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A PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES: BENEFITS OF TRAINING AND AN ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING MATERIALS

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ABSTRACT

Effective strategies used to overcome communication difficulties are of crucial importance for second language (L2) learners. Therefore, L2 learners might benefit from instruction on how to cope with such difficulties. Since the early 1970's, much research has been conducted on *communication strategies* (CS), the means used to overcome some difficulty in expressing an intended meaning. Due to differing theoretical perspectives, researchers have disagreed about the question of whether such strategy training is beneficial. However, few studies have specifically considered communication strategies from a pedagogical point of view. Also, practicing teachers of communication strategies may be at a loss when searching for appropriate materials. This study addresses this issue.

In this paper, I will first briefly present a definition, some conceptualizations, and examples of communication strategies. Then, I will discuss the controversy concerning teaching CS, arguing in favor of it. This will be followed by a description of a research project that analyzed communication strategies found in English language teaching (ELT) materials. Findings suggest that although there are at least a few materials available from which language teachers could draw appropriate, adaptable CS activities, particularly from teachers' resource books, most of the surveyed materials offer few suitable ideas for CS instruction. More materials that introduce communication strategy activities/tasks would be welcomed. Finally, suggestions for materials and pedagogical implications will be discussed.

INTRODUCTION: TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH?

It seems evident that no individual's linguistic repertoire or control of language is perfect. Both non-native and native speakers of a given language sometimes struggle to find the appropriate expression or grammatical construction when attempting to communicate their meaning. The ways in which an individual speaker manages to compensate for this gap between what she wishes to communicate and her immediately available linguistic resources are known as *communication strategies* (CS). Although researchers are still not in complete agreement, one widely accepted definition is "communication strategies are potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal" (Færch & Kasper, 1983a, p. 36) (see Dörnyei & Scott, 1997, for a review and alternative definitions).

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Early studies of CS first focused on defining and classifying strategies into taxonomies. More recently, empirical studies and reviews of CS have been conducted, and researchers have turned their attention to the relationship between CS and pedagogical issues (Kasper & Kellerman, 1997**,** chapter 1). Two fundamentally different conceptualizations of communication strategies have been categorized by Yule and Tarone (1997) as 'the Pros' and 'the Cons.' Essentially, the Pros, as in 'proponents' of teaching, or 'profligate,' in terms of their extravagant, liberal expansion of CS categories, have proposed additional categories to the taxonomies of CS. They often design studies that use an interlocutor and compare actual L2 learner performance to native speaker performance, finding many differences between the two. Because of such an approach, the results of their research generally lead them to advocate the teaching of communication strategies (e.g., Dörnyei 1995; Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991, 1994; Tarone, 1984).

On the other hand, the Cons, as in 'conservative,' favor a much more constrained and limited taxonomy of strategies. They are more concerned with the underlying cognitive processes than with performance. Con studies, which generally do not include an interlocutor, often compare L2 learners' performance with their own first language performance, finding many similarities between the two. Due to this focus on cognitive processes and findings that indicate similarities between L1 and L2 CS use, as a rule, the Cons do not advocate teaching CS (e.g., Kellerman, 1991). Because communication strategy use is evident in L1, implying strategic transfer, why bother teaching such strategies to L2 learners? In two oft-cited quotes, Bialystok and Kellerman, respectively, express their opposition to teaching CS, "What one must teach students of a language is not strategy, but language" (Bialystok, 1990, p. 147). Kellerman writes "Teach the learners more language, and let the strategies look after themselves" (1991, p. 158). Whether to teach CS remains a point of contention. Very few studies have evaluated communication strategies from a pedagogical perspective.

IN SUPPORT OF TEACHING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES: BENEFITS OF TRAINING

I will now consider the teaching of communication strategies in light of various domains of research: language learning strategies, listening strategies, strategy transfer, second language learning, procedural vocabulary, cultural differences in language use, learner autonomy, and the teaching and teachability of CS.

Towards Strategic Competence: Language Learning Strategies

Research in learning strategy (LS) instruction indicates that communication strategy instruction may also facilitate language learning. For more than a decade, there has been a growing interest in LS, including how to integrate strategy training in the language classroom. *Learning strategies* are specific actions, behaviors, and procedures involved in the process of learning. There are a number of definitions and frameworks of language LS, ranging from broad definitions (e.g., Wenden, 1987) to more specific characterizations (e.g., Oxford & Cohen, 1992). However, O'Malley and Chamot's three-part classification has been generally accepted (Ellis, 1994, p. 558). According to this model, learning strategies are categorized as metacognitive, cognitive, and social-affective (e.g., Chamot & Küpper, 1989). Like communication strategies, learning strategies are considered important for the development of strategic competence, one of the three competencies of Canale and Swain's famous framework of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). *Strategic competence* is defined as "verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence" (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 30).

Proponents of LS instruction, such as Oxford, claim that teachers should directly teach learning strategies, including compensation strategies,[1] and provide training on how to transfer such strategies to other learning situations (Oxford, Lavine, & Crookall, 1989). Thereby, learners can become more aware of how to use such strategies for more effective communication (Cohen 1990; Mendelsohn, 1994; Oxford 1990). Research regarding 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' language learners indicates that active, effective learners tend to use appropriate strategies to reach their learning goals, whereas ineffective language learners are less expert in their strategy choice and use. In addition, this research suggests that learners can benefit from training (Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978; Rubin, 1975; Stern 1975; Vann & Abraham, 1990; Wenden, 1985).

The above "strategy-based approach" to language instruction (Mendelsohn, 1995) is not without its skeptics (e.g., Ridgway, 2000). For example, it has been suggested that being exposed to, and even using LS does not ensure success in language learning (Skehan, 1989). Also, as with CS training, there have been few empirical studies which evaluate the effectiveness of LS training. Despite this healthy cautiousness towards advocating LS instruction, Ellis (1994) says, "The study of learning strategies holds considerable promise ... for language pedagogy" (p. 558). He also says that learners

[1] Oxford defines compensation strategies as "overcoming limitations in speaking and writing" (1990, p. 17). Presumably, she is referring to communication strategies.

should be able to ascertain *which* strategies to choose for *when* and what *purpose* (Ellis, 1994, p. 559). These are important considerations for strategy instruction.

Some researchers have confusingly conflated communication strategies and learning strategies (e.g., Chamot & Küpper, 1980; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990) without recognizing that they are theoretically different in research focus and purpose. For example, Oxford's (1990) Learning Strategy System includes what she labels 'compensation strategies' (p. 15). However, unlike learning strategies, communication strategies are an immediate response to breakdowns in communication. According to Færch and Kasper (1983b, p. 2), "learning strategies contribute to the development of interlanguage systems, whereas communication strategies are used by a speaker when faced with some difficulty due to his communicative ends outrunning communicative means." Tarone (1980) points out that the basic motivation of learners using CS is to communicate, whereas for LS the motivation is to learn (p. 419) (see also Tarone, 1983). The use of communication strategies may, indeed, lead to learning as the skillful learner exploits CS to elicit more input (see ***Second Language Learning*** section below). Thus, only in such cases, communication strategies can indirectly be considered a type of learning strategy.

In summary, despite skepticism from some, studies conducted with second/foreign language students indicate that learning strategy instruction may help students achieve success in language learning. Despite the differences between learning strategies and communication strategies, research suggesting the benefits of learning strategy instruction also lends support to the promotion of communication strategy instruction.

Listening Strategies

The research on developing listening skills indicates the value of strategy training and should inform our understanding of communication strategy instruction (see Mendelsohn & Rubin, 1995; Rubin, 1994 for reviews). In an extensive review of more than 100 studies of SL listening comprehension research, Rubin (1994) notes that current researchers are primarily interested in *which* strategies to teach and *how* to promote more successful listening comprehension through strategy instruction. She claims that cognitive and metacognitive skills should be taught (p. 214) because studies indicate that systematic instruction can result in the improvement of listening comprehension. One study (Rost & Ross, 1991) especially relevant to the study at hand looked at L2 learners' use of listener feedback, particularly clarification questions. Their results indicate that prior training of learners in specific questioning strategies can have an effect on their behavior in interactions and can influence their comprehension. Strategies used by higher proficiency listeners for specific tasks could be taught successfully to lower proficiency

listeners (p. 267) (see also O'Malley, Chamot, & Küpper, 1989; Thompson & Rubin, 1996).

Many researchers have made recommendations for teaching listening strategies, such as the following: find out what strategies your students are already using and select a few strategies that appear underused (Chamot, 1995; Mendelsohn, 1995), model how to use the strategies (Chamot, 1995), give students choices in strategy use (O'Malley et al., 1989; Rubin, 1994), label and explain strategies in terms of why and when these strategies would be useful (Chamot, 1995; Rubin, 1994), provide time and practice to develop strategy use (Chamot, 1995; Rubin, 1994), continually encourage students to try strategies with new tasks (Chamot, 1995), and select materials that activate strategy use, are 'real' spoken English, and not too difficult or complicated (Mendelsohn, 1995). I will return to these teaching recommendations when we consider communication strategies found in materials.

In summary, studies of listening strategy instruction indicate that training can be effective and result in improved second language listening ability and learning. Since listening strategies are considered worthy of teaching and possibly teachable, this might hold true for receptive as well as productive communication strategies.

Strategy Transfer

One of the major arguments posed by the Cons against teaching communication strategies is that the strategies will somehow naturally "look after themselves" (Kellerman, 1991, p. 158) because transfer is automatic. Mendelsohn (1995) justifiably cautions us *not* to assume that our students do not use strategies because "often people use certain helpful listening strategies in their first language, but they fail to transfer those strategies over to their second language listening" (p. 135). I would argue that this is often the case for communication strategies, as well.

According to Najar (1992), studies of learning indicate that experience with particular problems often yields little transfer to similar problems. This begs the question of the usefulness of instruction. However, she notes, "It seems that transfer between problems relies on individuals *noticing* [my emphasis] and making use of the similarities between problems" (p. 18). For language training, she recommends pedagogic tasks that require rehearsal for real-world situations as determined by a needs analysis in a task-based language syllabus (p. 21). Robinson (to appear) also claims that a task-based approach has the possibility of direct transfer of the abilities developed in the classrooms to similar situational contexts (p. 385).

This issue is raised because even if learners already have communication strategies in L1 or the target language, they may not use them often enough, appropriately, efficiently,

and spontaneously in the L2. Thus, there is the need for training to bring learners' attention (i.e., what Najar calls 'noticing') to these strategies and help them become more aware of a repertoire of strategies available to them, including those they may already make use of in the L1. Instruction could also help learners develop and automatize more effective strategies to fit the appropriate situation. Færch and Kasper (1983a) make the point that language learning and language use involve not only language-related knowledge but also language-related abilities. Teachers can still remind students of what they already do in their L1 and encourage them to do the same in L2. Therefore, even if learners use CS effectively in L1, communication strategy instruction could aid strategic transfer by raising awareness of CS, providing training in how to properly use CS in L2, and providing opportunities for practice (Dörnyei, 1995, pp. 62-64). Such practice should help learners develop second language communicative competence.

Second Language Learning

Another benefit of teaching communication strategies is for reasons of second language acquisition, hopefully the ultimate goal of our language classrooms. 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. As Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) put it:

> ...a NNS's ability to keep a conversation going is a very valuable skill because by maintaining the conversation, the NNS can presumably benefit from receiving additional modified input. Indeed, conversational maintenance is a major objective for language learners who regularly invoke communicative strategies (p. 126).

If learners soon give up without achievement or interactive strategies at their disposal, then it is unlikely they will develop their conversational ability. Through CS use, the channel will remain open. Hence, learners receive more input, can stay in the conversation, and develop their ability. Communication strategies are the means by which learners can act on Hatch's (1978) advice that "Finally, and most important, the learner should be taught not to give up" (p. 434).

Strong support exists for the beneficial effect of interactionally modified input on comprehension and acquisition through negotiation of meaning (see Doughty, 2000; Ellis, 1994; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Mitchell & Myles, 1998, for reviews). In terms of communication strategies, interactional strategies, such as appeals for assistance could be particularly worthwhile. If learners can put CS to use as a way to negotiate meaning, then, not only will their comprehension improve, but also they can learn new words and have the opportunity to talk in the L2. This point is persuasively expressed by

Yule and Tarone (1991) who argue that the roles of participants within interactions that lead to negotiation of meaning can be effectively described within a communication strategy framework which focuses upon cooperative moves by both speakers (e.g., circumlocution, appeals for assistance, etc.) (p. 167). The key question for teachers and material writers is how to design tasks to facilitate such interaction.

Procedural Vocabulary

Clearly, in order for second language learners to not 'give up' in the conversation, they need some vocabulary. Most research on communication strategies has focused on lexical difficulties (Kasper & Kellerman, 1997, p. 7). Also, it seems as though most recommended communication strategies can not be implemented in classroom instruction without the accompanying, relevant vocabulary (Dörnyei, 1995). Therefore, another value of CS instruction would be the extra benefit of vocabulary learning, specifically useful vocabulary that effectively furthers communication and learning.

Procedural vocabulary is 'core' vocabulary with 'procedural value' to learners in that it provides them with a strategic resource to help overcome breakdowns in communication (Marco, 1999; Robinson, 1989). Such vocabulary is highly context-dependent, contains very little lexical content, but plays a very important role in negotiating the meaning of more specific technical words and in explaining concepts (Marco, 1999). Robinson (1989) distinguishes this procedural ability from the declarative knowledge of lexis assumed when attempting to memorize traditional vocabulary word lists that do not aid in the learning of these words. Therefore, this procedural ability does not simply mean knowledge of word meanings, but rather, the 'how to' necessary to use such vocabulary in order to reach a communicative goal. These lexical items are formulaic expressions often used in place of other words for definitions, paraphrasing, or explanations "through establishing relations of simple synonymy or superordinacy" (Robinson, 1989, p. 530). Some examples of procedural vocabulary are:

Superordinacy: A guitar is a type of musical instrument.
Synonym: A gecko is similar to a lizard.
To guzzle something means to drink quickly.

If learners develop this competence early on, then they can express themselves in basic ways and convey the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary without reverting to L1 or giving up, the same goals of recommended achievement or interactive strategies. Such procedural vocabulary is useful not only for low-level language learners, but also for those of varying proficiencies, depending on their needs. Marco (1999) mentions its usefulness for learning technical/scientific and other specified ESP vocabulary.

Due to its obvious relevance to communication strategies training, procedural vocabulary will be considered a bonus benefit resulting from strategy instruction. The communication strategies of approximation and paraphrasing, for example, call for certain procedural vocabulary. Therefore, in this sense, the teaching of procedural vocabulary as a useful way to implement communication strategies is not exactly contrary to Kellerman's urging that we "teach the learners more language and let the strategies look after themselves" (1991, p. 158).

Cultural Differences in Language Use

According to Gumperz (1982) and others (e.g., Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994; Tannen, 1984), there are numerous cultural differences in discourse style. Just as Gumperz' (1982) 'discourse strategies' are crossculturally variable and a potential source of intercultural miscommunication, appropriate CS use may also be culturally constrained. Therefore, along with Dörnyei (1995, p. 63), I would like to argue that communication strategy training could be used to highlight cross-cultural differences in terms of appropriateness and CS use.

For example, in the Rost and Ross (1991) study of listening strategy instruction, cultural preferences were noted, such as their claim that "... questions are often viewed negatively in Japanese educational settings as admissions of ignorance or inattention" (p. 255). In addition to the threat to the student's own face, questions in class could also be seen as disrespectful to 'sensei' and hence a threat to a higher-status person's face (see Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967). Tarone (1980) argues that although strategic competence must exist in all languages and cultures, "the particular *types* of strategy preferred for use in such situations may be culture-specific or language-specific" (p. 422). Cultural differences in the use of silence, which might indicate message abandonment, is one such CS-related speech component that comes to mind (Gilmore, 1985; Hall, 1959; Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985). Dörnyei (1995) also mentions differences in verbalizing certain strategies (p. 64). For example, the Japanese 'eh?' meaning 'huh?' which could be used as a global appeal for assistance, might be seen as impolite in some cultures. Effective training in culturally appropriate CS use would be beneficial to students from all languages and cultures.

Learner Autonomy

One widely accepted goal of teaching learning strategies is to foster learner autonomy (Wenden 1985, 1991). Along with learning strategies, the concept of learner autonomy has enjoyed recognition and popularity in education during the past two decades. However, of course, it is not universally celebrated by researchers or educators. Wenden

(1991) defines the autonomous learner as “one who has acquired the strategies and knowledge to take some (if not yet all) responsibility for her language learning and is willing and self-confident enough to do so” (p. 163). Autonomous learning seeks to equip learners with tools that will best serve them once they are on their own and to facilitate their self-directed learning outside the classroom. Little (1991) describes it thus, “The capacity of autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts” (p. 4). In second language learning, Crabbe (1993) distinguishes between the public domain (i.e., classroom activities) and the private domain (i.e., private learning activity). He suggests that it is the teacher’s responsibility, through certain instructional practices, to think carefully about how to guide students in learning. This is accomplished by bridging these two domains in order to support autonomy.

Situations that encourage independence are beneficial because they lead to learning, achievement and accomplishment (Benson & Voller, 1991). Dickinson (1995) asserts that learning situations that foster autonomy are also valuable because they enhance motivation, which in turn leads to more effective learning:

> It has been shown that there is substantial evidence from cognitive motivational studies that learning success and enhanced motivation is conditional on learners... perceiving that their learning successes or failures are to be attributed to their own efforts and strategies rather than to factors outside their control (pp. 173-174).

An underlying assumption of the research on learner autonomy is that in order to equip the learner with the tools to eventually become autonomous, training must necessarily take place (see Benson & Voller 1991; Wenden 1991). In self-directed learning, the teacher acts more as a facilitator who provides the students with the tools to become autonomous through opportunities to learn and strategy instruction.

The connection between a learner autonomy approach and communication strategy instruction should be clear. Using the common metaphor of ‘bridge,’ Færch and Kasper (1983a) argue that “by learning how to use communication strategies appropriately, learners will be more able to bridge the gap between pedagogic and non-pedagogic communicative situations” (p. 56). Learner autonomy can be thought of as the ability to bridge that gap. Instruction can be thought of as the means to develop that ability. Cotterall (2000) highlights the importance of teachers providing *choice* in a learner autonomy approach, and in particular “extending the choice of strategic behaviours available to learners, and to expand their conceptual understanding of the contribution which strategies can make to their learning” (p. 111). This is in keeping with instructional recommendations made by researchers of listening strategies (e.g., Chamot, 1995; Rubin 1994).

If one of the goals of language teaching is to produce independent, skillful L2 strategy users, and if we think it is important for our learners to be able to participate in real communication outside the classroom, then how can we ignore communication strategies in our L2 lessons? Perhaps learner autonomy is one of the most significant goals of communication strategy training. The two approaches go hand in hand and would help teachers develop independent, strategically competent language learners.

Teaching and Teachability of Communication Strategies

Let us turn to non-empirical and empirical studies in support of communication strategy instruction. Those who advocate teaching CS generally make pedagogical recommendations and argue that communication strategy training is desirable in order to develop strategic competence (e.g., Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991, 1994; Færch & Kasper 1983a, 1986; Tarone & Yule, 1989; Willems, 1987). Færch and Kasper (1986) recommend three specific activity types to practice CS. These are communication games with visual support, without visual support, and monologues. They also recommend increasing students' meta-communicative awareness about the factors that determine appropriate strategy selection through certain analytic tasks, such as audio/video tape analysis of NNS-NS discourse. Willems (1987) presents recommended CS instructional activities to practice paraphrase and approximation (e.g., crossword puzzles, describe the strange object). He argues reasonably that "our first task is to train them [learners] 'not for perfection but for communication.' Correctness-errors, which learners will make anyhow, may reasonably be compensated for in interaction by skilfulness [sic] in the use of CmS" (i.e., CS) (p. 361). While Tarone and Yule (1989) advocate CS be taught in a focused and explicit way (p. 114), Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991, 1994) suggest the use of both traditional CLT activities as well as consciousness-raising.

Despite many arguments and recommendations put forth in favor of teaching CS, there have been few empirical studies which assess the value of communication strategy teaching. Yule and Tarone (1997) cite studies by Brodersen and Gibson (1992) and Dörnyei, Csomay, and Fischer (1992) suggesting that improvement in effective CS use can result from training (Yule & Tarone, 1997, p. 29). Chen's (1990) study of Chinese EFL learners indicates that effective CS use varies according to proficiency. She concludes that learners' strategic, and therefore, communicative competence could probably be increased through recommended CS training. Findings from systematic class observation by Brooks (1992) suggest that interview-type activities do not provide opportunities for negotiation. He recommends CS instruction, especially circumlocution and appeals for assistance, through the use of jigsaw tasks. Salomone and Marsal's (1997) study resulted in what they claim to be significant improvement (p. 473) of

learners' use of circumlocution following training. Russell and Loschky (1998) found that many Japanese university students of EFL tend to revert to L1 or non-linguistic strategies, and thus can benefit from CS instruction. Finally, the results, albeit mixed, of an empirical study conducted by Dörnyei (1995) suggest that learners' use of communication strategies should be developed through focused instruction. He advocates a 'direct approach' to teaching, and includes awareness-raising in this approach.

Although there have been few studies of communication strategy teaching, research results are still encouraging. That is, it seems as though CS training could result in language learning. In addition, there appears to be little disconfirming evidence (Dörnyei, 1995). As should be evident from this review of the literature on the teaching of communication strategies, apparently no studies examine how textbooks introduce CS. I hope my study will be able to contribute in this way.

Summary

I have proposed a number of arguments in favor of teaching communication strategies. These are based on evidence from the research on: language learning strategies, listening strategies, strategy transfer, second language learning, procedural vocabulary, cultural differences in language use, learner autonomy, and the teaching and teachability of CS.

Language instructors have a responsibility to help our learners improve their communicative ability. Since non-native speakers often find themselves lacking the very resources needed to communicate their intended goal, it seems natural that language teachers should foster strategic competence among our students and provide learning opportunities to develop communication strategies. Assuming a language teacher accepts this position and is convinced of the benefits of communication strategy training, what materials are available to assist her instructional practices? It is hoped that this study will bridge the gap between theory and practice by examining ELT materials as possible resources to help interested teachers bring communication strategies into the classroom.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN ELT MATERIALS

Not only is there evidence that teaching communication strategies is beneficial, but I have also observed the popularity of CS instruction since the early 1990's in an EFL situation in Japan. In 1989, Tarone and Yule wrote, "There are few, if any, materials available at present which teach learners how to use communication strategies" (pp. 114-115). Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991) also claimed that "hardly any activities have been developed to include strategy training in actual language teaching" (p. 16). Prior to this

study, I optimistically suspected that a decade later this was no longer the case. In fact, one of the goals of this project is to compile a collection of interesting and effective activities and resources for teachers of CS. My optimism stemmed from the observation that fairly recently it has become popular to teach learning strategies and communication strategies. This trend has resulted in textbooks claiming to provide relevant activities. These include *Basics in Listening* and *Strategies in Listening* (Rost & Uruno, 1990) for listening strategies, and Scarcella and Oxford's *Tapestry* series (e.g., Van Naerssen & Brennan, 1995) for learning strategies**.** Few academic research articles attempt to present CS practice activities and pedagogically adaptable research design recommendations. Those that do (see e.g., Brooks 1992; Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991; Færch & Kasper, 1986; Tarone & Yule, 1989; Willems, 1987; Yule, 1997) are certainly worthwhile sources for teachers of CS. However, from a pedagogical and practical point of view, they leave a bit to be desired in terms of accessibility, innovation, and variety. I was hoping that published ELT materials would have more to offer beyond the 'describe a colander' type of practice (Willems, 1987, pp. 357-358).

Why Look at ELT Materials?

The most basic resource for many language teachers is, generally, the textbook. Regardless of the extent to which it is utilized, the textbook is an almost ubiquitous feature of ELT teaching. Millions of copies are sold each year around the world. However, as Hutchinson and Torres (1994), Nunan and Lamb (1996, p. 180), and others have pointed out, the language textbook is often criticized (see e.g., Allwright, 1981; Auerbach & Burgess, 1985; Phillipson 1992; for the pro-textbook view, see Hutchinson & Torres, 1994; O'Neill, 1982). Because many ELT educators consider textbooks a necessary evil, the ability to evaluate them effectively is an essential professional skill. Despite this need and such an enormous influence of published textbooks, relatively few studies empirically examine ELT materials, although *English Language Teaching Journal* regularly publishes articles on materials issues. And among the few studies that do evaluate materials, none of them specifically consider communication strategies, as far as I know. My study will take this unique perspective.

In my observations from ten years experience teaching EFL/ESL, many experienced and conscientious teachers tend to rely more on teachers' resource books, as well as self-made materials, 'authentic' materials, realia, and supplemental materials, than on general textbooks. By *teachers' resource books* I mean those reference books containing a collection of activities, games or a framework of practices to implement in the classroom. Teachers often turn to such materials either as a supplemental aid, a source of inspiration or even as a replacement to the assigned course book. Indeed, a look at catalogs of ESL

teaching materials indicates the popularity of teachers' resource books (e.g., *Pilrims Longman Resource Books* series, Oxford University Press' *Resource Books for Teachers* series, *New Ways in TESOL* series, publications by Pro Lingua Association, etc.). RSA certificate and diploma training courses encourage teacher trainees to use such materials. Despite the apparent popularity of teachers' resource books, most studies of ELT materials tend to focus solely on commonly used textbooks (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, & Reynolds, 1991; Boxer & Pickering, 1995). Therefore, both textbooks and teachers' resource books will be considered in my study.

PROCEDURE

Research Questions

What are teachers likely to find when searching for materials to teach communication strategies? I have examined a few of the many available texts in order to answer this question by considering *which* communication strategies are included in materials and *how* are they introduced for practice. The following research questions were formulated:

1. Which communication strategies are introduced in the selected materials? Are these recommended, pedagogically sensible strategies to include?
2. What types of activities can be found to introduce and practice communication strategies? Are these theoretically effective ways?

Selection of Materials

There were two stages for selecting materials that include communication strategy activities. In the preliminary stage, a total of 40 textbooks and teachers' resource books were targeted based on the following criteria:

1. Texts that claim to promote either learning strategies (e.g., *Mosaic* series, *Tapestry* series), learner autonomy (e.g., *Learning to Learn English*), or communication strategies (e.g., *Nice Talking With You, Conversations and Dialogues in Action*).
2. Widely used texts (e.g., *Interchange* series, *Impact* series).
3. Texts likely to include communication strategies based on personal experience using these texts (e.g., *Conversation, Impact: Words and Phrases*), a title with phrases such as 'communication strategies' or 'conversation strategies' (e.g., *Breaking the Ice: Basic Communication Strategies, Strategies in Speaking)*, or materials recommended by proponents of CS (e.g., *Keep Talking, Functions of American English*).

Admittedly, this initial pool of 40 selected texts was limited to books I have access to.

Communication strategies were operationalized in two ways. First, they were considered CS if the authors explicitly introduce the idea of communication strategies. Second, they were considered CS if lexical items were found that could be used to implement CS (e.g., procedural vocabulary, expressions for appeals for assistance). Such items counted as CS even if the materials do not explicitly introduce the idea of communication breakdown and CS as a tool to overcome this. Out of the original 40 books, only 17 (42.5%) were determined to actually include communication strategies. Rejected texts, 23/40 (57.5%) did not include communication strategies. The remaining 17 texts consisted of nine textbooks (two in the same series) and eight teachers' resource books (three from the same series). In the secondary stage, these texts were then examined in light of the research questions (see **APPENDIX A** for information about the materials).

Analysis

Many general guidelines are available for language materials evaluation (e.g., Breen & Candlin, 1987; Cunningsworth 1984; Harmer, 1991; McDonough & Shaw, 1993; Rea-Dickins & Germaine, 1992; Skierso, 1991). However, these approaches tend to be elaborate systems of checklists for the practical purpose of selecting a particular textbook for a particular teaching context. Most of these systematic evaluations either have an implied theoretical component throughout (e.g., Skierso, 1991) or 'theory' is one of many criteria to consider (e.g., Rea-Dickinson & Germaine, 1992). For the purposes of this study, however, the evaluative yardstick will be the relevant research conducted on communication strategies themselves.

For this project, I considered 11 communication strategies, 10 from Yule (1997, pp. 79-81) and including time-stalling devices (Dörnyei, 1995; Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991, 1992). **APPENDIX B** presents definitions and examples of these 11 communication strategies. Yule's taxonomy was chosen because he attempts to reconcile the two Pro and Con perspectives (see also Yule & Tarone, 1997). Time-stalling devices were included despite disagreements among researchers as to whether they represent CS (e.g., pro—Dörnyei, 1995; con—Kasper, personal communication, 1999).

The analysis is descriptive rather than based on actual classroom implementation of the materials. I am not making any claims or judgments about the *overall* pedagogical effectiveness of these materials or whether, in general, they are 'good' or not. However, selected activities will be critiqued in terms of CS research. As many researchers have pointed out (e.g., Sheldon, 1988; Skiersco 1991), text evaluation should be considered in light of the teaching context and other factors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I will examine communication strategies found in the surveyed materials in light of the research questions. First, I will analyze activities found in the textbooks, followed by those in the teachers' resource books. At the end of the teachers' resource section, activities found in both types of materials will be critiqued in terms of research question number two.

Communication Strategies in Textbooks

APPENDIX C presents a summary of communication strategies found in the surveyed textbooks. The largest number of strategies is in *Learning to Learn* (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989) and *Nice Talking With You* (Kenny & Woo, 2000). This is probably because *Learning to Learn* promotes learner autonomy, and *Nice Talking With You* is designed to introduce communication strategies and other discourse-level strategies or functions (e.g., how to interrupt). The most common CS in this sample of eight texts are circumlocution (7), appeal for assistance (6), time-stalling devices (4), and abandonment (2). Only one text, *Learning to Learn English* introduces the strategies of approximation, foreignizing, and word coinage. Reasonably, none of the texts include borrowing, topic avoidance, message replacement, or non-verbal communication strategies.

Færch and Kasper (1983a) argue that the only CS useful for learning are those involving three aspects of language learning—hypothesis formation, hypothesis testing, and automatization. Therefore, recommended strategies to teach would be those requiring L2 production. These include the two conceptual achievement strategies of approximation and circumlocution. Other recommended strategies are code achievement strategies in the L2. These are word coinage and possibly foreignizing, depending on the L1 and how useful foreignizing would be in the L2. Recommended strategies also include appeal for assistance if verbal and in the L2. Non-recommended strategies are all the reduction strategies of topic avoidance, message replacement, and message abandonment**,** as well as borrowing and non-verbals. Depending on one's beliefs, time-stalling can be considered an optional, possibly recommended communication strategy. This makes sense because whereas all the achievement and interactive strategies may help a learner to *communicate* his/her intended goal, they would not necessarily facilitate foreign language *learning*. Results of the survey of textbooks are both disappointing and encouraging. It is pedagogically reasonable that circumlocution and appeal for assistance are commonly included CS. However, the other recommended strategies, word coinage and approximation, are quite rare (one case each), and surprisingly, the non-

recommended strategy of message abandonment is included in two textbooks (see **APPENDIX C**).

I will now introduce a few select examples of textbook activities designed to practice circumlocution, appeal for assistance, time-stalling devices, and message abandonment. *Learning to Learn*, which also contains many other CS, will be considered separately.

Circumlocution/paraphrase and procedural vocabulary. Circumlocution activities were found in seven out of nine texts. This strategy is commonly introduced with procedural vocabulary in sections on describing objects or gadgets, giving definitions, or as an academic vocabulary-learning skill. This seems fairly pedagogically sound, as procedural vocabulary will help to implement this CS. A typical example can be found in *Interchange 3* (Richards, Hull, & Proctor, 1991b, pp. 74-75, 114, 116). As is common in language textbooks, the target language is presented in a listening dialogue (p. 74) in which the speakers are talking about an item in a crossword puzzle. Then, the phrases are presented as a grammatical pattern, 'relative clauses' (p. 75). Finally, spoken practice activities are provided (pp. 75, 114, 116). For a pair work activity, students are to make definitions using some all-purpose word and relative clauses. An example is the following:

A: What's a broom
B: It's a thing that's used for sweeping floors.
A: What's glue?
B: It's stuff that's used to stick things together. (p. 75)

The follow-up 'interchange activity' is the typical spot-the-difference information gap activity in which students in pairs describe an item such as a coffee pot or telephone, and the partner must choose among the many similar items (pp. 114, 116). Some drawbacks of this particular activity are that the purpose of the activity is not expressed, and the strategy is only introduced once. In addition, this language, while potentially very useful for beginning-level students, is not included until Book 3 (intermediate level) of this series, although some lexical items for paraphrasing are in *Interchange 2* (Richards et al., 1991a, p. 43). Both texts offer a very limited range of procedural vocabulary. *Nice Talking With You* (p. 68) provides a similar sample dialogue to *Interchange.* Students are then given some new words, such as 'jet lag' to look up in their dictionary and explain (i.e., paraphrase) to their partner (p. 68). Gestures are allowed, but the L1 is not. The theme of gadgets and these types of circumlocution practice activities are common among books in this survey.

Functions of American English (Jones & von Baeyer, 1983), an older but classic text of the functional/notional syllabus type, also includes this 'describe a gadget' type of exercise in the chapter on 'describing things.' However, reasonably, an explicit explanation of the usefulness of circumlocution is provided:

> Very often we cannot find the right word for something. For example, take a ruler. If you did not know the name for it, you could ask someone: *What do you call that thing about twelve inches long made of plastic or metal? You use it to draw lines and measure things*. (p. 49).

Language for asking questions (e.g., "What size is it? What shape is it?", p. 49) and several exercises for practicing circumlocution are included. However, once again, there is a very limited range of procedural vocabulary to implement circumlocution. Even the ever-present conversational dialogue in the beginning of the chapter does not provide a good target model. The circumlocution practice activity is to give a detailed description of some objects and gadgets, come up with questions to ask about objects, and finally make a secret list of some items and describe them to your partner without naming the item (p. 49).

Other texts are also less than ideal. In *Mosaic One* (Ferrer-Hanreddy & Whalley, 1996) paraphrasing is introduced as a study skill (listening to lectures and rewording them and writing academic papers). The practice activity involves solving a problem. One student reads a problem, and paraphrases it in her own words. This is followed by discussion. No procedural vocabulary is introduced. In *Springboard to Success* (Skillman & McMahill, 1996) paraphrasing is included as a 'vocabulary learning' strategy. However, no procedural vocabulary or other lexical items are included, only language to ask the question as in "Excuse me, what does (that word) mean?" (p. 27). Yet, in the practice activity, students must provide dictionary definitions of classroom-related vocabulary expressions.

In summary, despite the popularity of circumlocution as a CS in ELT materials, there are few interesting activities to be found. Quite a few, however, could be significantly adapted and implemented effectively. Usually activities offer limited language and practice opportunities.

Appeal for assistance. It is not surprising that appeal for assistance is a common communication strategy found in six out of nine textbooks. This is obviously useful 'classroom language' for lower-proficiency second language learners, allowing them to immediately participate in conversation.

Interestingly, in most of the surveyed texts, appeals for assistance are for receptive skills (e.g., "Pardon me?") and not for production, as in "How do you say *jinja* in English?" For example, *Impact: Words+ Phrases*, (Harsch, Lange, Millett, Blackwell, Kusuya, & Murphey, 1997), a supplemental vocabulary workbook intended for self-study, includes phrases which show 'you don't understand' (i.e., appeals for assistance). The 'basic phrases' are: "I have no idea what you're talking about. How do you say that in English? I don't get it. What do you mean? Can you say that again?" (Chapter 29). Other books introduce similar phrases.

A few textbooks explicitly introduce the usefulness of the strategy, as in the textbook *Nice Talking With You*, "Hint: Ask to hear it again. Sometimes it's difficult to hear what your partner says. You can say 'Pardon me?' to ask to hear it again" (p. 5). "Hint: Sometimes your partner uses a word you don't know. Use this phrase when you want to understand. 'What does that mean?'"(p. 68). These phrases are accompanied by a practice in which one partner turns her face away or muffles what's she's saying in order to force her partner to ask what she means (p. 5).

Appeals are commonly introduced in the chapters on instructions and directions. For example, in *Breaking the Ice* (Hynes & Baichman, 1989), there is a listening dialogue and a task to listen for 'asking for clearer instructions' as well as 'making sure instructions are clear.' Again, mainly global appeals are introduced (e.g., " I'm not following you... Wait a minute. I'm getting lost.", p. 33). A few more specific lexical appeals are also given: "Could you go over that last part again?" (p. 33).

In most books, practice opportunities are minimal. For example, in *Springboard to Success: Communication Strategies for the Classroom and Beyond* (Skillman & McMahill, 1996), the procedure to 'practice' the list of phrases is the following: First target phrases are introduced in a 'model conversation' that learners read silently. Then, students listen to the teacher read it, and finally, they read aloud (p. 30). *Impact: Words+ Phrases* has a similar procedure. First students read the basic phrases and check the ones they know, and then practice them in a simple substitution dialogue (Chapter 29). These practice exercises do not appear to provide communicative interaction or practice.

In this sample, *Mosaic One* includes one of the more interesting and reasonable exercises for practicing appeal for assistance. Roles for both the speaker and the listener are emphasized for negotiated meaning. That is, the speaker needs to check that the listener is following, while the listener needs to ask for help when not following. Many lexical phrases are provided, including a distinction between formal and informal expressions. Discourse strategies are presented along with the CS (e.g., how to interrupt politely). Following several listening exercises, an interesting riddle/brain teaser activity is introduced to practice offering and requesting clarification. The presenter reads the

problem as quickly as possible with no pauses. The listener must stop the speaker and ask a question whenever he/she does not understand, and then try to solve the problem (pp. 14-15). In many respects this seems to be a pedagogically sound and interesting activity.

Despite the usefulness of appeals for assistance, with the exception of a few materials, this strategy seems to be treated as merely a list of phrases for receptive global appeals. In addition, generally, minimal practice opportunities and language are given.

Time-stalling devices. Time-stalling devices were found in three of the nine textbooks. In general, these devices are introduced in order to help speakers hold the floor and have time to think. The common procedure is for the authors to explain why speakers need this strategy, provide a list of example phrases, and a practice activity in which students discuss unfamiliar topics and must stall for time. For example, in *Functions of American English*, the chapter begins with a dialogue to introduce the target language. Next, the rationale for hesitating is explicitly stated, "But most people have to hesitate now and then during a conversation. Silence is not a good way to hesitate. Silence causes embarrassment and confusion. Silence lets other people take over the conversation" (p. 27).[2] A practice exercise follows which requires students to give an impromptu speech on an unfamiliar topic such as nudism (pp. 26-27). They must choose the subject they know least about, keep talking constantly, not be silent, and use a variety of hesitation devices (p. 27).

In *Nice Talking With You,* the rationale for using time-stalling devices is stated thus: "When a partner asks you a question, sometimes you can't answer quickly. Say these phrases to get time to think" (p. 14). The language is given as a list of phrases: "Hmm...Let me think. Hmm... Let me see. That's a difficult question" (p. 14). Finally, in the practice exercise (pp. ii-v), the topics and questions are generated from classmates. Then, partners practice questions and answers, using the time-stalling devices when struggling with more difficult topics. Although many researchers do not accept time-stalling devices as communication strategies, they are sometimes included in textbooks apparently as a strategy to keep the conversation going.

Abandonment. Surprisingly, abandonment is actually introduced in two of the textbooks, although communication strategy instruction is often advocated as an alternative to giving up. Abandonment is not recommended as a useful strategy that will lead to learning (Færch & Kasper, 1983a). In *Nice Talking With You*, it is not until the end of Unit 9, the last one before the final review unit, that abandonment is finally introduced to help learners 'escape' after having tried everything at their disposal. This

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[2] One might note the cultural bias of how silence is viewed.

follows eight units of students having practiced strategies such as appeals for assistance, time stalling devices, and paraphrasing. Students had also been introduced to other conversational functions/gambits, such as how to open a conversation, that help the speaker to not give up. The target phrases are introduced, accompanied by a practice activity:

> In conversation, we always do our best. But, sometimes, we can't explain something, even when we try hard. If we spend too much time trying to remember a word or trying to explain something, it slows down the conversation too much. Just say 'Never mind!' and keep the conversation going (p. 89).

Interestingly, abandonment is described as a strategy to keep the conversation going. Despite such an argument, abandonment does not seem like a valuable strategy to teach.

Various communication strategies. *Learning to Learn* (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989) is a textbook designed to develop learner autonomy. It introduces learning strategies throughout the textbook, and considers communication strategies a type of learning strategy. Among the small sample in this survey, the largest number of CS is included in this text (6). They include approximation, circumlocution, foreignizing, word coinage, appeal for assistance, and time-stalling devices. These strategies can be found in the 'skills training' unit in the chapters on vocabulary, listening, and speaking. The chapter on extending vocabulary is especially interesting. Learners first try to think of strategies they would use when they do not know a word. Then, they listen to three conversations between a shopkeeper and a customer in which the customer is trying to describe a certain piece of hardware. Students are to check off from a chart which (communication) strategies they hear. This is followed by a class discussion considering which strategies are the most effective and if there are other useful strategies (see Teacher's book, pp. 74-77, 154; Student's book, pp. 39-40). Finally, there is a speaking activity on shopping, with the following procedure:

1. The teacher gives a pair of students some objects or pictures of unusual items that they need to buy.
2. Pairs have five minutes to prepare strategies (i.e., CS) for buying these objects.
3. All the objects are returned to 'the store.'
4. Change partners. One is the shop assistant and the other the customer. The customer must try to buy his or her objects using the strategies prepared in step two. The first pair to finish their successful shopping are the winners.
5. How successful were your partner's strategies? (p. 40)

For further practice, the teacher's book recommends having students think of objects themselves, providing them with information-gap activities, such as describe and arrange, describe and draw and record or video students and analyze the recordings (p. 77). While it is encouraging to find recommended CS presented in a book such as *Learning to Learn*, there are few practice opportunities throughout the textbook, and CS are only introduced a few times.

Summary and commentary. In summary, several conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the communication strategies activities found in the selected textbooks. Returning to research question number one, in answer, there are few communication strategies introduced overall. Some recommended strategies are fairly common (e.g., circumlocution and appeals for assistance), whereas others are less so (e.g., approximation, word coinage). Finally, some non-recommended strategies are sometimes included (e.g., message abandonment). Overall, these are not particularly promising results.

The types of activities introduced by the books are also fairly limited. Strategies are commonly introduced in terms of functions, such as giving instructions, directions, and definitions. In general, the textbooks follow a fairly common procedure of presenting language in some context (through written dialogue, listening practice, etc.), providing a list of a few lexical phrases out of context, and practice and/or freer production of the target language through written and spoken exercises. I have discovered that *some* communication strategies are indeed introduced in some books. However, with the exception of those materials that promote strategy training or learner autonomy (e.g., *Nice Talking With You* and *Learning to Learn English)*, in the final analysis, the teaching approaches implied in these materials are quite disappointing. Based on this survey, textbooks do not seem to be a good source of CS teaching ideas. I will return to research question number two following a look at the teachers' resource books.

Communication Strategies in Teachers' Resource Books

Teachers' resource books, more than textbooks, serve as valuable sources of teaching ideas for many experienced teachers. Please refer to **APPENDIX D** for a summary of communication strategies found in the teachers' resource books. Compared to the regular course books, there are slightly more recommended strategies overall and less non-recommended strategies. As with the regular books, the three most common strategies found in the eight books were appeal for assistance (8), circumlocution (7) and time-stalling devices (5). However, approximation was much more common (4), and none of the resource books suggest abandonment as a CS. In fact, *Conversation Strategies* (Kehe

& Kehe, 1994) refers to abandonment as a 'conversation killer' (p. 17). The tables fail to reveal, however, the wealth of activities provided in the resource books, compared to the few exercises found per book among the regular texts.

The teachers' resource books have more interactive, innovative activities that go well beyond the limiting PPP (Present, Practice, Produce) procedure in the textbooks. Also, many activities in these sources resemble tasks recommended by CS researchers. For example, many of the tasks involve authentic English, group work, dialogue building, story-telling, self- evaluation, video/audio analysis, games, and more. Unfortunately, because there are so many strategies and practice activities in these books, it is impossible to include all of them. Thus, I will only introduce a few select examples of activities for practicing circumlocution, appeal for assistance, time-stalling devices and various communication strategies.

Paraphrasing/circumlocution and procedural vocabulary. Circumlocution strategy practice was found in seven out of eight of the teachers' resource books, including *Conversation Strategies* (Kehe & Kehe, 1994), a tiny book designed to help learners develop strategic competence. The teaching procedure recommended for these activities is similar to that found in the textbooks examined for this project. Students review the key expressions, fill in the blanks of the exercises, compare answers, and practice in pairs (p. 112). Despite this straightforward procedure, there are quite a variety of interesting activities. For example, in the section on 'Word Finders' (i.e., procedural vocabulary and paraphrasing), there is a list of useful expressions such as: *"*It's used for __. ; It looks like __. ; thingamajig, gadget*,"* etc. This is followed by some riddles to be solved. Then, students practice in a guessing game (pp. 49-52).

New Ways in Teaching Speaking introduces an activity entitled "Paraphrasing Races." Students are divided into teams. The teacher gives them a sentence, and students have to come up with as many rephrasings as they can in three minutes. Students must use circumlocution strategies. At the end of three minutes, each group reads their paraphrases aloud, and are judged for acceptability.

An interesting activity can be found in *Keep Talking* (Klippel, 1984) and *New Ways in Teaching Vocabulary* (Nation, 1994). In Klippel's version, the teacher puts a complicated transparency on the OHP, out of focus. Students guess what the drawing could represent using circumlocution, such as "Is the round thing a lamp? Perhaps the long shape is a person; it's got two legs" (p. 32). In a similar activity (Nation, 1994), the teacher puts an assortment of covered objects on the OHP so that the students cannot see what the objects are. An interesting silhouette collage appears on the screen. In pairs, students describe and identify the objects (p. 64) using circumlocution. Because of the diversity of practice

activities for circumlocution, it is difficult to find some common patterns. However, compared to the activities found in the textbooks, there is quite a bit more variety. In general, however, linguistic items to introduce circumlocution are rarely included in the materials, although the activities encourage circumlocution.

Appeal for assistance. Appeal for assistance was included in all eight of the surveyed teachers' resource books. I will introduce two example activities. *Conversation Strategies* presents an interesting "blah blah" activity for practicing verbal appeals for assistance, global and lexical reprise. Useful phrases are given, students fill in the blanks of dialogues and then practice appeals when their partners say 'blah blah.' For example, student A says "I'm planning to go to *blah blah* on my next vacation." Student B should reply something like "Excuse me, you're going *where*?" (pp. 13-16). This book also makes a strong argument for the usefulness of more specific rather than global questions: "If you don't understand a word during a conversation, it's helpful if you ask for specific information about the word; don't just say 'What?'...This is helpful to other people, and it is a good way to learn new vocabulary" (p. 112). Unfortunately, this book provides few lexical expressions to implement their recommendation and not much more support beyond the few exercises.

Conversation and Dialogues in Action (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1992) contains several practice activities for appeals for assistance when encountering communicative problems in reception and production. First, the strategy and its usefulness are introduced explicitly by the teacher. Then, appropriate phrases are elicited from the students, and the teacher provides more phrases. In Lesson 18 (pp. 68-70), students perform a dialogue in pairs. However, one speaker must pretend to forget important content words and ask for help through questions to the other speaker (i.e., appeals for assistance) and circumlocution with procedural vocabulary such as:

> A: Did you tell the ... er... I can't remember the word for the person who takes care of the patients...what do you call her?... the woman in white... What's the word...?
>
> B: Nurse?
>
> A: That's it! Did you tell the nurse? (p. 69)

In general, the teachers' resource books offer a variety of practice activities for appeals for assistance far more pedagogically useful than the lists of phrases for instructions or directions that we saw in the textbooks

Time-stalling devices. Time-stalling devices were once again quite common, and included in five out of eight of the teachers' resource books. As with the regular textbooks, here as well, this "communication strategy" is considered a useful gambit to keep your turn and stay in the conversation. The *Gambits* series (Keller & Warner, 1979), an older publication, includes several activities that could be adaptable for communication strategy practice. These gambits, called 'responders,' are to be learned in order to "give the speaker a fair amount of control over the conversation even if he does not have a full command of English grammar and vocabulary" (p. 1). For example, the third module contains time-stalling devices recommended to use in the context of a job interview in which the candidate is asked very difficult questions and needs to stall for time (pp. 22-23). Time-stalling practice activities in the teachers' resource books are not unlike those in the regular textbooks.

Various communication strategies. Many of the teachers' resource books do not single out individual strategies, but rather introduce tasks that could be adapted in order to introduce and practice numerous strategies at once. For example, *Conversation* (Nolasco & Arthur, 1987), from the Oxford series *Resource Books for Teachers,* provides many ideas for practicing CS. In the section on 'Feedback tasks' the authors suggest an awareness-raising activity in order to hold the floor, keep talking, and be better communicators in general. Learners are videotaped or audio recorded during a group conversation, and afterwards, they evaluate each other on the use of CS. Feedback Task #10 (p. 136) includes questions for self-evaluation, such as "Did you invent a new word? Did you paraphrase or describe the thing you didn't know the word for?"(p. 136) and questions for five other communication strategies. However, it does not distinguish between recommended and not recommended CS. Another interesting activity is the "Building a Model" activity (p. 107). One group builds a model from LEGO pieces. The other group, in a separate room, has to rebuild the exact copy of the model within a time limit. They send an observer back and forth between the rooms, who cannot help build, but must make effective use of recommended CS in order to communicate. Such assembly-building tasks are commonly used in CS research designs (Yule, 1997).

New Ways in Teaching Speaking, one of the popular TESOL *New Ways in...* series, also presents several ideas for teaching and practicing CS. For example, in "Students as Language Researchers" (p. 21-22), students tape and transcribe a conversation between themselves and a native speaker. Students must consider two types of interaction, a 'smooth' and a problematic one. Another activity, "Games for Speaking: Talking With Tanagrams" (pp. 87-88), could be adapted for CS practice. In pairs or groups, learners try

to come to a solution using tanagrams (tile pieces) to reconstruct shapes. Tanagrams are also used in referential communication research (Yule, 1997, pp. 49-50).

Keep Talking (Klippel, 1984), a well-known teachers' resource book, is also filled with various activities that could be used to introduce and practice communication strategies. "Word Wizard" (p. 77) is one activity to raise awareness of achievement strategies. Each student can only keep four words in the English language. She pairs up with another student, and they attempt to communicate with their eight words. Then, each student shares her eight words with another student, so that both have 16 and so on. Other practice activities in *Keep Talking* include spot the difference, picture description, strange abstract shapes, jigsaw tasks, definition practice, and other adaptable tasks for practicing communication strategies.

Conversation and Dialogues in Action (1992) by Dörnyei and Thurrell, well-known proponents of teaching CS, of course contains many activities for practicing various recommended and non-recommended CS. These include avoidance, approximation, paraphrasing, verbal and non-verbal appeals for assistance, and time-stalling devices. Like many of the textbooks that introduce CS, this book also includes 'strategies' or functions/ gambits at the discourse level, such as how to change the subject, how to interrupt, and how to close a conversation. It also includes strategies for the speaker as well as the listener to use, for example checking that the listener follows what you are saying. The strategies are meant to be practiced through 'instructional dialogues' (p. ix). Although there are some sample dialogues, the book provides teaching ideas for exploiting dialogues that could be found from any source such as a movie or generated by the students from a skeleton dialogue. This book includes far more examples of lexical items to implement each communication strategy than any other book surveyed.

Summary and commentary. An analysis of the eight teachers' resource books revealed more promising results than the textbooks. For example, in answer to research question number one, a good many recommended strategies are fairly common (e.g., approximation, circumlocution, and appeals for assistance), whereas others are less so, especially word coinage (one case). Non-recommended strategies are rarely included (borrowing in one case, and non-verbals in three out of eight books). There is also a much larger variety of activities in the teachers' resource books, compared to the textbooks. These provide the teacher with a larger repertoire of activities ranging from the more well-known, mundane 'describe the coffee pot' activities to the more interesting and fun, such as games, riddles, dialogue-building, conversation analysis, and so on.

It is encouraging that an examination of these materials reveals much more variety and innovation in CS practice possibilities. However, some serious discussion of guidelines for implementation is missing. Although some of the teachers' resource books do provide a bit of advice on how to use the activities (e.g., *Conversations and Dialogues in Action, Conversation*), most of them leave it up to the teacher's discretion. In addition, in general, not much language is provided to implement the strategies.

Critique of Materials and Research Question Number Two

Now that we have seen some of the CS practice activities ELT materials have to offer, let us consider how teachers could execute CS tasks effectively in the classroom. Dörnyei (1995) suggests six guidelines for a direct approach to teaching communication strategies. These are: raising learner awareness about the nature and communicative potential of CS (see also, Willems, 1987; Tarone, 1984), providing L2 models of the use of certain CS, teaching directly by presenting linguistic devices to verbalize CS, providing opportunities for practice in strategy use and feedback, encouraging students to be willing to take risks and use CS, and highlighting cross-cultural differences in CS use (p. 80).

Other guidelines we should consider include: the assessment of learners' needs (Kasper, 1999; Tarone & Yule, 1989, pp. 113-114), which strategies are the most appropriate for which situation/problem (Færch & Kasper, 1983a, p. 55), small group problem-solving tasks that lead to natural conversation (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Willems, 1987), activities likely to lead to genuine communication situations (Bialystok, 1985; Canale & Swain, 1980; Chen, 1990), and task difficulty/ complexity (Brown & Yule, 1983; Robinson, to appear)

The activities found in the 17 books seem to follow *a few* of these guidelines *to a small degree.* After reviewing the numerous activities introduced in these materials to practice communication strategies, I can make the following observations. First, in general, there is little or no mention of learners' needs or matching the strategy to the situation. Target models are seldom provided, and there are a limited number of useful linguistic devices. There are few practice opportunities, as indicated by the fact that the language and strategies are seldom recycled throughout the texts. Occasionally, the usefulness of communication strategies is directly mentioned, and you can find tasks that lead to 'genuine' and 'natural' conversation. Tasks which tend to fit these guidelines can be found in some academic research articles on CS (e.g., Willems, 1987; Yule, 1997), materials designed to promote learner autonomy, learning strategies or communication strategies (e.g., *Learning to Learn, Conversations and Dialogues in Action*), or selected

activities found in some teachers' resource books if implemented appropriately (e.g., *Conversation*, *Keep Talking*).

CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This paper has considered communication strategy instruction by first presenting an argument in favor of teaching CS and then considering what materials are available to implement strategy instruction in the classroom. This study is admittedly limited in that it only surveyed a small sample of books. Nonetheless, some important, practical ideas were discovered. It was not completely surprising, though perhaps disappointing, that textbooks appear to offer few effective practice activities to develop communication strategy competence. The teachers' resource books have a bit more for us to draw on, yet are by no means ideal. More high quality materials designed to teach communication strategies would be very welcomed.

What would such materials look like? The ideal book on teaching communication strategies would focus on recommended strategies that require L2 production, (Færch & Kasper, 1983). They would recommend that CS be taught directly (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1994), and that teaching should include many principles or guidelines, as proposed by Dörnyei (1995), Kasper (1999), and others, as listed in the previous section. Practice activities would not only encourage, but also *push* learners to use communication strategies. Some possible activities found in the research and the language learning materials surveyed, in general, involve solving communicative problems through negotiated meaning. A list of activity types can be found in **APPENDIX E**. While these tasks would not *necessarily* practice communication strategies (e.g., simulations, dialogues) they could be designed with that purpose in mind.

Less than ideal textbooks do not necessarily lead to bad instruction. To assume that the presentation and content of ELT texts control instruction is far too strong. Nonetheless, we should be aiming for the best materials possible in order to assist the learner and the already overworked and underpaid ELT instructors and administrators. To my knowledge, the definitive textbook of communication strategies has yet to be written. Unfortunately, because of the paucity of adequate materials focusing on communication strategies, the burden may very well fall on the instructor. The textbooks surveyed and my suggestions by no means exhaust the possible ways of incorporating communication strategy training into the classroom. Naturally, the students' needs, teaching context, available resources, and creativity of the teacher could suggest other possibilities.

Teaching recommended communication strategies empowers students to participate in *communication* by helping them to not give up in the conversation. We as teachers have a

responsibility to provide our students with tools to communicate, such as through the development of strategic competence. I hope that this study has shed some light on the controversial issue of teaching communication strategies and provided some practical ideas on how we can implement such training in the classroom.

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APPENDIX A

ELT Materials Surveyed

Textbooks

Breaking the ice: Basic communication strategies. Hynes, M., & Baichman, M. (1989). London: Longman.

Functions of American English. Jones, L., & von Baeyer, C. (1983). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Impact words + phrases. Harsch, K., Lange, E., Millet, S., Blackwell, A., Kusuya, B., & Murphey, T. (1997). Hong Kong: Lingual House.

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Learning to learn English: A course in learner training. Ellis, G., & Sinclair, B. (1989). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mosaic one: A listening/speaking skills book. Ferrer-Hanreddy, J., & Whalley, E. (1996). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Nice talking with you. Kenny, T., & Woo, L. (2000). Tokyo: Macmillan.

Springboard to success: Communication strategies for the classroom and beyond. Skillman, P., & McMahill, C. (1996). Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

Teachers' Resource Books

Conversation. Nolasco, R., & Arthur, L. (1987). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Conversation and dialogues in action. Dörnyei, Z., & Thurrell, S. (1992). New York: Prentice Hall.

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Gambits 3: Responders, closers & inventory. Keller, E., & Warner, S. (1979). Ottawa: Public Service Commission of Canada.

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APPENDIX B

Eleven Communication Strategies Investigated

I. Achievement (Compensatory)

a. Conceptual--

1. ***approximation/generalization--*** using an alternative expression which may not express exactly what you mean. Example: (superordinate term) 'bird' for owl

2. ***circumlocution/paraphrase --*** describing or explaining the meaning of the target expression, for example through description of its characteristics such as shape, color, function, etc.
Example: "*Somen* is a type of thin noodle often eaten in the summer in Japan."

b. Code--

3. ***borrowing--*** codeswitching to the L1

4. ***foreignizing--*** trying out an L1 word but adjusting it slightly phonologically or morphologically. Example: 'arbeit' for the Japanese word 'arubeito' meaning part-time job

5. ***word coinage--*** creating an L2 word thinking it might work. Example: 'fish zoo' for aquarium

II. Reduction (Avoidance)

6. ***topic avoidance--*** remaining silent about some part of the message

.

7. ***message replacement--*** changing a part of the message.
Example: "I went to the uh--- when I was shopping..."

8. ***abandonment--*** not finishing a message; giving up.
Example: "Never mind. I don't know how to explain this in English."

III. Interactive

9. ***appeal for assistance***-- asking others for help
Examples: these may be global (eg.,'Pardon?') or lexical (eg.,"How do you say *jinja* in English?

10. ***non-verbals--***
*Examples: mime, gestures, sound imitation

*Adapted from Yule, 1997, pp. 79-81. The 3 interactive strategies- *mime, gesture, sound imitation* have been conflated into *non-verbals*

IV. Other Communication Strategies Considered

11. ***time-stalling devices***- hesitation devises used to fill pauses in order to gain time to think, keep the floor, or warn the interlocutor that you are not a native speaker. Example:
'Umm, give me a minute to think about that'
Note: Although many researchers do not consider time-stalling devices to be CS (e.g., Kasper), others do (e.g.. Dörnyei, 1995). Time-stalling devices are sometimes included in materials.

APPENDIX C

Communication Strategies Found in Surveyed Texts

	Recommended Strategies to Teach				*Possibly Recommended*		Not Recommended to Teach				
Textbook	Approximation	Circumlocution/ Paraphrasing	Word Coinage	Appeal for Assistance	*Foreignizing*	*Time-Stalling Devices*	Topic Avoidance	Message Replacement	Message Abandonment	Non-Verbals	Borrowing
Breaking the Ice				✓							
Functions of American English		✓				✓			✓		
Impact: Words & Phrases				✓							
Interchange 2		✓									
Interchange 3		✓									
Learning to Learn English	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Mosaic One		✓		✓							
Nice Talking With You		✓		✓		✓			✓		
Springbooard to Success		✓		✓							
Total (out of 9 texts)	1	7	1	6	*1*	*3*	0	0	2	0	0

APPENDIX D

Communication Strategies Found in Surveyed Teachers' Resource Books

	Recommended Strategies to Teach				*Possibly Recommended*		Not Recommended to Teach				
Teachers' Resource Book	Approximation	Circumlocution/ Paraphrasing	Word Coinage	Appeal for Assistance	*Foreignizing*	*Time-Stalling Devices*	Topic Avoidance	Message Replacement	Message Abandonment	Non-Verbals	Borrowing
Conversation	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓
Conversation and Dialogues in Action	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	
Conversation Strategies		✓		✓							
Gambits: Responders, Closers & Inventory				✓		✓					
Keep Talking	✓	✓		✓						✓	
New Ways in Teaching Listening	✓	✓		✓		✓					
New Ways in Teaching Speaking		✓		✓		✓					
New Ways in Teaching Vocabulary		✓		✓							
Total (out of 8)	4	7	1	8	*0*	*5*	1	0	0	3	1

APPENDIX E

Common Task/Activity Types for Practicing Communication Strategies

dialogues
tanagrams and other abstract shapes
video/audio tape analysis
spot the difference among similar drawings or objects
jigsaw tasks
simulations
describe the strange gadget, cultural concept or other unfamiliar objects or concepts
crossword puzzles
assembling parts
role-playing
games, riddles, brain-teasers
identify familiar objects
directions/map routes
story telling
assembling tools, LEGO, etc.

Note: Based on a literature review of communication strategies and activities found in surveyed ELT materials.

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