relationship between the frequency of compensation strategies use and the learners' foreign language proficiency, i.e. the frequency of compensation strategy use increases as the level of language proficiency develops. On the other hand, no significant relationship was found between the frequency of compensation strategies use and the learners' gender.

A total of 395 instances of CpSs were identified in the learners' performance. In comparison with similar studies (Rababah & Bulut, 2007; Dornyei & Scott, 1995), the number of CpSs found in the corpus is much less. The reason underlying this paucity of cases can be detected in the data collection procedure. The most naturalistic methods of data collection are believed to be oral interviews and conversations. The main drawback in these elicitation techniques, however, is that CpSs are rarely found because what the participants might say is less controlled by the experimenters. Rababah and Bulut (2007) used an oral interview and a role-play task while Dornyei and Scott (1995) employed cartoon description, definition, and guided role-play. Despite the fact that these data collection procedures –except oral interview – are successful in eliciting strategic behaviors, they seem remote from the real-life communication. Of course, it is not easy to claim that oral interview and conversation represent real-life communication. Even if the subjects feel relaxed, they will still have the feeling of being tested. Thus, their performance may be affected. If researchers are interested to carry out their study in a natural setting, it will be "... difficult to control and the results are often problematic to interpret. If a particular phenomenon is the object of study, such as the use of strategies for referential communication, one may have to wait days for any spontaneous emission of relevant data. Further, natural data are the product of a myriad of factors over most of which the researcher is unaware (Bialystok, 1990, p. 161).

According to Khanji (1996) and Yarmohammadi & Seif (1992), paraphrase, repetition, restructuring, and approximation are among the most widely and frequently used strategies. Therefore, the results of the first question, i.e., the most frequently used strategies – except about "direct appeal for help" –are in line with the findings of previous studies. The first and third most frequently used strategies – self-repetition and approximation- were employed mostly by advanced learners. High proficiency learners tend to use more holistic conceptual strategies, typically involving semantic approximation by means of words or gestures. The explanation for this proficiency-related differences seems to be quite straightforward—"learners of a low proficiency level do not have a sufficiently large L2 vocabulary at their disposal to come up with suitable approximation"(Poulisse, 1990).

The second most frequently used strategy – direct appeal for help – was mostly used by female intermediate learners. It seems that the frequent employment of "direct appeal for help" is a consequence of teaching method which is employed in the educational center. The main focus in education is to nurture learners who are able to communicate effectively in English. Therefore, a great deal of class time is devoted to speaking skill. Since the first language of all teachers is the same as learners' and to help learners to keep communication going, learners are used to asking the unknown lexical items in Farsi. On the other hand, the limited vocabulary knowledge of intermediate learners may have a role in resorting to this strategy. Thus, the frequent employment of "direct appeal for help" in the present study reflects the influence of teaching method on strategy use.

The second question explored the relation between strategy use frequency and level of language proficiency. In general, learner's use of CpSs undergoes considerable restructuring and reorganization as proficiency increases. Poulisse (1990) noted that there was indeed an inverse relationship between the number of compensation strategies used and the proficiency level of Dutch subjects learning English as a foreign language. She suggested a fairly straightforward explanation of this fact, namely that low proficiency learners encounter more lexical problems and therefore need to resort to compensation strategies more often. In her study on Persian learners, Paribakht (1985) also found similar results.

In the present study, it was revealed that there is a significant relationship between the frequency of compensation strategies use and proficiency i.e. the frequency of compensation strategies use increases as the level of language proficiency develops. This finding is in contrast with that of previous studies. Intermediate learners employed 114 instances of CpSs while the advanced learners used 281 instances. Two factors seem to underlie this contrast: First, the learners have not been acquainted with CpSs use; CpSs training is not addressed in teaching material. Even the teachers do not have a clear concept of the subject. Therefore, the learners do not know these strategies. They themselves have discovered some compensation strategies during the years of learning and employ them in communication. As they learn more and spend more time in learning environment, the chance of strategy discovery increases. They also use their peers' experience and share their own. The second factor that may underlie this contrast is that intermediate learners are less risk-taker than advanced learners. During the course of retrospection, intermediate learners showed that they do not have a strong self-confidence

in speaking. This may originate from their limited repertoire of linguistic knowledge. Some participants told the researchers that sometimes they had alternatives in mind to express the meaning but the fear of making mistake prevented them from giving them a try.

The third question asked about the probable relationship between CpSs use and gender. No detailed study concerning compensation strategies is in hand but the results of similar studies on learning strategies, which according to some researchers – e.g. Oxford (1990) – include compensation strategies, show greater willingness of female learners to employing CpSs. Ofcourse, there are studies (e.g., Tercanlioglu, 2004) which indicate women use fewer strategies than men. In this study, no significant relationship was found between two variables. Both male and female learners used CpSs at relatively the same level: male learners used 198 instances as compared to 197 instances of female learners.

### 5.1 Implications and Applications

The findings of this study indicate that Iranian learners have not been acquainted with compensation strategies. Being afraid of making mistake in the public eye prevents them from risk-taking and they resort to those cases of CpSs which they are relatively assured of their effect. These facts confirm the necessity of teaching CpSs. CpSs should be taught so that communication does not break down. Although employing suitable CpSs will stop communication from breaking down, this is just the first and most apparent function of CpSs.

On the other hand, some researchers (e.g., Dornyei, 1995; Dornyei and Thurrell, 1991) advocate the teaching of communication strategies for enhancing second language acquisition, hopefully the ultimate goal of language classrooms. Faucette (2001) states, “Communication strategies would serve as an excellent means for less proficient learners to have the tools to maintain the conversation, resulting in the opportunity to receive more language input and improve their language ability” (p. 6). Moreover, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) believes that a non-native speaker's ability to keep a conversation going is a very valuable skill because by maintaining the conversation, the non-native speaker can presumably benefit from receiving additional modified input. Indeed, if language learners soon give up without employing the language and interactive strategies at their disposal, it is unlikely they will develop their communicative ability.

Teaching compensation strategies necessitates their integration into EFL curriculum. Language teachers and syllabus designers should develop an effective strategy-training program that equips EFL students with CpSs that enhance language acquisition. Faucette (2001), criticizing the poor quality of text books in presenting CpSs, maintains that it is perhaps disappointing that textbooks appear to offer few effective practice activities to develop communication strategy competence. The teachers' resource books have a bit more to draw on, yet are by no means ideal. More high quality materials designed to teach compensation strategies would be very welcomed. Paribakht (1985) suggests that such results – the relationship between language proficiency and CpSs use frequency – can be used as criteria for material design, sequencing and presentation in EFL/ESL classroom. She even proposes a strategic approach which is complementary to a communicative approach to L2 teaching.

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