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On the Teachability of Communication Strategies

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Because a significant proportion of real-life L2 communication is problematic, L2 learners might benefit from instruction on how to cope with performance problems. Such instruction could include the specific teaching of' communication strategies, which involve various verbal and nonverbal means of dealing with difficulties and breakdowns that occur in everyday communication. Opinions on the teachability of such strategies, however, vary widely, and several researchers have questioned the validity of strategy training. This article first describes what communication strategies are and provides an overview of the teachability issue, discussing the arguments for and against strategy instruction, and suggests three possible reasons for the existing controversy. After this the results of a study aimed at obtaining empirical data on the educational potential of strategy training are presented. The findings point to the possibility of developing the quality and quantity of learners' use of at least some communication strategies through focused instruction.

In the 1970s, four studies prepared the ground for the study of communication strategies (CSs), a new area of research within applied linguistics: Selinker's (1972) classic article on interlanguage introduced the notion of strategies of L2 communication. Váradi (1973, but published in 1980) and Tarone (1977; also Tarone, Cohen, & Dumas, 1976) elaborated on Selinker's notion by providing a systematic analysis of CSs, introducing many of the categories and terms used in subsequent CS research. Savignon (1972) reported on a pioneering language teaching experiment involving a communicative approach, which, for the first time, included student training in CSs (or, as she termed them, *coping strategies).* Since these early studies, much research has been done to identify and classify CSs (for reviews, see Bialystok, 1990; Cook, 1993; Poulisse, 1987); however, far less attention has been paid to the question of whether these strategies could be integrated

into second or foreign language teaching programs. This article addresses this issue.

I will first describe what communication strategies are and what role they play in communicative competence, then I will give an overview of the controversy that exists in the literature over their teachability. Finally, the results of a quasiexperimental study will be presented, involving a strategy training classroom project conducted with Hungarian EFL learners to obtain data on the effectiveness of such instruction. The results include comparisons of the learners' strategy use and speech rate before and after the training in both the treatment and the control groups, as well as measures of attitudes toward the training program.

STRATEGIC COMPETENCE AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Some people can communicate effectively in an L2 with only 100 words. How do they do it? They use their hands, they imitate the sound or movement of things, they mix languages, they create new words, they describe or circumlocute something they don't know the word for—in short, they use communication strategies. Because they lack basic grammar and vocabulary in the target language, their communicative success relies entirely on their "ability to communicate within restrictions" (Savignon, 1983, p. 43) by using strategies, that is, on their strategic competence. The importance of strategic competence in communication has been widely recognized since Canale and Swain (1980) included it as a major component in their well-known construct of communicative competence, defining it as "verbal and nonverbal strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence" (p. 30).

Complete agreement has not been reached on the definition of CSs, but one working definition many researchers accept is that CSs are "a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his [or her] meaning when faced with some difficulty" (Corder, 1981, p. 103). This definition, in accordance with Canale and Swain's (1980) and Færch and Kasper's (1983a) conceptualizations, posits problem orientedness and systematicness/consciousness as central features of CSs. Other researchers, however, have conceived CSs in a broader sense by also including attempts to "enhance the effectiveness of communication" (Canale, 1983, p. 11).

It has been generally accepted that CSs are not unique to L2 speakers because communication problems occur and are tackled in L1 commu-

nication as well (see Bongaerts & Poulisse, 1989). There is, however, disagreement concerning the range of these strategies, in particular whether to include interactive strategies that are used when *miscommunications* (Gass & Varonis, 1991) occur—for example, repair mechanisms and the negotiation of meaning—or whether the term *communication strategies* should be restricted to devices speakers use when they have difficulties in verbalizing a mental plan for lack of linguistic resources (see Cook, 1993; Færch & Kasper, 1984; Váradi, 1992; Yule & Tarone, 1991). This article focuses on the latter category only.

It follows that the taxonomies offered by various researchers vary somewhat (for a review, see Bialystok, 1990; Poulisse, 1987) but as Bialystok (1990) remarks, "the variety of taxonomies proposed in the literature differ primarily in terminology and overall categorizing principle rather than in the substance of the specific strategies. If we ignore, then, differences in the structure of the taxonomies by abolishing the various overall categories, then a core group of specific strategies that appear consistently across the taxonomies clearly emerges" (p. 61). In Figure 1 I have collected a list and descriptions of the CSs I consider most common and important in this core group, based on Váradi (1973), Tarone (1977), Færch and Kasper (1983a), and Bialystok (1990).

In the latter half of the 1980s, researchers at Nijmegen University (Netherlands) criticized the existing topologies of CSs as being product oriented, focusing on the surface structures of underlying psychological processes and thus resulting in a proliferation of different strategies of ambiguous validity (Kellerman, 1991; Poulisse, 1987; see also Cook, 1993). The alternative they proposed instead, a process-oriented classification of Css, is presented in Figure 2.

Following the basic principles for classifying Css established by Váradi (1973), Tarone (1977), and Færch and Kasper (1983a), the first two strategies in Figure 1 are usually referred to as *avoidance* or *reduction strategies* as they involve either an alteration, a reduction, or complete abandonment of the intended message.

Strategies 3–11 are normally termed *achievement* or *compensatory strategies* as they offer alternative plans for the speakers to carry out their original communicative goal by manipulating available language, thus compensating somehow for their linguistic deficiencies. The strategies suggested by the Nijmegen group (see Figure 2) also fall under this category.

Strategy 12 is an example of *stalling* or *time-gaining strategies.* These strategies are functionally different from the strategies mentioned above because they are not actually used to compensate for any linguistic deficiencies but rather to gain time and to keep the communication channel open at times of difficulty. It must be pointed out that commu-

FIGURE 1
CSs Following Traditional Conceptualizations

Avoidance or Reduction Strategies

1. Message abandonment—leaving a message unfinished because of language difficulties.
2. Topic avoidance—avoiding topic areas or concepts which pose language difficulties.

Achievement or Compensatory Strategies

3. Circumlocution—describing or exemplifying the target object or action (e.g., *the thing you open bottles with* for *corkscrew).*
4. Approximation—using an alternative term which expresses the meaning of the target lexical item as closely as possible (e.g., *ship* for *sail boat).*
5. Use of all-purpose words—extending a general, empty lexical item to contexts where specific words are lacking (e.g., the overuse of *thing, stuff, make, do,* as well as using words like *thingie, what-do-you-call-it).*
6. Word-coinage—creating a nonexisting L2 word based on a supposed rule (e.g., *vegetarianist* for *vegetarian).*
7. Use of nonlinguistic means—mime, gesture, facial expression, or sound imitation.
8. Literal translation—translating literally a lexical item, an idiom, a compound word or structure from L1 to L2.
9. Foreignizing—using a L1 word by adjusting it to L2 phonologically (i.e., with a L2 pronunciation) and/or morphologically (e.g., adding to it a L2 suffix).
10. Code switching—using a L1 word with L1 pronunciation or a L3 word with L3 pronunciation in L2.
11. Appeal for help—turning to the conversation partner for help either directly (e.g., *What do you call . . . ?)* or indirectly (e.g., rising intonation, pause, eye contact, puzzled expression).

Stalling or Time-gaining Strategies

12. Use of fillers/hesitation devices—using filling words or gambits to fill pauses and to gain time to think (e.g., *well, now let me see, as* a *matter of fact).*

FIGURE 2
CSs as Conceptualized by the Nijmegen University Group

1. *Conceptual strategies*— manipulating the target concept to make it expressible through available linguistic resources.
   (a) *Analytic strategies*— specifying characteristic features of the concept (e.g., circumlocution).
   (b) *Holistic strategies*— using a different concept which shares characteristics with the target item (e.g., approximation).
2. *Linguistic/code strategies*— manipulating the speaker's linguistic knowledge.
   (a) *Morphological creativity*— creating a new word by applying L2 morphological rules to a L.2 word (e.g., grammatical word coinage).
   (b) *Transfer* from another language.

nication maintenance strategies of this type have not been included in the most well-known taxonomies put forward by Tarone, Færch and Kasper, Bialystok or the Nijmegen group. Several other researchers, however, have highlighted the significance of using fillers and hesitation devices as a conscious means to sustain communication in the face of difficulties (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Ellis, 1985; Haastrup & Phillipson, 1983; Hatch, 1978; Rost, 1994; Rubin, 1987; Savignon, 1972, 1983). In Hatch's (1978) words, learners should be told to use "whatever fillers they can to show the Native Speaker that they really are trying . . . . The most important thing of all has to be 'don't give up'" (p. 434). Canale (1983) specifically listed the "use of pause fillers" (p. 25) among the CSs making up strategic competence. Haastrup and Phillipson (1983) included in their taxonomy a set of strategies which they termed "Strategies aimed at solving retrieval problems" (p. 144) (e.g., "er now I have to think"), which appear to be similar to the ones we are talking about here. Rost (1994) also mentions using conversational fillers to keep the conversation going in his list of communication strategies.

The question, then, is whether it is justifiable to include stalling strategies among CSs or not. Færch and Kasper (1983b) considered any filled pause (lexical or nonlexical alike) to be *temporal variables* of speech performance rather than CSs.[1] According to them, therefore, fillers and hesitation devices are not CSs. On the other hand, it was Færch and Kasper's definitions of *problem orientedness* and *consciousness* as criteria of CSs, which originally prompted me to include stalling strategies as CSs: The conscious use of communication maintenance fillers and gambits appears to satisfy both criteria. From another perspective, Tarone (1980) distinguished between *production* and *communication* strategies, the former referring to general attempts to use the linguistic system efficiently and clearly, the latter being used more specifically to negotiate meaning by offering alternative means to communicate one's message. In this system, stalling strategies fall under production and not communication strategies. Although this distinction makes sense, I believe that it is difficult to draw the line exactly between the two types of strategy; for example, in its rigid application, this framework would restrict CSs primarily to achievement strategies; avoidance strategies would fall short of qualifying as real CSs because by using them one's meaning is not so much negotiated as reduced. In sum, there is clearly a need to provide a thorough analysis and typology of all the cognitive strategies that speakers use to enhance communication, but this goes beyond the scope of this study. This

[1]However, Færch and Kasper (1983b) also pointed out that "the exact functions of the various types of pauses are still far from being well-described" (p. 215).

article uses the term *communication strategies* broadly to cover a wide range of communication-enhancing devices, including stalling strategies.

It may be useful to point out that Tarone (1980) mentions *learning strategies* as a third type of strategy in her classification. These strategies are defined by Oxford (1990) as "actions taken by second and foreign language learners to control and improve their own learning" (p. ix). Even though such strategies are functionally different from communication-enhancing strategies, the distinction is not so clear at a closer glance. A great deal of language attainment takes place through taking an active part in actual communication, and CSs help learners to do so and thus (a) to obtain practice, and (b) to gain new information by testing what is permissible or appropriate. In fact, Tarone (1980) points out that in actual use all CSs may serve learning purposes; for the same reason, Oxford (1980) included compensation strategies as one of the six main classes in her system of learning strategies.

THE TEACHABILITY CONTROVERSY

The teachability of CSs has been a source of considerable controversy in the past decade. Whereas strong theoretical arguments reject the validity and usefulness of specific CS training, practical considerations and experience appear to support the idea. A brief summary of the problem and the arguments follows.

Tarone (1981) points out that CSs, rather than being part of linguistic knowledge, are "descriptive of the learner's pattern of use of what he/she knows as he/she tries to communicate with speakers of the TL [target language]" (p. 63). What is more, most researchers would agree that strategic competence develops in the speaker's L1 and is freely transferable to target language use (see Bongaerts & Poulisse, 1989; Bongaerts, Kellerman, & Bentlage, 1987; Kellerman, Ammerlaan, Bongaerts, & Poulisse, 1990; Paribakht, 1985). This means that most adult language learners already have a fairly developed level of this competence, involving a repertoire of applicable CSs, regardless of their level of L2 proficiency (see Bialystok & Kellerman, 1987). If, therefore, there is no new linguistic knowledge involved and the cognitive processes are familiar from the L1, what then is the point in teaching these strategies? As Kellerman (1991) concludes, "there is no justification for providing' training in compensatory strategies in the classroom . . . . Teach the learners more language and let the strategies look after themselves" (p. 158).

After providing a comprehensive overview of strategy use and language processing, Bialystok (1990) argues that communicative strate-

gies are reflections of underlying psychological processes, and therefore it is unlikely that focusing on surface structures will enhance strategy use or the ability to communicate. Her conclusion is very similar to Kellerman's: "The more language the learner knows, the more possibilities exist for the system to be flexible and to adjust itself to meet the demands of the learner. What one must teach students of a language is not strategy, but language" (p. 147). Canale and Swain (1980) also believe that CSs are most likely to be acquired in real-life communication and not developed through classroom practice.

The arguments above are well-founded. Still, many other researchers maintain that strategy training is possible and desirable (e.g., Brooks, 1992; Chen, 1990; Færch & Kasper, 1983a, 1986; Haastrup & Phillipson, 1983; Paribakht, 1986; Rost, 1994; Rost & Ross, 1991; Savignon, 1972, 1983, 1990; Tarone, 1984; Tarone & Yule, 1989; Willems, 1987). The sources of this seeming contradiction, I believe, lie in the following three observations:

1. Most of the arguments on both sides are based on indirect evidence.
2. There is variation within CSs with regard to their teachability.
3. The notion of teaching allows for a variety of interpretations.

Indirect Evidence

Very little systematic strategy training research has been conducted thus far to test the teachability of CSs. I share Bialystok's (1990) view that "there is little empirical research investigating the pedagogy of CSs, so descriptions and evaluations of any procedure are somewhat speculative" (p. 149). Most arguments concerning the teachability issue are based on indirect or inconclusive evidence, but it must be noted that some of these data actually appear to confirm the validity of strategy training.

Some studies did investigate the potential usefulness of the specific training of some CSs. These were, however, either too narrow in scope to be generalizable (i.e., focusing only on one strategy), or did not follow rigorous experimental research methods. Wildner-Bassett (1986) provides evidence, for example, that explicit instruction can increase both the quality and quantity of time-gaining fillers used by students. Færch and Kasper (1986) and Tarone and Yule (1989) report on four different classroom projects that successfully incorporated strategy training into foreign language instruction. Rost (1994) conducted a questionnaire survey among teachers of conversation-based L2 classes, in which they were asked to indicate to what extent they considered certain (primarily interfactional) communication strategies

to be useful and teachable. Several strategies, including using conversational fillers, were considered highly teachable.

There are also some indications in the literature that learners who have been exposed to certain L2 input do improve their strategic competence. Tarone (1981) reports on a study by Piranian investigating learners of Russian, in which learners who had had some extracurricular exposure to Russian were found to use strategies more often and more effectively than their peers whose Russian experience was limited to the classroom. Raupach (1983) had similar findings with a group of learners of French who had spent a term in France: "Whereas the interviews following the stay abroad showed no appreciable progress in the learners' command of grammatical structures, there generally was a considerable change in the use of communication strategies" (p. 207). Bialystok (1983) found that those subjects who had travelled widely and spoke more than two foreign languages proved to be superior in their L2 strategy use. There is also some evidence that students in classroom settings which offer more natural input (such as immersion classes) tend to develop a higher level of strategic competence (see Tarone, 1984) than students in ordinary classrooms, who tend to use only a limited number of mostly unsophisticated CSs (see also Willems, 1987).

Variation Within CSs

The range of strategies researchers include when they talk about communicative strategies varies from study to study. Most references in the literature to the teaching of CSs involve generalizations (either in favor of or against teaching them) based on one or two strategy types, and the current study, though attempting to investigate a range of strategies, is no exception to this. This approach is obviously not ideal, as some strategies (such as message abandonment) are clearly not desirable to teach, whereas some others (e.g., circumlocution or appeal for help), as we will see below, are not only useful and desirable, but also involve certain core words and structures, which lend themselves readily to classroom instruction. This implies that the question of whether communication strategies in general are teachable or not may be too simplistic, and this maybe partly responsible for the controversial answers given to it.

Various Interpretations of the Notion of Teaching

Those who argue against teaching CSs claim, in broad terms, that there is no need to do so because learners are already familiar with them from their L1. This argument, however, is based on a narrow

interpretation of teaching, namely that of passing on new information, whereas in the L2 literature, teaching is often used in a broader sense, for example when we speak about teaching L2 reading skills to learners who can already read in their L1. A broader interpretation of teaching would involve the following six (interrelated) procedures, all relevant to strategy training.

1. ***Raising learner awareness about the nature and communicative potential of CSs*** by making learners conscious of strategies already in their repertoire, sensitizing them to the appropriate situations where these could be useful, and making them realize that these strategies could actually work. The importance of conscious attention in the learner's internalization process in general is highlighted by Schmidt (1990) in his review of what cognitive psychology tells us about learning and memory. From a cognitive perspective, the main role of instruction is to orient the learners and focus their attention on a given topic. Færch and Kasper (1986) also emphasize the need to increase learners' "metacommunicative awareness" (p. 187) with respect to strategy use. In fact, most definitions of CSs include (potential) consciousness as a major feature and, as they also point out, this implies that these strategies "can be influenced by teaching" (Færch & Kasper, 1984, p. 47).

2. ***Encouraging students to be willing to take risks and use CSs,*** that is, to manipulate available language without being afraid of making errors (Færch & Kasper, 1986; Yule & Tarone, 1990). Willems (1987) also argues that very often we need to make it clear to learners that for some strategies, "their innate tendency to use them in free speech activities is quite a natural urge and nothing to be frowned upon" (p. 356). It must be noted that Bialystok and Kellerman (1987) agree that the use of CSs should be encouraged, but they do not consider this part of teaching them: "It is one thing to encourage their use (and create the conditions in which they can be used) and quite another to actively teach communication strategies in the classroom" (p. 172). This is a good example of the fact that some of the teachability controversy stems from the different interpretations of what teaching involves.

3. ***Providing L2 models of the use of certain CSs*** through demonstrations, listening materials and videos, and getting learners to identify, categorize, and evaluate strategies used by native speakers or other L2 speakers. A variation of this structured inductive approach, described by Færch and Kasper (1986), is when conversations between the students and native speakers are recorded on video, and after viewing their own recordings, students analyze their own strategy use.

4. ***Highlighting cross-cultural differences in CS use*** might involve various degrees of stylistic appropriateness associated with CSs (e.g., in some languages particular CSs may be seen as indications of bad

style), differences in the frequency of certain CSs in the speaker's L1 and L2, as well as differences in the verbalization of particular CSs.

5. ***Teaching CSs directly*** by presenting linguistic devices to verbalize CSs which have a finite range of surface structure realizations. According to McLaughlin (1990), verbal tasks are hierarchically structured and in order to realize a higher order goal, each of the component skills needs to be executed. This would imply that being familiar with a strategy in L1 might be an insufficient condition for efficient strategy use in L2 if certain lower order components are missing or not automatized properly.

Tarone and Yule (1989) point out that circumlocution, for example, requires certain basic core vocabulary and sentence structures to describe properties (e.g., shape, size, color, texture) and function. They provide examples like *top side, bowl-shaped, triangular, on the rim, circular, square.* Dörnyei and Thurrell (1992) consider the automatization of basic structures such as *it's a kind of/sort of the thing you use for. . . . it's what/when you . . . , it's something you do/say when . . . ,* necessary for circumlocution. They also provide a list of common fillers and hesitation devices which come in handy when learners wish consciously to buy time (e.g., *well, actually, as a matter of fact, the thing is . . . . how shall I put it...),* as well as a set of ways to appeal for help (e.g., *What do you call it/someone who . . . . What's the word for . . .).* One good way of collecting such sets is by asking the learners to perform strategies in their L1 and then trying to find L2 equivalents for the structures and core lexis they used.

6. ***Providing opportunities for practice in strategy use*** appears to be necessary because CSs can only fulfil their function as immediate first aid devices if their use has reached an automatic stage. My experience in L2 teaching and CS training suggests that this automatization will not always occur without specific focused practice (see also Willems, 1987). Again, Kellerman (1991) acknowledges the possible usefulness of situational classroom practice of strategies in order to help learners overcome inhibitions arising from having to operate in the L2, but does not consider this part of actual strategy teaching since "such exercises would be designed to help learners *perform* their competence, rather than build it up" (p. 160).

Communication Strategy Training Versus Learning Strategy Training

It may be interesting to compare the six categories listed above to experiences gained from learning strategy training programs (for an overview, see Chamot, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) emphasize that learning

strategy training should be direct, that is "students should be apprised of the goals of strategy instruction and should be made aware of the strategies they are being taught" (p. 184). This emphasis on directness is very similar to Oxford's (1990) and Wenden's (1991) emphasis on *informed training.* As Oxford summarizes:

> Research shows that strategy training which fully informs the learner (by indicating why the strategy is useful, how it can be transferred to different tasks, and how learners can evaluate the success of this strategy) is more successful than training that does not. (p. 207)

Thus, learning strategy training is found to be most efficient if it is explicit (direct, informed), which I have argued to be the case for CSs as well. The components of direct training of learning strategies, according to the above authors, include "awareness training" (Oxford, 1990, p. 202) offering a general introduction to the concept of learning strategies and strategy training; identification of the strategies students are already using; encouragement of strategy use in general; direct explanation of the use and importance of new strategies; initial demonstration, naming and modeling of the new strategy by the teacher; guided in-class practice of the new strategy followed by a cyclical review; exploration of the significance of the strategy and the evaluation of the degree of success with it; student identification of additional strategies and their potential applications; and, finally, the transfer of the new strategies to new tasks. Many of the above elements show a remarkable similarity to the CS training components listed earlier. There are two components of CS training absent here—the highlighting of cross-cultural differences in CS use and the actual teaching of linguistic devices—and this is because they are closely associated with the verbal nature of CSs.

THE INVESTIGATION: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DESIGN

Research Questions

In order to obtain empirical data on the teachability of CSs, we conducted a strategy training course and assessed the effects of the treatment using pre- and posttests and comparing the results with those obtained from control groups. We were interested in how strategy training affected some qualitative and quantitative aspects of strategy use as well as the rate of delivery of speech. We also wanted to find out how language proficiency affected the results and what

students' affective dispositions were toward such training. Thus, we formulated five research questions:

1. Does the training of a specific strategy increase the frequency of the use of this strategy by the students?
2. Does the training of a specific strategy improve the quality (efficiency) of this strategy in actual language use?
3. Does strategy training have a direct impact on the students' speech rate?
4. Is the success of strategy training related to the students' initial level of language proficiency?
5. What are the students' attitudes toward strategy training and the usefulness of CSs?

Strategies Investigated

The research focused on the training of three CSs and offered both awareness and practice activities. These strategies were: (a) topic avoidance and replacement, (b) circumlocution, and (c) using fillers and hesitation devices.

By selecting three different types of strategies, we intended to increase the range of our training program. We assumed that including topic avoidance and replacement skills in the training could improve learners' fluency along the lines of the old slogan, "Language learners should say what they can and not what they want to," or along the lines of a variation on this slogan, "Language learners should be encouraged to say what they can, rather than retreat silently from what they can't." [2] Circumlocution is often seen as the most important achievement strategy, and most of the existing strategy training activities focus on it. The ability to use fillers and hesitation devices plays an important role in helping a person to remain in the conversation and gain time to think; we have found in the past that teaching fillers brings about an improvement in students' fluency.

Research Design

The study had a quasiexperimental design (i.e., it involved intact EFL learner groups) and included a treatment group and two types of control group: In the first type, students received no treatment at all but followed their regular EFL curriculum; in the second, general conversational training was given without any specific strategic focus.

[2] I am grateful to George Yule for suggesting this variation on the slogan.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 109 students (72 girls and 37 boys), aged 15–18, studying English in 8 class groups in 5 different secondary schools in Hungary. Table 1 presents a summary of the subjects according to schools and class groups in the treatment and control groups. I selected these two schools for the treatment group because I was supervising two theses on communication strategies, so their classes were used for the treatment. The three schools for the control groups were selected because I had some personal contacts there with teachers who were ready to participate in the project.

The selection of the schools and teachers was intentional, and we tried to control for as many other variables as possible. The 5 schools were of the same type, *gimnázium* (similar to British grammar schools), providing general instruction and preparing students for further studies in higher education. They were all respectable but not particularly famous or elite schools. The 6 teachers involved in the project were in the same age group (25–30), having had between 2–5 years of teaching experience. Students in all 8 groups followed a similar EFL curriculum (the Hungarian national curriculum), using coursebooks published in Great Britain. Group sizes ranged from 13 to 18 (people who were absent during the pre- or posttests were not included in the investigation), which is the usual size for EFL class groups in Hungarian secondary schools (for a more detailed description of the EFL teaching situation in Hungary, see Dörnyei, 1992; Medgyes, 1993).

Because the research also involved the investigation of the effect of L2 proficiency on strategy use, we selected classes of different English proficiencies to ensure sufficient variation. All the students had been studying English between 1.5 and 3.5 years and had received between

TABLE 1
Subjects' Class Groups, Schools, and Group Types

Treatment Group (*n* =53)				Control Groups (*n* =56)			
				No-Treatment Group		Conversational Training Group	
School 1	School 2			School 3	School 4	School 5	
Class 1 Teacher 1	Class 2 Teacher 2	Class 3 Teacher 2	Class 4 Teacher 2	Class 5 Teacher 3	Class 6 Teacher 4	Class 7 Teacher 5	Class 8 Teacher 6
16	12	11	14	12	12	15	17

200 and 480 English lessons; their EFL proficiency ranged from preintermediate to postintermediate (about 1+ to 2+ on the U.S. Foreign Service Institute scale). Both the treatment and control groups included some higher and some lower level classes.

Description of the CS Training Program

The experiment consisted of a 6-week strategy training program, embedded in the pupils' official secondary school English course. The 4 class groups receiving treatment *(n* = 53) were taught by 2 teachers following exactly the same syllabus. The strategy training took place in three lessons each week, lasting for about 20–40 minutes each time. The teaching material was based on the techniques described by Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991), supplemented with awareness-raising discussions and feedback. An attempt was made to cover all the six types of CS teaching procedures listed above.

In order to learn to use topic avoidance and replacement strategies, students were taught to go off the point, evade answers, and steer the conversation in a given direction. First the teachers provided demonstrations of the strategies, then students were asked to perform these in their L1. In the next stage, students were given time to prepare their "manoeuvres" in English and after the performance their achievement was discussed; later during the course, an increasing amount of improvisation was required. The activities focusing on circumlocution involved comparing various dictionary definitions and analyzing the structure of effective ones. Students were then given various tasks in which they had to describe objects and later more abstract notions, to extend definitions using long relative clauses, and play games such as Call my Bluff. The training of the use of fillers involved first collecting and classifying fillers, then inserting fillers into dialogues, lengthening dialogue turns as much as possible by adding sequences of fillers, expressing hesitation explicitly by using fillers, and matching fillers with different emotions and moods. The Appendix contains a selection of the most typical activities used to teach the three strategies.

The program had a cyclic content design with each of the three teaching topics recurring and being further elaborated in every third lesson. The rest of the English lessons were typical foreign language classes, including a balanced teaching of integrated skills, using standard British coursebooks such as Access *to English* (Coles & Lord, 1975) or *Headway* (Soars & Soars, 1987).

Control Groups

Of the 8 class groups in the sample, 4 served as control groups *(n* = 56). These were divided into two parts. Two groups *(n* = 24) re-

ceived no treatment at all but followed their regular EFL curriculum; students were not even told that an experiment was in progress but were only asked to participate twice (with an interval of 6 weeks) in a recording activity (i.e., the pre- and posttests). In the other 2 control groups (n = 32) subjects were exposed to a conversational training supplement to their normal English classes (similar in length to the strategic supplement of the treatment group), without any specific strategic focus. The conversational training activities included communicative tasks such as role-play, games, and discussions, involving a lot of pairwork and groupwork. Students in these groups were told in advance that they would take part in an "interesting communicative experiment."

The Pre- and Posttests

All the students took a written and an oral test before the program and the oral test again after the training (or after 6 weeks in the case of the no-treatment group). The elicited speech was recorded and transcribed. Students in the treatment group also filled out a questionnaire assessing how interesting and useful they had found the training. The written test consisted of the following.

1. The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), a standardized multiple-choice test (listening and reading sections) offered by the Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey. (The control groups were given a shortened version.)
2. The C-test, an integrative pencil and paper test; the particular version used had been validated with Hungarian EFL learners (see Dörnyei & Katona, 1992).
3. The oral test consisted of the following.

Topic description: Students were given an abstract topic (e.g., vegetarianism, marriage, peace) and were asked to talk about it for 3 minutes.

Cartoon description: Students were asked to describe the content of a cartoon strip consisting of three to four pictures.

Definition formulation: Students were given five Hungarian words related to school or family life (e.g., child care benefit, school leaving certificate, specialization course) and were asked to provide a definition

or an explanation in English. The target words were chosen from a pool of eight words in the pretest and seven words in the posttest.[3]

Variables in the Survey

Definition Quality

The effectiveness of the definitions the students provided was taken to reflect the quality of their use of circumlocutions. Even though the task of giving formal definitions does not fully represent the ability to generate circumlocutions in context, this method was used to control for the number and the topic of circumlocutions, thus ensuring comparability across students. The evaluation of the effectiveness of the definitions required a complex measure: The success of a circumlocution does not depend on its length or the speech rate it is delivered at but rather on whether the listener can identify the target word described. Therefore all definitions produced by the students were transcribed and inserted into Definition-Evaluation Questionnaires for judges who had to guess the key words that the definitions defined and write them in the questionnaire.[4]

To ensure that one judge did not evaluate more than one definition of a key word (because the task of finding out the item would have been significantly easier the second time), each judge was given only one questionnaire which included definitions of different key words (6–14 definitions on a questionnaire). This meant, however, that 95 Definition-Evaluation Questionnaires needed to be prepared to include every definition generated by the students in the pre- and posttests. Copies of these 95 questionnaires were distributed to more than 600 English majors at Eötvös University, Budapest, who served as the judges. Data were obtained on a minimum of 9 out of the total of 10 definitions a student produced (the missing definitions are explained by the exclusion of some key words—see Note 3). The evaluation of each definition was based on an average of seven judges' guesses. The answers were evaluated on a 3-point scale (wrong = 0, semicorrect = 1, correct = 2).

Based on the results, two composite measures, *pretraining definition*

[3]The data for one item in the pretest and two items in the posttest had to be excluded because some of the students did not know their exact meaning or mixed them with other items,

[4]The reason we used the written transcripts of orally produced definitions to be evaluated by the judges was largely practical: We did not want one judge to evaluate more than one definition of a key word because the task of finding out the item would have been significantly easier the second time. This meant, however, that hundreds of judges were needed to ensure multiple evaluations of each definition. With such a huge number, we were simply unable to play individually the recorded definitions to the selected judges.

quality and *posttraining definition quality*, were obtained by first averaging the judges' quality scores for each definition for each individual and then averaging the definition scores a student obtained in the pretest and the posttest (thus these quality means ranged from 0 to 2, with 0 indicating that none of the definitions a student generated was correctly interpreted by any of the judges, and 2 that all the definitions were understood by every single judge). A third measure, *definition-quality gain*, was also computed by deducting the figure for pretraining definition-quality from that of posttraining definition-quality.

Frequencies of Circumlocutions and Fillers

All occurrences of circumlocutions and fillers in the students' speech were identified by the author and a group of research assistants. We did not include the circumlocutions from the definition-formulating activity (where the actual task was to generate circumlocutions) unless further circumlocutions were embedded in the definitions. Also, we did not include fillers whose use was not appropriate in English but was rather influenced by L1 interference. The decisions about each occurrence were based on three researchers' agreement; in case of different judgments, the issue was discussed until an agreement was reached. Here again *frequency gain scores* were computed by subtracting the pretest frequency scores from the posttest scores.

Speech Rate

Although the efficiency of the training of fillers and circumlocutions could be directly evaluated by computing quality and frequency gain scores (see above), the use of the third featured strategy in the training program, topic avoidance/replacement, was only indirectly assessed through the students' fluency. The assumption was that topic avoidance/replacement skills have a positive effect on fluency and, therefore, an improvement in the use of this strategy will be reflected in an increase in the fluency measure. There are several ways of conceptualizing fluency (see Schmidt, 1992, for a comprehensive overview); we were particularly interested in one aspect, the ability to fill the time with talk, which contrasts with a characteristic feature of L2 speech (typical of learners whose contact with the L2 is mainly restricted to the L2 classroom) in which the learner keeps grinding to a halt, pauses for lengthy periods, and often gets so lost that the interlocutor loses patience, or a complete communication breakdown occurs. In measuring speech rate, fillers, lexicalized hesitations (e.g., gambits, but not those of hesitation), and repetitions are considered to be part of fluent speech even though such leximic units may be viewed as dysfunctional

intrusions and, as such, may be examples of a lack of fluency from the perspective of other fluency conceptions.

Speech rate measures were computed by simply dividing the total number of words a student produced by the length of time of that particular stretch of speech (measured in seconds). Separate coefficients were obtained for the cartoon description and the topic description tasks (but not the definition formulation task—see above) for both the pre- and the posttests. These were then averaged to form two composite measures: *pretraining speech rate* and *posttraining speech rate,* and again a gain score, *speech rate gain* was also computed.

Language Proficiency

A general language proficiency measure was computed by adding up the standardized scores of the C-test and the two subtests of TOEIC equally weighted.

Perceived Usefulness of Training

A Student Questionnaire asked the students to indicate on a 7-point scale how useful they considered the training of each of the three strategies to be.

Attitudes Toward the Training

Students indicated on a 7-point scale on the Student Questionnaire the extent to which they had enjoyed the course.

Statistical Analyses

The definition-quality gain in the three conditions (treatment group and two kinds of control group) was compared by means of a one-way ANOVA of the gain scores. Student improvement in the use of circumlocutions and fillers in the treatment and control groups was compared by means of the Chi-square test. The significance of speech rate gain was first tested by paired sample *t* tests separately in the three conditions, then the gain scores were compared using a one-way ANOVA. To detect interrelationships between the students' language proficiency, speech rate, and measures related to strategy use, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of the quality of the students' definitions in the pre- and posttests across the three conditions. As can be seen, in the treatment group there is an improvement in the quality of the definitions after the training, whereas in both types of control group the quality score decreases (possibly because the key words in the posttest were somewhat more difficult to define, which makes the increase in the treatment group even more noteworthy).[5] In order to test whether these contrasting results were caused by the treatment, a comparison of the gain scores across the three conditions was carried out by means of a one-way ANOVA. The analysis (see Table 2) produced a significant result and the Scheffé test showed that the difference between the treatment and the no-treatment conditions was significant. This was not the case between the treatment and the conversational training conditions at the $p < .05$ level. However, a comparison of the mean gains in these latter two groups indicated that the difference approached significance ($F[1,83] = 3.44$, $p = .067$) and we can therefore talk about a trend in favor of the treatment condition (see Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991, p. 232).

We may conclude that the CS treatment was successful in improving the quality of the definitions the students generated as confirmed by the difference between the treatment and the no-treatment conditions. The reason for the conversational training group showing no significant difference from the treatment group, but only a trend, might lie in the nature of conversational training: Communicative activities often include information-gap elements, which can be considered indirect practice in strategy use, and this reduces somewhat the difference between the two types of training.

Table 3 contains descriptive statistics of the frequency of circumlocutions and fillers in the pre- and posttests as well as the percentage of students who showed a positive change in the use of these strategies in the posttest. The means are the averages of raw frequencies for all the tasks (i.e., students in the treatment group used, e.g., fewer than two fillers on average during the whole of the pretest). As can be seen, in the treatment group the use of both circumlocutions and fillers

[5]The key words to be defined were different in the pre- and posttests, so a within-group repeated-measure comparison of definition quality may not be very meaningful because it may reflect the difference between the difficulty levels of the sets of keywords rather than within-group change. For this reason, no paired-sample *t* test statistics are given in Table 2. Incidentally, these statistics are in accordance with the claim about the superiority of the treatment condition: In the treatment group the difference in definition quality is significant ($t = -2.04$, $df = 52$, $p < .05$), whereas in the two types of control group it is not ($t = 1.61$, $df = 23$, p = n.s.; $t = .76$, $df = 31$, p = n.s.).

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics of Definition Quality and One-Way ANOVA of Definition Quality Gain Across the Treatment and Control Groups

	M			*SD*	
Group	Pretest	Posttest	Gain	Pretest	Posttest
Treatment Group *(n* = 53)	1.50	1.61	+.11	.30	.27
Control Group *(n* = 56)	1.49	1.42	–.07	.31	.27
No-treatment group *(n* = 24)	1.58	1.46	–.12	.35	.27
Conversational training group *(n* = 32)	1.43	1.39	–.04	.27	.27

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	r
Between groups	2	1.01	.51	3.83	.025
Within groups	106	13.99	.13		
Total	108	15.00			

increased, with the increase in the use of fillers appearing to be particularly substantial. In the control groups, on the other hand, there was only a minimal change in the frequency of circumlocutions, whereas the number of fillers actually decreased in the posttest.[6] Because of the frequency data, parametric procedures such as the ANOVA were not appropriate here to test whether the changes had been caused by the treatment. Instead, a nonparametric test, the Chi-square test, was applied to compare student improvement in the three conditions, with the number of students who showed a positive change being the dependent and group type the independent variables.

With respect to the use of fillers, the results of the comparison are highly significant, indicating that significantly more students in the treatment group showed improvement in their use of fillers (72%) than in the no-treatment group (13%) and the conversational training group (28%). This substantial increase as the function of the treatment is in accordance with Wildner-Bassett's (1986) findings. The Chi-square analysis, however, did not produce significant results with respect to circumlocutions ($\chi^2[2] = 1.53$, p = n.s.) in the three conditions (38%, 30% and 25%, respectively). There are two possible reasons for this: (a) The treatment affected not so much the frequency of the circumlocutions but rather their quality (which we have seen before). (b) Circumlocutions are not very common in everyday speech, and even in our tasks which were designed to pose language difficulties to the learners

[6] In the no-treatment group the decrease of the number of fillers in the posttest is rather large. This was partly caused by one student, who used a disproportionately large number of fillers (30, mostly *well's)* in the pretest and only half as many in the posttest.

TABLE 3

Descriptive Statistics of the Frequency of Circumlocutions and Fillers and Chi-Square Test on the Percentage of Students Showing a Positive Change Across the Three Conditions

Group	*M* [a]			Percentage of students showing positive change
	Pretest	Posttest	Gain	
Treatment Group (*n* = 53)				
Circumlocution	.57 (.80)	.91 (.86)	+.34	38
Fillers	1.70 (2.22)	6.36 (6.33)	+4.66	72
Control Group (*n* = 55)[b]				
Circumlocution	.69 (1.05)	.69 (.88)	.00	27
Fillers	1.95 (4.32)	1.11 (2.30)	−.84	22
No-treatment group (*n* = 23)				
Circumlocution	.65 (.78)	.71 (.86)	+.06	30
Fillers	2.52 (6.26)	1.04 (3.07)	−1.48	13
Conversational training group (*n* = 32)				
Circumlocution	.72 (1.22)	.66 (.90)	−.06	25
Fillers	1.53 (2.06)	1.16 (1.55)	−.37	28

	χ^2	*df*	*p*
Circumlocution	1.53	2	n.s.[c]
Fillers	29.23	2	.000

[a]Standard deviations are given below the means in parentheses.
[b]Because of missing data, one student was excluded from the control groups
[c]Nonsignificant at the $p < .05$ level.

and thus elicit CSs, the frequency of circumlocutions was rather low. This, coupled with the limited sample sizes, may not have allowed for stable trends to emerge and the results to reach significance.

Table 4 contains a comparison of the students' pre- and posttest speech rate in the treatment and the control groups, as well as a comparison of the speech rate gains across the three conditions. As can be seen, in the treatment group the improvement in the students' speech rate is highly significant. The two types of control group show a different pattern: There is no significant change in the no-treatment group, but students in the conversational training group improved in their speech rate significantly after the training. This latter result was

actually expected because the primary purpose of a conversational training supplement to a language course is to improve the students' fluency.

The one-way ANOVA of the gain scores across the three conditions did not produce a significant result, meaning that there were no differences between any of the three groups. The fact that the treatment and the conversational training conditions did not show any difference was not surprising in view of the significant increase of speech rate in the conversational training group. On the other hand, the lack of a significant difference between the treatment and the no-treatment groups was rather unexpected. One possible explanation may be that even though CSs help smooth out trouble spots in conversation and thus reduce thinking time and increase fluency, the general rate of speech delivery is also a function of other aspects of one's communicative competence we did not control for in our survey. A second possible explanation may be that even if the treatment condition does have a stronger effect on the students' speech rate than the no-treatment condition, the resulting difference may not be sufficiently great after a 6-week strategy training supplement (18 x 20–40 mins) with such a limited sample, and would require more participating students and/or a longer training program to reach statistical significance.

Table 5 contains correlations obtained in the treatment group be-

TABLE 4

Paired Sample *t* tests on Pre- and Posttest Speech Rate and a One-Way ANOVA of Speech Rate Gain in the Treatment and Control Groups

		M[a]				
Group	*df*	Pretest	Posttest	Gain	*t* value	*p*
Treatment Group (*n* = 53)	52	.89 (.33)	1.06 (.35)	+.17	–5.14	.000
Control Group (*n* = 55)[b]	54	1.05 (.33)	1.17 (.33)	+.12	–3.46	.001
No-treatment group (n = 23)	*22*	1.05 (.36)	1.13 (.35)	+.08	–1.43	n.s.[c]
Conversational training group (n = 32)	31	1.06 (.32)	1.21 (.32)	+.15	–3.40	.002

Source	SS	*df*	*MS*	*F*	r
Between groups	2	.14	.07	1.08	n.s.
Within groups	105	6.78	.06		
Total	107	6.92			

[a]Standard deviations are given below the means in parentheses.
[b]Because of missing data, one student was excluded from the control groups.
[c]Nonsignificant at the r < .05 level.

tween the students' pretraining language proficiency, speech rate, and variables describing their strategy use. It was expected that the students' pre- and posttraining speech rate would be related to their language proficiency, that is, better students would be more fluent. This was indeed the case. What is important, however, is that the speech rate gain after the training is unrelated to the students' language proficiency, which means that success in the training was not a function of the participants' initial language competence. This is further confirmed by the correlations with definition quality, circumlocution, and fillers, where none of the gain scores correlated significantly with pretraining language proficiency (for an analysis of the relationship between language proficiency and strategy use in general, see Poulisse & Schils, 1989).

The second column in Table 5 shows correlations between the students' speech rate and strategy use before the training. The significant correlations indicate that both the quality and the quantity of the students' strategy use were positively related to their speech rate. The correlation between speech rate and fillers is particularly high, implying that more fluent students tended to use time-gaining strategies.

With respect to the correlations between variables after the training and correlations between variable-differences, (Columns 3 and 4), fillers again correlate highly significantly with speech rate—indicating

TABLE 5

Correlations Between Pretraining Language Proficiency y, Speech rate, and Variables Describing Strategy Use in the Treatment Group *(n* = 53)

Oral performance variables	Pretraining language Proficiency	Speech Rate		
		Pretraining	Posttraining	Gain
Speech Rate				
Pretraining	.37**			
Posttraining	.43**			
Gain	.10			
Definition Quality				
Pretraining	.30*	.30*	—	—
Posttraining	.22	—	.01	—
Gain	−.07	—	—	.05
Circumlocution				
Pretraining	.17	.30*	—	—
Posttraining	−.19	—	.07	—
Gain	−.26	—	—	−.14
Fillers				
Pretraining	.15	.66***	—	—
Posttraining	.09	—	.51***	—
Gain	.04	—	—	.41**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 6
Descriptive Statistics of the Affective Items from the Student Questionnaire

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Lowest value	Highest Value
Usefulness of fillers	5.68	1.14	3	7
Usefulness of topic avoidance	5.87	1.10	4	7
Usefulness of circumlocution	6.04	1.07	2	7
Attitudes towards the training	5.93	1.04	4	7

Note. The answers were given on 7-point scales ranging from "not useful at all/I didn't like them at all" (l) to "very useful/I liked them a lot'' (7).

that the mastery of fillers is positively associated with improvement in speech rate—but neither definition quality nor circumlocution do so. This lack of significant correlations could be due to several facts: Because the training also focused on a third strategy, topic avoidance/ replacement (which was assumed to be directly related to speech rate), unremarkable use of definitions/circumlocutions in the posttest may have been compensated for by good topic avoidance skills, which depressed the correlations. Another explanation might be that enhanced use of circumlocution does not directly affect speech rate but rather the quality of general message conveyance, which was not measured.

Table 6 contains descriptive statistics of the affective variables in the Student Questionnaire. The high value means indicate that students found the strategies in the training useful, especially circumlocution, and their general attitude toward the training was very favorable.

CONCLUSION

What prompted this study was my realization that a significant proportion of real-life communication in L2 is problematic (Gass & Varonis, 1991), and yet language classes do not generally prepare students to cope with performance problems. I assumed that one educational approach learners might potentially benefit from in developing their coping skills could be the direct teaching of CSs.

My own experience, as well as indications in the literature, suggested that it was possible to develop efficient strategy training activities; however, the serious theoretical arguments of researchers questioned the teachability of CSs. Three possible sources of this controversy have been suggested here: (a) The arguments concerning the systematic training of CSs have been typically based on indirect evidence, and some of this evidence actually supports the teachability of strategic

competence. (b) There is variation within CSs with respect to their teachability and, therefore, no straightforward answer can be given to the question whether CSs in general are teachable or not. (c) Part of the contradiction stems from different interpretations of one's notion of teaching.

To obtain empirical data regarding the potential usefulness of CS instruction, a training experiment was carried out, focusing on three different kinds of strategies. In the treatment group, the posttraining results showed improvement in measures related to both the quality and quantity of strategy use (quality of circumlocutions and the frequency of fillers and circumlocutions). A comparison of the gain scores with those obtained in the control groups provided evidence that the improvement in the quality of circumlocutions and in the quantity of fillers could indeed be attributed to the treatment; however, the same thing could not be confirmed about the quantity of circumlocutions, which was argued to be caused, at least partly, by the low frequency of this strategy in the corpus.

As for the students' speech rate, it was found that both the quality and the quantity of the students' strategy use were positively related to their fluency in the pretest but only fillers affected speech rate in the posttest. With respect to the differences between the pre- and the posttest results, significant within-group gains were found in the groups that received CS and conversational training (but not in the no-treatment group), but a comparison of the three conditions did not have significant results. It was argued that the unexpected lack of significant difference between the treatment and the no-treatment groups may have been caused by the shortness of the training and the limited sample sizes; alternatively, fluency is also determined by other important variables related to communicative competence which were not focused on or controlled for in our study and which may not have changed significantly during the 6-week period of the treatment, thus depressing speech rate gain differences.

With respect to the students' level of L2 proficiency, the effectiveness of the training was found to be unrelated to the learners' EFL competence. This implies that strategy training can be incorporated early—as our study shows, even at a preintermediate level—in an L2 teaching syllabus, which is in accordance with Savignon's (1972) original recommendation. It was also found that student attitudes toward such training were favorable, indicating that such training activities are relatively safe to use in the classroom.

The results presented above are far from conclusive. Only three types of CS were examined, which does not allow for generalizations, and there were quite a few mixed messages. Furthermore, a very

simple conception of fluency was applied in our study (words per seconds), which did not take into account any qualitative aspects of fluency, that is, the quality and efficiency of message conveyance.

Even bearing the above cautions in mind, the results of the CS training experiment are still promising. Although the experiment was a pilot study in the sense that we could not rely on any established methodology or the experiences of other teachers and researchers, the treatment was successful in improving some of the qualitative and quantitative aspects of strategy use. Future extensions and elaborations of the training program maybe expected to achieve even more marked results, and thus our project appears to provide some support to Tarone and Yule's (1989) claim concerning the direct teaching of CSs:

> In our suggestions for teaching sociolinguistic skills, we argued for an essentially inductive, integrative approach . . . However, for the purpose of developing communication strategies, we feel that a more focused and even explicitly didactic approach is possible. We differ in our approach from other researchers, who argue that communication strategies cannot be explicitly taught. (p. 114)

The direct approach to teaching CSs might involve the following procedures:

- Raising learner awareness about the nature and communicative potential of CSs
- Encouraging students to be willing to take risks and use CSs
- Providing L2 models of the use of certain CSs
- Highlighting cross-cultural differences in CS use
- Teaching CSs directly by presenting linguistic devices to verbalize them
- Providing opportunities for practice in strategy use

Finally, some teachers might have doubts about teaching CSs such as fillers or topic avoidance, language behaviors normally not encouraged in their own L1s. Why then do learners need them? The answer is that they provide the learners with a sense of security in the L2 by allowing them room to manoeuvre in times of difficulty. Rather than giving up their message, learners may decide to try and remain in the conversation and achieve their communicative goal. Providing learners help towards accomplishing this is, I believe, a worthy objective of communicative language instruction.

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Appendix

Examples of Strategy Training Activities Used in the Study

Topic Avoidance and Replacement

1. Avoiding giving information: The teacher addresses a student with a question that asks for specific information, for example, "How old are you?" The student must respond in two or three sentences without actually giving that particular information, for example, "Well, that's an interesting question. Isn't it strange how people always feel that they need to know the age of a person?"

2. Going off the point: Students are told that no matter what their question is, they must steer the conversation to a given topic, for example, judo. If the question is, for example, "Does your grandmother own a pet?" the answer might be something like this:

> Yes, my grandmother keeps an enormous Alsatian dog because it makes her feel safe when she's at home alone. When she was younger, of course, she didn't need a dog because she was extremely fit and active, and right up to the age of 60 she attended judo classes . . . .

Circumlocution

3. Comparing dictionary definitions: In small groups students look up entries for a given word in monolingual dictionaries and compare and discuss the differences. Then they are asked to prepare a "perfect" definition for the word in question by editing/compiling the dictionary definitions.

4. Challenging the definition: Students work in pairs. Each pair is given the name of an object, which they must define using a relative clause. Each pair in turn reads out their definition, while the other pairs check whether it is precise enough. If it is not—that is, if a pair can find another object the definition suits—they get a point, and for another point they must give a more specific definition. Of course, this new definition is also open to challenge. After students have gained some competence in creating definitions, the task is made more difficult by giving them abstract notions (e.g., friendship, peace) instead of objects to describe.

5. Calling my bluff: Students are in groups of three. Each group is given a card with one very difficult word and its definition on it. Students must invent two convincing but false definitions of the same word. Then they read out the three definitions for the other groups to decide which is the real one.

Fillers and Hesitation Devices

6. Adding fillers: The teacher takes a short excerpt (two-three utterances) from a dialogue in the class textbook and puts it on the board. Students are divided into groups of two or three; each group in turn must add one filler to the dialogue, which the teacher then inserts into the text on the board. You may want to specify that each filler can be used only once. If a group fails to provide an extra filler, or offers one to be inserted at an inappropriate place, they drop out.

7. Composing nonsense dialogues: In pairs, students compose short nonsense dialogues that consist almost entirely of fillers; they may use names of cities, for example, as content words. For example:

> A: You know, I thought maybe London.
> B: Well, I see what you mean, and don't get me wrong—that's very Chicago—but actually, as a matter of fact, I was thinking more along the lines of Montreal if you see what I mean.
> A: Really? But that's Istanbul!

(For further strategy teaching ideas the reader is referred to the following publications: Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991, 1992; Kehe & Kehe, 1994; Pattison, 1987; Savignon, 1983; Tarone, 1984; Tarone & Yule, 1989; Willems, 1987.)