The impact of teaching communication strategies on EFL learners' Willingness to Communicate[1]

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Abstract

One of the pedagogical implications of the research on the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) might be to propose practical ways of making language learners more willing to communicate in the classroom. This study investigated the impact of teaching communication strategies (CSs) on Iranian EFL learners' WTC. To this end, 8 intact classes were included as the experimental and control groups. The control group underwent regular language instruction, while the experimental group received the treatment (i.e., communication strategy training). The self-report measurement of WTC (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrad, 2001) was done before (pre-test) and after the treatment (post-test). The results of the independent-samples *t* test showed that the degree of WTC of the treatment group was significantly higher compared with that of the control group. It was concluded that teaching CSs helps learners become more willing to communicate in the classroom.

Keywords: Willingness to Communicate, communication strategies, strategic competence, Communication Apprehension, Self-perceived Communicative Competence

51

1. Introduction

The development of communicative competence in language learners might be the central purpose of communicative approaches to language teaching (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). However, we cannot be assured that by achieving communicative competence, second language (L2) use is guaranteed. It happens that some learners after a long period of time spent on learning English and having a presumably high level of language competence are still reluctant to interact (MacIntyre, 2007a). Such communication aversion displayed by these learners might indicate that there must be an elusive variable whose task is to put that competence into practice and make the individual more responsive, leading to the actual and volitional initiation of L2 communication (Dörnyei, 2005). This variable goes beyond communicative competence; it is about more than the ability to use a language; it is the psychological preparedness to communicate at a particular moment (MacIntyre, 2007b). This variable has been called Willingness to Communicate (WTC).

Factors that might impact upon an individual's WTC are numerous (e.g., Cao, 2011; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, and Donovan, 2003; MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Peng, 2007; Yashima, 2002). Among these, one's L2 proficiency, as MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei and Noels (1998) believe, will have a significant effect on WTC. This means that language learners, especially at lower levels, are highly likely to experience some difficulty when communicating in the target language. Too much difficulty during communication may make them abort their attempt to carry on. This communicational frustration, if constantly felt by learners, may thus result in eroding confidence, and, consequently, in dissipating the desire to communicate.

This study aims to demonstrate that if language learners could manage to strategically compensate for deficiencies in communication, their WTC would probably not fade away. They may acquire the ability to get their meaning across to communicative partners and to cope successfully with the problems popping up during the communication process. Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991) referred to this ability as strategic competence. Strategic competence, otherwise known as communication strategies (CSs), is considered as one component of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). It is conceivable that an underdevelopment of this competence may account for some learners' lack of the ability to overcome interactional pitfalls, which may adversely affect their WTC. In this study, we wanted to make language learners more willing to communicate by dint of making them assured of their strategic competence.

2. Willingness to Communicate and communication strategies

The investigation of the relationship between WTC and CSs seems to be a conspicuous rarity in the literature. In the frequently quoted heuristic model of WTC by MacIntyre et al. (1998), communicative competence is considered as one of the affective and cognitive variables having stable and enduring influence on WTC. Although a certain level of all the other competences (e.g., linguistic, discourse, sociolinguistic) is required in order for effective communication to occur, they believe that a speaker can go a long way by relying primarily on strategic competence, which is mainly the knowledge of CSs.

In a similar vein, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1994) refer to conversational/communicational strategies as the invaluable means of dealing with communication "trouble spots." They hold the view that these strategies

> enhance fluency and add to the efficiency of communication. Knowing such strategies is particularly useful for language learners, who frequently experience such difficulties in conversation, because they provide them with a sense of security in the language by allowing extra time and room to maneuver. (p. 44)

When the learner anticipates problems during communication, this "sense of security" can allay his/her fear of speaking, or language anxiety, leading to a lower level of communication apprehension as well as a higher level of WTC.

In order to illuminate the likely links between the two main variables of the present study, we continue with first a closer look at the concept of WTC and its immediate antecedents to see how they determine L2 use, and second with what CSs are and how they can be exploited by language learners to clear any communication problem.

2.1. Willingness to Communicate

A rich body of research, either in communication studies or in language learning studies, has been dedicated to exploring the reasons behind what Burgoon (1976) called "unwillingness to communicate" (e.g., Lee & Ng, 2010; McCroskey & Richmond, 1990; Millrood, 2001; Sunderland, 1998; Yung & McCroskey, 2004; Zhang & Head, 2009). The findings indicate that a labyrinth of psychological, social, contextual, situational, and linguistic variables impact upon the degree to which an individual is willing to communicate with a particular person at a particular moment.

Among all these variables that make an individual's WTC susceptible to variation are: the sense of kinship between communicators, the register of discourse (the

formality or informality of the situation), the degree of evaluation of the speaker, the topic of discussion, situational variables (MacIntyre et al., 1998), the group size in the classroom (Cao & Philp, 2006), sex and age (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2002), culture (Barraclough, Christophel, & McCroskey, 1988) to name just a few. Moreover, WTC is not static. As MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) argue, it can be seen as a dynamic system changing from moment to moment.

In accordance with the model proposed by MacIntyre (1994), people with the least WTC are apprehensive (about communication) individuals who perceive themselves to be incompetent as communicators. In other words, the model specifically focuses on two of the most immediate precursors of WTC: Communication Apprehension, and Self-perceived Communicative Competence.

Communication Apprehension is defined as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (Burroughs, Marie, & McCroskey, 2003, p. 231). The anxiety that a student experiences, due to some communication problems he or she might think likely, is easily inimical to the desire to communicate. Some causes of Communication Apprehension might include: novelty, formality, subordinate status, and degree of attention from others (McCroskey, 1997), all of which are particularly relevant to the language classroom.

Self-perceived Communicative Competence is the perception one might have of his or her own competence as a communicator (Burroughs et al., 2003). Although actual competence might encourage communication, it is the perception of that competence that will ultimately determine the choice of whether to communicate or not (Clément, Baker, & MacIntyre, 2003). This might explain why some language learners, being incompetent communicators notwithstanding, demonstrate a comparatively high level of WTC, while some others, regardless of their high language competency, shun any communication partner and prefer to remain reticent due to an underestimation of their competence.

There is much evidence that the links between Communication Apprehension, Self-perceived Communicative Competence, and WTC are strong: if Communication Apprehension recedes, an individual's perceived competence is likely to be higher, leading to a greater level of WTC (e.g., Barraclough et al., 1988; Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004; MacIntyre, 1994; MacIntyre, Babin, & Clément, 1999; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrad, 2001; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; McCroskey, 1997). So if we are to enhance learners' willingness to interact, we need to allay their apprehension at the time of communication and bolster their confidence regarding their communicative competence to initiate and maintain the interaction. This study intends to show that CSs might help.

2.2. WTC in this study

When it is believed that second language learners must communicate in order to acquire the language (MacIntyre et al., 2003; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Savignon, 2005), the learner's WTC comes to the forefront of language teaching and learning concerns. It then makes sense to suggest that a learner will stand a much better chance of success in acquiring an L2 when he or she is not disinclined to initiate L2 communication when such a predisposition emanates from both the self and the situation.

In addition to the differences between L1 WTC and L2 WTC, we need to recognize that the latter itself might differ between English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) and English-as-a-second-language contexts. WTC assumes even greater importance when we consider learning a second language in an EFL context, in which language learners might have less opportunity to initiate communication beyond the classroom. Furthermore, even two different countries (e.g., Japan vs. Iran), as representing two different EFL contexts, may provide more or fewer opportunities for learners to communicate in an L2 outside the classroom. WTC is thus conceived in somewhat different ways in different contexts.

This study, therefore, has to conceptualize WTC with regard to the restrictive features of its immediate context. In Iran, a language class is the only place that affords some opportunities for learners to communicate; thus, WTC barely makes any sense outside of the classroom. By WTC we mean the degree to which an EFL learner is willing to interact inside the classroom when he or she feels free to do so.

2.3. Teaching Communication Strategies

Communication strategies refer to all those techniques that language learners employ, in spite of a deficient language competency, when target language items are not available. This is the way learners may circumvent communication pitfalls by their immediately accessible (non)linguistic resources.

The efficacy of teaching CSs has not been devoid of controversy. Doubtless, it is worthwhile for learners to have a repertoire of such strategies at their disposal, whereby they achieve a degree of communicative effectiveness beyond their immediate linguistic means (Thornbury, 2005). While there is ample evidence in support of teaching CSs (Brett, 2001; Dörnyei 1995; Dörnyei and Thurrel, 1991; Ellis, 1984; Faucette, 2001; Littlemore, 2001, 2003; Maleki, 2007, 2010; Nakatani, 2010; Oxford; 2001; Yule & Tarone, 1997), some have voiced their misgivings about teaching them (Bialystok, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Thornbury, 2006). Thornbury (2005), for instance, contended that while these strategies of communication might provide learners with an initial conversational "foothold," they may

also lead to the premature closing down of the learner's developing language system (interlanguage), making them dependent on their strategic competence at the expense of their overall communicative competence.

A point deserving a special mention here is that the present study includes teaching those CSs which are deemed conducive to strategic competence development. As Faucette (2001) argues, the CSs requiring L2 production are recommended and desirable strategies to teach. Among them, interactional strategies might be particularly worthwhile. They lead to the initiation and maintenance of communication and smooth meaning negotiation (Maleki, 2010). Reduction strategies such as topic avoidance, message abandonment, going off the point, or even borrowing (for a comprehensive review of definitions and taxonomies of CSs see Dörnyei & Scott, 1997) were not dealt with in this study. As their names suggest, these strategies induce a sense of unwillingness to communicate in an L2. A brief description of all the strategies that were practiced in this study is provided in the Section 4.4.

3. Research question

The research question of the present study is: Does teaching CSs have any statistically significant impact on the degree of WTC of Iranian EFL learners?

4. Method

4.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 120 EFL learners (78 females and 42 males) in a private language institute. All the participants had completed four terms at the elementary level as well as the Key English Test (KET) to start the pre-intermediate level. They ranged in age from 15 to 40 years. Since random selection of the participants was not possible, 8 intact classes were the target participants. Four classes constituted the control group ($N = 62$), while 4 other, similar classes of EFL learners formed the experimental (treatment) group ($N = 58$). All the participants were assumed to be at the intermediate level of English based on the KET scores they had obtained. They were all learning English as a foreign language with little opportunity to speak English outside the classroom.

4.2. Instrumentation

The self-report measurement of WTC (see Appendix A) employed in this study consisted of 27 items, all of which referred to the students' willingness to en-

gage in communication tasks during class time (MacIntyre et al., 2001). Students were required to indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 how willing they would be to communicate inside the classroom (1 = *almost never*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *half of the time*, 4 = *usually*, 5 = *almost always*). The items were grouped into four skill areas (alpha levels indicate reliability estimates for each set of items): speaking (8 items, α = .89), reading (6 items, α = .81), writing (8 items, α = .78) and comprehension (5 items, α = .65). The scale was translated into Persian to ensure the intelligibility of the questionnaire and increase the return rate. The Persian version of the instrument was translated back to English to ensure the accuracy of the translation as well.

4.3. Procedure

Both the experimental and control group were taught by one of the researchers and received the same amount of class instruction, while the training on CSs (the treatment) was offered only to the experimental group. Prior to the treatment, both groups took the WTC questionnaire mentioned above to examine whether their WTC levels were significantly different.

The next step was to provide the CS training (the treatment) to the experimental group. By contrast, the control group, following the regular EFL curriculum, received no treatment. The final phase involved the re-administration of the self-report WTC measurement (as the post-test) to gauge the participants' WTC in both groups on the penultimate session of the course.

4.4. Treatment

Teaching CSs can be incorporated into whatever task is being done in class. In other words, any opportunity in class might be grasped by the teacher as a "golden moment" to teach the intended strategy of communication. For instance, when teaching vocabulary, every new item can, by the teacher's scaffolding, be explained or "circumlocuted" by the learners, however simple that circumlocution might be. For the purposes of this study, however, some specific tasks were devised to encourage learners to make use of CSs to deal with communication problems. These tasks will now be explained in some detail.

Circumlocution is describing or exemplifying the target object or action for which the exact word is, for whatever reason, not available. It can be regarded as a "meaning negotiation" tool in that the aim is to restore or maintain mutual understanding (Van den Branden, 1997) by the interlocutors to achieve a communicative goal (Tarone, 1980). The negotiation of meaning, whose efficacy for second language learning has been validated by numerous

researchers (e.g., Ernst, 1994; Foster, 1998; Foster & Ohta, 2005; Long, 1983; Savignon, 2002), is the essence of this CS.

The use of monolingual dictionaries proves really helpful in acquiring the circumlocution strategy. Every session, 10 carefully selected words (see Appendix B) were provided to the learners. They looked them up in their dictionaries (learners have to bring and use a monolingual dictionary in class) as homework and brought the meanings to class. In pairs, one learner said the word and another one said the meaning, and then the other way round. Raising learners' awareness of the simple way in which a dictionary may define a word is of particular importance (for example by explicitly mentioning useful phrases and expressions; see Appendix C). After 10 sessions repeating the same task, the learners were given 5 words in their mother tongue and tried to define them in English, and then again in pairs one learner gave the definition in English and another one said the word in the mother tongue. At this point the original English words were given in order for the learners to compare their own definitions with their dictionary's.

A *formulaic sequence* is defined as "a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other meaning elements, which is prefabricated: that is stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar" (Wray, 2000, p. 465). Implicit in this definition is the fact that, since formulaic sequences are accessed as wholes, they require minimal processing capacity, leading to more fluent speech (Ellis, 2003). Ample evidence lends support to the efficiency of investment in formulaic sequences either as an approach in its own right or as one type of CS (e.g., Boers, Eyckmans, Kappel, Stenger, & Demecheleer, 2006; Canale & Swain, 1980; Ellis, 2005; Howarth, 1998; Thornbury, 2002; Shin & Nation, 2008).

As a first step, the teacher's job is raising learners' awareness of the pervasiveness of formulaic sequences in written or spoken English (Boers et al., 2006), and of their beneficence in language reception and production. Introducing the concept of chunks by bringing up some familiar examples (*in the morning*, *go for a walk*, *wearing glasses*, *how much does . . . cost?*) seems essential. Learners need to become aware of the fact that whenever they want to speak, write, listen, or read, chunks are greatly helpful.

Using a regular text in students' course book, the teacher introduced various chunks presented in the text (see Appendix D). In practice, for noticing formulaic sequences, learners were required to underline all the chunks on a few pages of their storybook (at every level a storybook is the regular supplement to the main course book) or in the listening task transcripts provided at the back of the course book.

Fillers are a few fixed phrases that are supposed to come to the help of learners when they need more time to think about what to say. They are considered as invaluable delaying or hesitation devices that can be used to buy some time and carry on the conversation when language learners would otherwise end up feeling more and more desperate and would typically grind to a halt (Dörnyei and Thurrell, 1991).

At first, a number of fillers were presented to the students: *well*, *I think/mean*, *I believe that*, *let's say*, *let me think/see*, *actually*, *you know*, *as a matter of fact*, *to be quite honest with you*, *you see what I mean*, *as far as I know/remember*, *in my idea/opinion*, *uh*, *what else I can say*, *how can I say that*? Then a prepared piece of text (see Appendix E) was distributed among them. This piece of writing contained no fillers. The students, in pairs, were required to put different fillers in appropriate places (usually between the chunks). Every pair swapped their work with the neighbors for comparison. Then they were provided with the same text containing fillers (it may include some other strategies of communication such as circumlocution). In pairs, they compared their work with the new version of the text and discussed the proper use of fillers in discourse.

Appealing for help is a straight strategy of asking for questions, help or repetition in case incomprehensibility. The following devices to appeal for help were directly provided to learners on the board: *Pardon me!*, *What does (x) mean?*, *How do you say (x) in English?*, *I didn't get you, could you please repeat your question?*, *I don't get you. What do you mean?*, *Can you say that again?*, *May you write it up?*, *How do you spell that?*, *Can you explain more?*, *I didn't understand the first part, could you please repeat that?* The teacher wrote the following question on the board: "Do you use a thimble when you sew?" In pairs, students asked this question to each other and then tried to use the sequences provided on the board to ask for help. During the task, they consulted their dictionary to prepare for an appropriate response to their partner's request for help.

The strategy of *approximation* involves the use of a single target language item or structure which the learner knows is not correct but which is assumed to share enough semantic features (semantic contiguity) with the desired item to be correctly interpreted (Tarone, 1981). A short explanation and some examples were used to raise the learners' awareness of this strategy (some examples include: *driving card* for *driver's license*, *ship* for *sail boat*, *vegetable* for *broccoli*, *bus* for *double-decker*, and *king house* for *palace*). Then, in pairs students were required to brainstorm a word or a phrase in order to describe some pictures presented to them. Since the exact word for every picture was not available, they were supposed to look for a term as close as possible to the intended idea. For example, a picture of the Gherkin Tower stimulated the following phrases from the students: "a long building," "high building," or even "a big house!"

The use of *all-purpose words* is the strategy of extending a general, empty lexical item to contexts where specific words are lacking (Dörnyei, 1995). By recognizing the versatility of a verb such as *get*, which enjoys a high level of coverage (Richards & Schmidt, 2002), a learner may convey the sense of many other verbs (for example: *obtain, acquire, become, catch, receive, succeed, enter, earn, realize, retrieve*, etc.) through just one verb. The use of all-purpose words provides the opportunity for the learner to compensate for their inadequate vocabulary repertoire. In pairs, students were required to replace all the verbs, if possible, with *get* on one page of their story book. Then the teacher checked their work for the accuracy and appropriateness of the verb replacements.

5. Results

As mentioned above, the questionnaire used in this study addressed four skill areas: speaking, reading, writing and comprehension. We broke the questionnaire down and performed independent-samples *t* tests concerning WTC in each skill area before and after the treatment. Because of space limitations, we report the results for only one skill: speaking.

An independent-samples *t* test (Table 1) was run to compare the degree to which the participants of the study were willing to communicate before the treatment. There was no statistically significant difference before the treatment in the degree of WTC between the experimental group ($M = 45.36$, $SD = 26.72$) and the control group ($M = 40.46$, $SD = 24.39$), with $t(113) = 1.035$, $p>.05$.

Table 1 Independent-samples *t* test for the experimental and control groups on the pre-test

Levene's test for equality of variances		*t* test for equality of means			
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean dif.
.050	.507	1.035	113	.260	4.897

The experimental group received the CSs training while the control group followed the regular classroom instruction. After the treatment, the WTC questionnaire was administered again, and the performance of the experimental and control groups were compared. The results of the independent-samples *t*-test (Table 2) showed that there was a significant difference in the WTC scores between experimental group ($M = 59.21$, $SD = 27.31$) and control group ($M = 42.79$, $SD = 27.64$), with $t(99) = 3.48$, $p< .05$. Furthermore, the magnitude of the difference in the means was large (eta squared = .10). This meaningful difference

showed that the participants who received CS training became more willing to communicate than those who received no treatment on CSs.

Table 2 Independent samples *t* test for the experimental and control groups on the post-test

Levene's test for equality of variances		*t* test for equality of means			
F	Sig.	*t*	*df*	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean dif.
.722	.374	3.563	99	.001	16.424

Moreover, two paired-samples *t*tests were run in order to find whether there was any significant increase in WTC for individual groups after the treatment. Table 3 shows that there was no statistically significant difference in WTC scores for the control group between their performances on the pre-test (M = 37.17, SD = 24.41) and post-test (M = 43.79,SD = 28.59), with t (52) = 1.27, p > .05.

Table 3 Paired samples *t* test for the control group on the pre- and post-test

Group	Mean	*SD*	*SEM*	*t*	*df*	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control group	-6.61950	37.8276	5.19602	-1.274	52	.208

For the experimental group, there was a statistically significant difference in WTC scores between their performances on the pre-test (M = 42.84, SD = 27.76) and post-test (M = 63.46, SD = 28.04), with $t(47)$ = 3.35, p < .05. This means that the participants in the experimental group became significantly more willing to communicate after receiving the training on CSs.

Table 4 Paired samples *t* test for the experimental group on the pre- and post-test

Group	Mean	*SD*	*SEM*	*t*	*df*	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental group	-20.62500	42.58722	6.14694	-3.355	47	.002

6. Discussion

This study presents the argument that language learners will become more willing to communicate if they acquire the ability (employing CSs) to overcome communicational problems. There might be some very direct explanations for the effects of each strategy of communication on WTC. Consider a situation to which the following comment by MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) applies: "when vocabulary items do not flow easily to mind, WTC declines" (p. 165). In such situations CSs, *circumlocution* for example, help learners compensate for the evasive word and keep their WTC unscathed. On other occasions, *fillers* offer

them some extra time to think online about how to solve the imminent problem and reduce the attendant apprehension. *Appealing for help* gives learners the assurance that in case of the very problem occurring, seeking for direct help will prevent the interaction from coming to an end. The use of *all-purpose words* affords them the opportunity to keep the communication going in spite of their limited vocabulary size. All these may lead to higher levels of WTC.

But more generally, we can argue that CSs enhance learners' WTC. First, *CSs make learners feel less Communication Apprehension.* It is clear that the fear of engaging in interaction adversely affects one's WTC. This communication phobia might wither away if we attempt to eliminate the roots. Communication Apprehension originates from feeling uneasy about encountering problems during interaction: not knowing the right word to convey the intended meaning, not being able to repeatedly fall silent during speaking in order to think about the words to use and not knowing how to deal with incomprehension. This fear might be alleviated when a learner feels that he is equipped with some techniques or strategies by which he can resolve any communication problem with ease. Teaching CSs, in this sense, might give learners a comforting sense of security (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1994).

Second, *CSs help learners achieve a higher perception of their communicative competence.* As mentioned earlier, there exist two perspectives on an individual's communicative competence: the actual communicative competence and the perception one has of one's communicative competence. As noted by Clément et al. (2003), the latter ultimately determines the choice of whether to communicate or not. Some experience of successfully coping with communication difficulties brings the learner a higher perception of his/her communicative competence. The dubiousness of this perception by no means matters. It improves one's self-confidence and consequently emboldens one to feel assured enough to take risks and venture into interaction in spite of the deficiency of one's actual communicative competence.

Next, *CSs improve learners' state communicative self-confidence.* According to Clément (1980, 1986), self-confidence involves two key constructs: Perceived Competence and a lack of Anxiety. These constructs represent relatively enduring personal characteristics. However, as MacIntyre et al. (1998) argue, some situations might entail more confidence than others depending on the characteristics of prior L2 experience. As learners see their ability to overcome communicative pitfalls during interaction, they feel much more confident about initiating and maintaining communication. Gaining psychological security (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1994) and linguistic self-confidence (MacIntyre et al., 1998) through acquiring the strategies of communication may greatly contribute to learners' level of willingness to interact.

Furthermore, *CSs can be psycholinguisticaly comforting for learners so that they are willing to initiate communication.* According to Skehan's (1998) dual mode system, much of language is more exemplar- rather than rule-based. This study has tried to expand the strategy of employing prefabricated patterns by learners through raising their awareness about the prevalence of formulaic sequences. By using this strategy, learners can gradually build a reliable repertoire of highly useful prefabricated patterns on which they can draw at the time of communicative difficulties and reduce the learning burden while maximizing communicative ability (Ellis, 2008).

Finally, *CSs motivate learners.* CSs can be regarded as a useful means to remove the causes of demotivation in learners. It frequently happens that when a learner, especially at lower levels, does have some ideas in his/her mind to convey, he/she keeps them bottled up just because of not knowing just *one* word. This lack of the ability to compensate for a missing word and consequently avoiding the conveyance of the intended meaning may lead to the erosion of motivation. Being aware of the existence of a strategy such as circumlocution and knowing the way to employ it might bolster the learner's confidence to venture into communication. Experience tells us that achieving success in meaning conveyance by learners can arouse their motivation and enthusiasm to initiate communication.

One point regarding CSs merits special attention, namely the overuse and misuse of some strategies by learners of which both the learner and the teacher should be wary. It is exemplified by a learner who obviates the need for the use of many verbs and repeatedly resorts to the use of just one verb (e.g., *get*, in accordance with the strategy of using all-purpose words). This is redolent of the case made by some researchers against teaching CSs, where they believed that these strategies may hinder learners' language development system, making them dependent on their strategic competence at the expense of their overall communicative competence (Thornbury, 2005).

Indeed, at beginning stages it is only natural and we should not expect too much of learners, that is, we should not expect them to use CSs immaculately. On the other hand, when they grow aware of CSs, they can easily notice them in discourse. This is where the teacher might play the role of a model. He may introduce and demonstrate the appropriate use of different strategies. For instance, he can make use of appealing-for-help-devices whenever a learner asks a question. He can circumlocute a new word before presenting it, which, if the learners guessing the right word, may be really encouraging for them.

In early stages learners need conscious effort to use CSs. But, little by little, they become accustomed to utilizing them. They no longer need to think about what strategy to use. During interaction, the right strategy of communi-

cation automatically matches the problem at hand. The knowledge of CSs is declarative at the outset, but it gradually becomes proceduralized through repeated practice and use during communication (Anderson, 1983).

During the observation of one class, the learners, who had become expert users of CSs, were required *not* to use CSs. They found speaking really difficult! With a lot of class exuberance and a bundle of raised hands, in response to the teacher's question: "*Have you ever had any problems in a hotel room?*", one learner started talking excitedly about an interesting happening in a hotel. Her WTC as well as the expertise with which she used various CSs was striking:

> *Let me say this, let me say this. It's very interesting. Ok, let me see, ok, yes it was two years ago, I think. We were in Mashhad, yes. There are many hotels you know there in Mashhad. And we got one. It was, as far as I remember, a hotel with four stars, um, let's say a beautiful hotel, yes. When we got to our room, suddenly my, let me see, let me see my, uh huh, my niece got cry! She has five years old. There is, you know, what is the thing that, let's say, artists make from wood or stone for example, for a king, it's a kind of art, I can't remember its word. What is it in English? (one of her peers: "sculpture you mean?") yes! Yes sculpture. There was a sculpture in the room. She was very afraid form it. It was very interesting, you know. We got a thing, uh fabric, yes, we got a fabric on it but my niece cried again. We make a phone call to secretary, you know, and they bring out from our room.*

The satisfaction she derived from sharing her experience and from coping successfully with communication problems bestowed a great sense of self-confidence and motivation upon her. Although there were some minor grammatical errors (or maybe mistakes), they hardly hindered comprehension and the meaning conveyance as well as the problem solving processes by the use of CSs seemed impeccable. She made use of strategies such as fillers, circumlocution, appeal for help and all-purpose words (four uses of the verb *get*) to get her point across.

7. Conclusion

This study attempted to investigate the question of whether teaching CSs has any significant impact on Iranian EFL learners' WTC. The results showed that the level of WTC for the experimental group, who received CSs training, dramatically improved in comparison with the control group, who followed regular language instruction. This offers evidence for the belief that learners can go a long way by relying primarily on their strategic competence (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

There are some implications of this finding for both materials developers and teachers. Textbooks that specifically incorporate teaching CSs into their

lesson plans might be more effective than those that do not. A teacher's guide should provide an overview of the background knowledge teachers need to understand the rationale for strategy training (Maleki, 2007). The teachers themselves should be proficient users and preachers of CSs to act as models of proper strategy use. They might expose learners to communication problems and help them with how to get them resolved by using different strategies.

With regard to the fact that the participants of this study were pre-intermediate learners of English, it is suggested that similar studies be conducted with learners of different language proficiency levels. More importantly, if WTC enhancement is intended, it seems necessary to perform a careful analysis of the assumptions of various theoretical positions claiming to account for learners' willingness to speak. The conclusions drawn from the findings of this study were based on *self-report* data. They need to be verified through more studies with more rigorous designs.

Acknowledgments

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APPENDIX A

The WTC Scale Measurement (MacIntyre et al., 2001)

DIRECTIONS:This questionnaire is composed of statements concerning your feelingsabout communication with other people, in English. Please indicate in the space provided the frequency of time you choose to speak in English in each classroom situation.
If you are almost never willing to speak English, write 1. If you are willing sometimes, write 2 or 3. If you are willing most of the time, write 4 or 5.
I = Almost never willing
2 = Sometimes willing
3 = Willing half of the tine
4 = Usually willing
5 = Almost always willing

Speaking in class, in English
... 1. Speaking in a group about your summer vacation.
... 2. Speaking to your teacher about your homework assignment.
... 3. A stranger enters the room you are in, how willing would you be to have a conversation if he talked to you first?
... 4. You are confused about a task you must complete. How willing are you to ask for instruction/clarification?
... 5. Talking to a friend while waiting in a line.
... 6. How willing would you be to be an actor in a play.
... 7. Describe the rules of your favorite game.
... 8. Play a game in English, for example Monopoly.

Reading in class (to yourself not out loud)
... 1. Read a novel.
... 2. Read an article in a paper.
... 3. Read letters from a pen pal written in native English.
... 4. Read personal letters or notes written to you in which the writer has deliberately used simple words and constructions.
... 5. Read an advertisement in a paper to find a good bicycle you can buy.
... 6. Read reviews for popular movies.

Writing in class, in English
... 1. Write an advertisement to sell an old bicycle.
... 2. Write instructions for your favorite hobby.
... 3. Write a report on your favorite animal and its habits.
... 4. Write a story.
... 5. Write a letter to a friend.
... 6. Write a newspaper article.
... 7. Write the answers to a "fun" quiz from a magazine.
... 8. Write down a list of things you must do tomorrow.

Comprehension in class
... 1. Listen to instructions and complete a task.
... 2. Bake a cake if instructions are not in Persian.
... 3. Fill out an application form.
... 4. Take directions from an English speaker.
... 5. Understand an English movie.

APPENDIX B

Some carefully select words used in circumlocution tasks

ticket, rail, bungee jumping, adventure, circus, bullfight, cruise, windsurfing, journey, elastic, parachute, dome, umbrella, cereal, compass, patience, ATM, charity, rubbish, vacuum cleaner, ashtray, mug, stool, carpet, haggle, zoo, eager, substance, peace, advice, flight attendant, complain, facility, flat, souvenir, glue, magic, watermelon, ruler, palace, tease, handkerchief, overhead projector, eavesdrop, sink, flour, morale, inflation, digest, spice, mustache, bald, starve, kidney, addicted, superstition, loyal, doubt, famine, heir, jealous, sculpture, inquisitive, identity card, military service, fog, thermometer, chador, sew, needle, fabric, etc.

APPENDIX C

Some key words or phrases in circumlocution

material, fabric, a kind of, object, stuff, something, somebody, metal, wood, plastic, when, where, a ... is a place where ..., it is used for ..., you use it when you want to ..., it is made of ..., it is an instrument to ...

APPENDIX D

A sample text to underline the chunks

Have you ever driven <u>faster than the speed limit</u> or driven <u>through a red traffic light</u>? The answer is probably 'yes'. <u>Every year</u> thousands of motorists <u>become offender</u> – they <u>break the rules</u> of the road. But what are the <u>punishments for this offence</u>?
<u>In most countries,</u> drivers have to <u>pay a fine</u>. But in the U.S.A, Australia and some European countries, offenders also <u>get points on</u> their <u>driving license</u>. After they get <u>a certain number of</u> points, they can't drive.
Life is difficult when you can't drive. So some states in the U.S.A. have <u>introduced a new way</u> to avoid this – traffic school. Offenders <u>have a choice</u>: they can <u>get a point on</u> their license or they can <u>do a course</u> at traffic school.
Traffic schools <u>run driver improvement courses</u>. They <u>cost about</u> $80. And <u>take eight hours.</u> Motorists learn the <u>rules of the road</u> and they learn how to be better drivers. They don't have to <u>take a driving test</u>. But <u>at the end of</u> the course, they have to <u>pass a written examination</u>. (Taken from Foley and Hall, 2002, p. 106).

APPENDIX E

A sample text without and with fillers

A short description of your last holiday (without "fillers")
It was two or three months ago. We travel a lot. Traveling is very necessary for a good and happy life. My family and I went to Mashhad. It was a wonderful journey. We did a lot of things there. We went by plane. I'm afraid of flight. But I had no choice at that time because my family liked to go by plane. We stayed in a hotel, a very big, beautiful and modern hotel. We went to a kind of park that everything worked by water, it was kind of interesting. We went to the zoo, many interesting animals. We went shopping every day. There are many big shopping centers in that city. I love shopping, especially buying things for your friends or your family. I don't know what is the word in English for the things you buy for your friends or your family when you are on travel. We always liked to argue about the prices with the shop assistants there. To cut a long story short, we had a lot of fun. (177 words)

A short description of your last holiday (with "fillers")
<u>Let me see</u>, <u>welll think</u> it was two or three months ago. <u>As a matter of fact</u>, we travel a lot. <u>You knowin my idea</u>, traveling is very necessary for a good and <u>uh</u> happy life, <u>you see what I mean</u>. <u>Any way</u> my family and I went to Mashhad. <u>Well uh</u> it was a wonderful journey. <u>You know</u> we did a lot of things there. <u>As far as I remember</u>, we went by plane. <u>Actually</u>, <u>to be quite honest with you</u>, I'm afraid of flight. But <u>you know</u> I had no choice at that time because my family liked to go by plane. <u>Any way</u>, we stayed in a hotel, a very big,<u> uh</u> beautiful and <u>let's say</u> modern hotel. We went to, <u>uh</u> to <u>a kind of</u> park that <u>let's say</u> everything worked by water <u>you know</u>, it was <u>kind of</u> interesting. <u>What else I can say</u>, <u>right</u>, we went to the zoo, many <u>you know</u> interesting animals. We went shopping every day. There are many big shopping centers in that city <u>you know</u>. And <u>actually</u> I love shopping, especially, <u>let me see</u>, buying things for your friends or your family, <u>as a matter of fact</u>, I don't know what is the word in English for the things you buy for <u>let me see</u>your friends or your family when you are on travel, <u>you see what I mean</u>. We always liked to, <u>how can I say that</u>, argue about the prices with the shop assistants there. <u>After all</u>, <u>to cut a long story short</u>, we had a lot of fun. (265 words).