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SOME COMMENTS
ON THE EXISTING
TYPOLOGIES OF
COMMUNICATION
ESTRATEGIES:

Its effect on the
interpretation of
empirical findings

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The main aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the existing typologies of communication strategies that have been adopted by different authors in order to carry out empirical research on the field. For this purpose, we will focus on two different taxonomies of communication strategies which have been classified as being either product or process-oriented. We will discuss the problems and criticisms associated with these typologies, and we shall also account for Poulisse's (1995) revision of such classifications, as well as for her own proposal.

We address this issue since it is our belief that the adoption of a given typology of communication strategies in a determined case study might affect results of the investigation. In order to illustrate such an idea, we will comment on the results of an empirical study concerning the teachability of communication strategies (Dörnyei, 1995) in which a product-oriented taxonomy of communication strategies was adopted.

In the 1970s, several studies prepared the ground for the study of communication strategies. Selinker's (1972) article on interlanguage introduced the notion of second language communication strategies. Váradi (1973) and Tarone (1977) provided a systematic analysis of communication strategies based on Selinker's (1972) notion of this kind of strategies: "if the fossilised aspects of interlanguage are the result of an identifiable approach by the learner to communication with native speakers of the target language, then we are dealing with strategies of second language communication".

The above quoted authors (Váradi, 1973; Tarone, 1977) introduced a classification of communication strategies that would be used in subsequent research. Tarone (1977) defined her taxonomy as "a system which seems to provide the best tool to make sense of the behaviour of my subjects in this communicative situation". The author herself pointed out the lack of generality of her taxonomy. However, other researchers have adapted Tarone's (1977) typology and introduced other strategies (Paribakht, 1985).

This fact has promoted the existence of a rather confusing multitude of different strategies of ambiguous validity. According to Bialystok (1990), "the variety of taxonomies proposed in the literature differ primarily in terminology and overall categorizing principles rather than in the substance of specific strategies".

The following represents a taxonomy of communication strategies based on the above stated conceptualizations.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES	EXPLANATION OF STRATEGY
A. Avoidance or Reduction Strategies	
1. Message abandonment _____	leaving a message unfinished because of linguistic difficulties.
2. Topic avoidance _____	avoiding topic areas or concepts which pose linguistic difficulties.
B. Achievement or Compensatory Strategies	
3. Circumlocution _____	describing or exemplifying the target object or action (e.g., the thing you open doors with for key).
4. Approximation _____	using an alternative term which expresses the meaning of the target lexical items as closely as possible (e.g. ship for sail boat).

5. Use of all-purpose words _____ extending a general empty lexical item to contexts where specific words are lacking (e.g. overuse of thing).
6. Word-coinage _____ creating a nonexisting L2 word based on a supposed rule (e.g. paintist for painter).
7. Use of nonlinguistic means _____ mime, gesture, facial expression.
8. Literal translation _____ translating literally a lexical item an idiom, a compound word or structure from L1 to L2.
9. Foreignizing _____ using a L1 word by adjusting it to L2 phonologically (e.g. adding a L2 suffix).
10. Code switching _____ using a L1 word with L1 pronunciation.
11. Appeal for help _____ turning to the conversation partner for help, directly or indirectly.

C. Stalling or time gaining strategies

12. Use of fillers/hesitation devices _____ using filling words or gambits to fill in pauses and to gain time to think (e.g. now, let me see...).

(From Dornyei, 1995:57; based on Váradi (1973), Tarone (1977), Faerch and Kasper (1983a), and Bialystok (1990)).

In the latter half of the 1980s, some researchers at Nijmegen University (Kellerman, Bongaerts, and Poulisse, 1987) criticized the existing typologies of communication strategies as being product-oriented, since these showed a tendency to illustrate strategy types with isolated examples, rather than demonstrate how these typologies could be applied to cohesive speech or writing. They focused on the linguistic product, so these typologies were merely descriptive.

The Nijmegen University Group observed two major deficits in product-oriented taxonomies of communication strategies. These involve: a failure to distinguish the psychological process from the linguistic product, as well as to consider the linguistic and non-linguistic constraints that influence the choice of a particular strategy.

For these reasons, this group of researchers proposed an alternative taxonomy of communication strategies, which is based on the assumption that identifying the cognitive processes that underlie the choice of a strategy is essential, as well as, taking into account the factors involved in such selection.

Kellerman (1991), a member of the Nijmegen group, characterizes this process-oriented typology considering three fundamental conditions that are reflected in such taxonomy. The first one makes reference to its *psychological plausibility*, which means that the strategies included in this taxonomy are compatible with cognitive processing and problem-solving behaviour. The second condition is *parsimony*. This points out their preference for a taxonomy with few strategy types, provided these are consistent with data. Finally the

third condition involves the fact that a taxonomy should be *generalisable* across tasks, items, languages and learners. This means that no strategies should be uniquely associated with certain tasks or certain items.

The following constitutes the process-oriented taxonomy presented by the Nijmegen group (1987):

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES	DEFINITIONS
I. Conceptual archistrategy	manipulating the target concept to make it expressible through available linguistic resources.
1.a. Analytic Strategies	specifying characteristic features of the concept (e.g. circumlocution).
1.b. Holistic Strategies	using a different concept which shares characteristics with the target item (e.g. approximation).
II. Linguistic/Code Archistrategy	manipulating the speakers linguistic knowledge.
2.a. Morphological creativity	creating a new word by applying L2 morphological rules to an L2 word (e.g. grammatical word coinage).
2.b. Transfer	from another language.

(From: Kellerman, Bongaerts and Poulisse, 1987)

Poulisse (in press) criticises the above quoted typology by arguing that the distinction between conceptual and linguistic strategies does not refer to different processes involved in the production of these strategies. According to the author, both conceptual strategies of the holistic type and the linguistic strategy of transfer refer to the same process, namely that of *substitution*, regardless of whether the word being replaced belongs to a same or a different language.

Apart from this, Poulisse (in press) points to great differences in the processes underlying analytic and holistic conceptual strategies. In the author's view, analytic strategies (e.g. circumlocution) require the planning and execution of new messages, which involves creating new syntactic plans, and selecting new lexical items from the mental lexicon. On the other hand, holistic strategies (e.g. approximation) require the addition or replacement of some of the conceptual features in the concept which the speaker is about to produce.

Bearing this difference in mind, and considering the processes involved in the use of linguistic transfer strategies, Poulisse (forthcoming) states that holistic strategies seem to be more similar to linguistic transfer strategies than to conceptual analytic ones.

Poulisse (in press) presents an alternative typology of communication strategies. This taxonomy fulfills all the criteria, which, in the author's opinion, any theory of communication strategies use should meet. These criteria are the following: *it should allow one to define CS use and to operationalize the distinction between strategic and nonstrategic language use; it should capture the differences between the CS types that have been distinguished in a theoretically satisfying manner; and it should enable one to explain empirical findings that have been obtained to date and to predict future findings.*

We present the typology of communication strategies suggested by Poulisse (in press) as follows:

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES	DEFINITION
1. Substitution _____	substitution of one lexical item for another, whether it be an L1 for L2 item.
2. Substitution plus type _____	substitutions which require phonological and/or morphological adaptation before they are articulated, (e.g. foreignizing, morphological creativity).
3. Reconceptualization _____	a change in the preverbal message which involves more than a single chunk, (e.g. paraphrase).

(From: Poulisse (in press))

The above taxonomy has been developed in accordance with Levelt's (1989) model of speech production, which includes the following parts.

A cognitive component named *conceptualizer*, which produces preverbal messages. Then, these are passed to a linguistic component called the *formulator* which encodes them grammatically and phonologically, and has access to a lexicon which gives the messages linguistic forms. Finally, there is an *articulator*, which allows for the production of the messages.

According to Poulisse (in press), the three types of communication strategies included in her taxonomy can be related to differences in the speech production process described above. Therefore, this new typology is theoretically motivated and the second criterion is met.

The third requirement, which deals with the possibility of explaining empirical findings, as well as, to predict future ones, is also fulfilled. In order to illustrate this fact, Poulisse (in press) makes reference to the results of a study carried out by the Nijmegen project (Poulisse, 1990), in which the author assumes that speakers adhered to the general principles of communication, particularly the Cooperative Principle and the Least Effort Principle (Grice, 1975). According to the author, speakers should use a communication strategy which is both comprehensible and requires little effort. However, since the reconceptualization strategies that are most comprehensible require much effort, the above assumption is not always possible. In fact, subjects of the study (Poulisse, 1990) tried to be comprehensible, and thus, made use of reconceptualization strategies in the task where interaction did not take place. Substitution strategies were mainly employed in other tasks which either dealt with high cognitive demands or allowed the presence of an interlocutor. Therefore, as Poulisse (in press) had predicted, subjects spent much effort when necessary and saved it whenever possible; and in any case, they always tended to be comprehensible.

This latter typology of communication strategies developed by Poulisse (in press) has been criticised by Otal and Ruiz de Mendoza (in press). These authors argue that despite the fact that Poulisse has attempted to present her taxonomy within an encompassing theory of communication, she only deals with a part of communication strategies, namely those of a compensatory nature. Therefore, we may assume that she presents a restricted and limited view of what a taxonomy of communication strategies would include.

Apart from this, Otal and Ruiz de Mendoza (forthcoming) point to the idea that substitution and reconceptualization strategies share a conceptual basis, since in both cases substitution takes place; in the first case, a given lexical item is replaced by a description, while reconceptualization strategies refer to the substitution of a lexical item by a related lexical item (e.g. paraphrase).

Considering the substitution plus type strategy, the authors agree with Poulisse (in press) in that it requires a greater amount of cognitive effort than the substitution strategy. Nevertheless, and due to this same idea, Otal and Ruiz de Mendoza wonder why a similar distinction between the communication strategy of reconceptualization, as presented by Poulisse (in press), and another one named reconceptualization plus type has not been drawn.

Otal and Ruiz de Mendoza (forthcoming) affirm that human communication is guided by the Relevance Principle (as developed by Sperber and Wilson, 1986), which is best defined in terms of contextual effects and processing effort. These authors characterize communicative behaviour as being intentional, goal-oriented and problematic. This last feature is regarded not only as the coding and decoding of messages, but also as the interpretation of the speaker's intention when producing the message on part of his/her interlocutor.

Otal and Ruiz de Mendoza (in press) distinguish between what they have called *local* communication strategies and *general* communication strategies. The former are the basis of specific communicative goals; and these only exist if the speaker is willing to take part in discourse. As the authors state, *local* communication strategies depend exclusively on the "idiosyncratic features of communicative tasks". Due to this fact, and considering the authors' conception of what communicative behaviour involves, Otal and Ruiz de Mendoza propose a typology of communication strategies which is not based on *local* but on *general* communication strategies, since these last do not only refer to contextual effects but they also take into account the interlocutors' processing effort.

The following constitutes the typology of communication strategies as suggested by Otal and Ruiz de Mendoza (forthcoming), and which focuses on their belief of what human communication entails.

GENERAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Information strategy (focuses on production)

- *Explicit* (using non-ambiguous lexical items and syntactic constructions)
- *Implicit* (using ambiguous lexical items and syntactic constructions)

Text-context strategy (focuses on reception)

- *Textual* (a lesser amount of contextual information is provided)
- *Contextual* (a greater amount of contextual information is provided)

Negotiation strategy (used when a given speaker is faced with production or interpretation difficulties).
(From: Otal and Ruiz de Mendoza (forthcoming))

Besides as regarded by Alcón (in press), the different approaches to explain the use of communication strategies can be criticized for having presented a partial analysis of what goes on in conversation. Most of the typologies are based on learners' output without taking into account both the speaker and listener's moves in conversation. Alcón (in press) suggests that further research is needed to see if there is a correlation between the learner's communication strategies use and the listener's signals of misunderstanding. In so doing, we could appropriately test the use of different strategies on second language development.

A good example of those approaches to communication strategy use criticized by Alcón (in press) above are Dörnyei's (1995), Paribakht's (1985), and Poulisse and Schils' (1989) studies on the topic.

Paribakht (1985) and Poulisse and Schils (1989) address the issue of the relationship between the learner's proficiency level and the use of communication strategies. Although Poulisse and Schils (1989) focus on the use of compensatory strategies, and they also consider the effect of the type of task in learners CS use.

Paribakht (1985) compared native and nonnative speakers' CS use in a task that required the subjects to describe concrete and abstract concepts. The author concluded that all subjects employed the same type of communication strategies, although beginning learners draw more often on other knowledge sources different from the L2, than did advanced learners. Therefore, we may assume that there is some sort of relation between the learner's proficiency level and CS use. However, as argued by Poulisse and Schils (1989), there was only one type of task involved in Paribakht's study and it cannot be considered as representative of an actual communicative situation. Apart from this, the author made use of a product-oriented taxonomy of communication strategies adapted to her data, what does not allow for the generalisation of the results of this study.

Poulisse and Schils (1989) tested three groups of Dutch learners of English on three different tasks, namely those of picture description, story retell, and an oral interview with a native speaker.

According to the authors, the type of task appeared to influence the type of CS used by the subjects. However, the type of compensatory strategy selected by subjects was did not revealed any sort of relation with their proficiency level, despite the fact that the quantity of compensatory strategies used was inversely related to the subjects proficiency level. Due to this fact, Poulisse and Schils (1989) point to the need for further research on the field.

The main aim of Dörnyei's (1995) study focuses on how strategy training affected qualitative and quantitative aspects of strategy use, on how proficiency affected the results, and on the students' affective dispositions toward such training.

The research was based on the instruction of three strategies, namely those of topic avoidance and replacement, circumlocution, and using fillers and hesitation devices.

For the purposes of the study, subjects were distributed into three groups: one group received no treatment and followed their regular EFL curriculum; the second group was offered conversational training without any focus on specific strategies; and the third group was provided with specific strategy and content training. Strategy training took place in three lessons each week (20-40 min. each week) during six weeks.

Students performed a written and oral test before the instruction and repeated the oral test after the training. This oral test was composed by the following: topic description, cartoon description and definition formulation.

Dörnyei (1995) concludes this research by claiming that communication strategies treatment was successful in improving the quality of the definitions generated by the students. He also argues that the quality and

quantity of students' strategy use were related to their fluency in the pretest. The author points out the unexpected lack of significant difference between treatment and the non-treatment groups (second and third group). He justifies this fact by assuming that communication activities (second group) often include information-gap elements, which can be considered indirect practice in strategy use, and this, thus, may reduce the difference between the two types of training.

Nevertheless, we wonder whether such lack of difference, between the group performing conversational activities without direct instruction on communication strategies and the group receiving direct strategy training, could be due to the fact that the author only focuses on the surface structures of the language; and this, as Bialystok (1990) claims, is unlikely to enhance strategy use.

As a conclusion to this paper, we would like to point out the importance of actually focusing on the interlocutors underlying psychological processes, as well as, on those factors that govern communication in general, when performing an analysis based on the use and selection of communication strategies. As we have tried to demonstrate here, depending on our conceptualization of what a taxonomy of communication strategies should entail, we might regard our results as being more or less significant for our own purposes.

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