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COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN THE INTERLANGUAGE OF GALICIAN STUDENTS OF ENGLISH: THE INFLUENCE OF LEARNER- AND TASK-RELATED FACTORS[1]

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This paper presents the development and results of an investigation carried out in order to identify the use that Galician learners of English as a foreign language make of communication strategies; it explains this use in relation to those factors suggested in the literature as having an influence on strategic behaviour: proficiency level and speaker's native language, contextual conditions and cognitive complexity of the task.

An experiment was designed and conducted in order to obtain representative samples of oral production in English ready to be analysed in search of communication strategies. A total of 629 strategies were identified in the data, classified and submitted to quantitative and statistical analyses. The results of these analyses suggest that (1) proficiency level has a strong but not definitive influence on frequency and choice of strategies, (2) the different native languages of our subjects do not have a clear influence on their strategic behaviour, although further research seems to be needed in order to clarify this issue, (3) certain task-related factors such as cognitive complexity and interlocutor's role have a significant effect on the use that foreign language learners make of communication strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term *communication strategies* (CS) was coined in the Second Language Acquisition literature to make reference to all those techniques language learners use to overcome linguistic problems encountered when trying to communicate in a foreign language with a reduced interlanguage system.

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Quirk, R., S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, J. Svartvik 1985: *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman.

Roeper, T. & M.E.A. Siegel 1978: "A Lexical Transformation for Verbal Compounds". *Linguistic Inquiry* 9: 199-260.

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Basically, the study of CS has been marked by a division between those who adopt an interactional approach, viewing CS as discourse strategies evident in interaction, and those preferring a psycholinguistic perspective; according to the latter, CS are regarded as cognitive processes to be explained in relation to cognitive models of speech production.[2]

The first approach is illustrated by definitions of CS such as Tarone's "a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared" (1981: 288); whereas, in the psycholinguistic tradition, CS have been defined as "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal" (Færch and Kasper 1983: 36) or, more recently, "mental plans implemented by the second language learner in response to an internal signal of an imminent problem, a form of self-help that did not have to engage the interlocutor's support for resolution" (Kasper and Kellerman 1997: 2).

These differences in the conceptualisation of CS are obviously reflected in the variety of taxonomies proposed for their classification. The first group of researchers classify CS mainly on the basis of the different forms of the linguistic utterances they produce, using categories such as circumlocution, word coinage or literal translation (Corder 1978; Tarone 1981; Hyde 1982; Paribakht 1985). Psycholinguistic taxonomies are the result of different attempts to describe and classify the mental processes that underlie these utterances (Færch and Kasper 1983; Bialystok 1990; Poulisse, Bongaerts and Kellerman 1990; Poulisse 1993). The resulting categories reflect differences in cognitive processing: analysis and control strategies (Bialystok 1990) or conceptual and linguistic strategies (Poulisse, Bongaerts and Kellerman 1990).

Despite the existing controversy, work on the issue of the definition and classification of CS has allowed researchers from both approaches to build a theoretical framework on which to base a considerable amount of empirical studies on CS. Some of the concerns of these studies are: the possibility of teaching CS in the foreign language classroom (Dörnyei and Thurrell 1991; Dörnyei 1995), the comprehensibility and effectiveness of different types of strategies (Ervin 1979; Bialystok and Frölich 1980) and the relationship between CS used in the first and the second language (Tarone and Yule 1983; Poulisse, Bongaerts and Kellerman 1990).

However, the bulk of empirical research on CS has been devoted to the study of those factors that may have an influence or even determine the use that second and foreign language learners make of these strategies. Although, as we have already pointed out, no definite conclusions have yet been achieved on this issue, it seems that proficiency level influences the number and type of CS used in foreign language communication (Bialystok and Fröhlich 1980; Hyde 1982; Paribakht 1985; Poulisse, Bongaerts and Kellerman 1990). The distance perceived between the

[2] For a detailed analysis of the differences between these two approaches, see Yule and Tarone 1997 on what they have called the Pros and the Cons approaches.

Anyone who has ever tried to express themselves or interact with other speakers of a foreign language will certainly have suffered the annoying experience of wanting to say something but lacking the necessary vocabulary or linguistic structures for it. The logical and practical impossibility of predicting all the present and future communicative needs of the language learner has made CS an increasing object of interest among Second Language Acquisition researchers and foreign language teachers.

It is now a well-documented fact that language learners make use of CS to convey their messages. However, after more than 25 years of research and a considerable amount of accumulated literature on this issue, it is not yet clear what the exact nature of CS is and what leads language learners to make use of a particular CS in a given situation. Evidence provided by this research suggests a possible influence on CS use of certain factors related to the language learner, such as proficiency level or linguistic background; or to the communicative context, such as task demands. However, no definitive conclusions have yet been achieved.

The concern of the present investigation is the specific use that learners of English as a foreign language from a bilingual community and, therefore, with different native languages –Galician and Spanish–, make of these strategies: frequency, range and type of CS used, and possible influences of learner- and task-related factors on this use. What follows is an account of the development and the results of an experiment specifically designed to investigate this issue, carried out at the University of Santiago de Compostela with a group of secondary and university Galician students of English as a foreign language.

2. COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

The study of CS dates back to 1972 when Selinker introduced for the first time the notion of *strategies of second language communication* in his classic article "Interlanguage". Elaborating on this notion, Váradi carried out in 1973 what is generally considered the first systematic analysis of such strategies. Four years later Tarone introduced the term CS in the Second Language Acquisition literature and developed the first definition of the concept as well as a taxonomy which would become one of the most influential and widely used in subsequent research. These initial studies opened a new field of research to a wide range of investigations which started to appear in the late 70s.

Early studies concerned themselves mostly with questions of definition and classification. The definition of CS, obviously a crucial issue since identification, classification and even research design depend upon it, is still an open question subject to strong controversy. Researchers have not yet reached an agreement on the criteria to be used to distinguish strategic from non-strategic language behaviour or the range of devices to be covered by the term CS. This divergence of opinions and the subsequent variety of definitions available explains, in part, why research on the nature of CS and the use that language learners make of them has yielded mixed and sometimes even contradictory results.

Since they have a less developed interlanguage system and a more reduced lexicon, they will encounter more problems in their foreign language production, thus needing to resort to CS more frequently.

Hypothesis 2. When performing the same tasks, the choice of CS will vary according to the speakers' target language proficiency level.

In the taxonomies proposed in the literature for the classification of CS types, the categories identified impose different cognitive and linguistic demands on the speaker. Most researchers generally agree to distinguish two basic types of strategic behaviour. When faced with a communication problem originated by an unknown target item, speakers can either develop an alternative means to convey their original intended message or reduce, alter or even abandon this message, thus losing part of their original communicative intention. The first kind of behaviour has a more enhancing effect on communication but does also impose higher demands on the speaker. More advanced students, having a more developed interlanguage system, are expected to be able to make more frequent use of this kind of strategic behaviour than less proficient students.

Furthermore, when developing alternative means to convey their original messages, students can either exploit their interlanguage resources or resort to their native languages. The use of the speaker's mother tongue is a relatively simpler and less demanding strategy, but it does also seem to be less effective in foreign language communication. Due to their more developed interlanguage system advanced students can also be expected to need to seek help from their native languages less often than less proficient students.

3.1.2. Relationship between foreign language learner's native language and CS use

According to the literature on this issue (Kellerman 1984; Bialystok 1990), only if one of our subjects' languages was perceived as being more closely related to the foreign language than the other could we expect differences in the use of certain CS. But, since Galician and Spanish are both Latin-based languages, quite closely related and similar in origin and features, this should not be the case. Furthermore, there is no real significant difference in the subjects' linguistic background which also makes us expect no difference in their use of CS. This is because of the fact that, despite their different native languages, all of them can speak both Galician and Spanish and come from the same bilingual background. On account of this we formulated the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3. Galician and Spanish native speakers will not differ in the frequency of CS use when communicating in English as a foreign language.

Hypothesis 4. Galician and Spanish native speakers will not differ in the choice of CS when communicating in English as a foreign language.

foreign and the native language has also been suggested as affecting the use of certain kinds of strategies (Palmberg 1979; Kellerman 1984). Other factors, such as personality, are supposed to have an effect as well but, as no reliable method to measure those personality features which may be related to CS use has yet been developed, not much research has been done in this area (Haastrup and Phillipson 1983). Together with these learner-related factors, differences in the conditions of the communicative task to be accomplished, such as cognitive complexity, time constraints or interlocutor's role have also been investigated in relation to CS use and found to have an influence that, in some cases, overrules the effect of any other factor (Bialystok and Fröhlich 1980; Poulisse, Bongaerts and Kellerman 1990).

A new source of evidence on CS use is coming now from related fields of research such as sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. By recognising work carried out on linguistic phenomena such as referential communication (Russell 1997), child bilingualism (Deutsch, Bruhn, Masche and Behrens 1997) or linguistic pathologies (Stemmer and Joanette 1997), which are somehow directly related to strategic language behaviour, researchers are attempting to broaden their scope of research and, in this way, achieve a better understanding of CS. These recent contributions make of the study of CS an open and lively field of research in constant development, even when those questions which prompted the beginning of the research remain to be answered.

3. THE STUDY

3.1. Objectives

The goal of our study was, first, to obtain as detailed a description as possible of the use that Spanish- and Galician-speaking learners of English as a foreign language make of CS and, secondly, to find out to what extent this use could be explained in relation to those factors suggested in the literature as having an influence on CS use, i.e. proficiency level, native language and task demands. In order to achieve this final aim, a series of hypotheses were formulated, building on previous research and on what is known so far about the nature of CS.

3.1.1. Relationship between foreign language learner's proficiency level and CS use

We have already seen that plenty of research has been carried out on the possible influence of the foreign language learner's proficiency level on their use of CS (Bialystok and Fröhlich 1980; Hyde 1982; Bialystok 1983; Paribakht 1985; Poulisse, Bongaerts and Kellerman 1990). On account of the evidence provided by these studies, we hypothesised that this factor would influence our subjects' strategic behaviour in at least two different ways: frequency of CS use and choice of specific CS types.

Hypothesis 1. When performing the same tasks, less proficient students will make more frequent use of CS than more proficient ones.

the University of Santiago de Compostela, five in their first year and five in their fourth year.

All subjects at the same academic level have studied English as a foreign language for the same number of years and all passed the level exams needed in order to be promoted from their previous academic level to their present one. In order to make sure our subjects could be considered representative of their respective academic levels, we also controlled those factors which may directly or indirectly affect language proficiency such as stays in English speaking countries, contact with native speakers of English, attendance at English lessons additional to those of the official academic curriculum, and the like. This was considered to be enough evidence of their different English language proficiency levels and also explains why we did not consider it necessary to administer any kind of language level test.

Secondary school students, since they can be assumed to have a lower English language proficiency level than university students, were classified as elementary proficiency level students. University students in their first year of English Language and Literature were classified as intermediate, since their proficiency level in the foreign language can be considered as intermediate between that of the other university students and the secondary school students. Lastly, final year English Philology students were classified as advanced level students, because they are supposed to have the highest proficiency level of the three groups of subjects.[4]

3.2.2. Materials and procedures

In order to elicit a representative sample of oral production in English that could be recorded, transcribed and analysed in the search for CS, these subjects were asked to accomplish three different communicative tasks: a picture story narration, a photograph description and a ten-minute conversation.[5]

The story narration and the photograph description, apart from being two of the most widely used instruments in CS research (Tarone 1977; Hyde 1982; Poulisse, Bongaerts and Kellerman 1990), provide a well-defined and stable content which forces the subject to communicate about pre-selected topics, thus facilitating the study of the data and making it possible to establish comparative analyses across subjects. At the same time, these two research instruments allowed us to elicit two similar versions of the same task: first in English and then in the speaker's native language. These second versions are assumed to reflect the intended meaning –what the subjects would have said if they had not been constrained by an imperfect command of the target language (Tarone 1977; Hyde 1982)– and, in this way, serve as a procedure of CS identification.

[4] It should be noted that the labels elementary, intermediate and advanced are used just in order to illustrate the differences in the language proficiency levels of our three groups of subjects. They should not be taken as general categories established by any kind of proficiency test score.

[5] The picture story and a black and white reproduction of the photograph are included in the appendix.

3.1.3. Relationship between nature of data collection instruments and CS use

Although most researchers have tended to use only one data collection instrument, there are a few studies that have compared subjects' performance across a variety of tasks and found evidence of the influence of certain task-related factors on the language learner's use of CS (Poulisse, Bongaerts and Kellerman 1990). In our study, in order to obtain a representative sample of oral production in English, three different data collection instruments were used. Although the three of them were designed to obtain as much natural data as possible and followed the same communicative principles, differences between them in terms of cognitive complexity and the interlocutor's role allowed us to test the possible influence of these task factors on our subjects' use of CS.

The frequency of CS depends not only on the nature of the elicitation task but also on the number of lexical difficulties imposed by its content, a quite difficult feature to be measured in the free and uncontrolled types of tasks used in our study. Therefore, no well-founded hypothesis could be formulated in relation to CS frequency and our analysis focused on the relationship between task factors and CS choice.

Hypothesis 5. Task-related factors will have an influence on the type of CS employed by the foreign language learner.

3.2. Method

A two-phase experiment was designed and carried out at the Philology Faculty of the University of Santiago de Compostela to test these hypotheses and in this way give answers to our research questions. In May 1998, a small-scale pilot study, involving a reduced number of subjects and a limited amount of data, was conducted with the purpose of testing the feasibility of further more comprehensive and developed research. Given the positive results of this piloting experience, in April and May 1999 a second experiment, with a wider and more representative sample of learner language and more developed and varied materials, was carried out.

In this paper we present the design, development and results of this second investigation.[3]

3.2.1. Subjects

A total of 15 students of English, with different proficiency levels in the foreign language and different linguistic backgrounds, were selected to participate in our research. These students, 8 females and 7 males, were aged 16 to 26. Galician was the mother tongue of 7 of them and Spanish of the rest.

In order to guarantee clear differences in their English language proficiency levels, these students were selected from three separate academic levels. Five of the subjects were in their third year of secondary school education and the rest were undergraduate students of English Language and Literature (English Philology) at

[3] On the results of the first phase of the study, carried out in May 1998, see Fernández Dobao (1999).

to be identified as a CS, it would need to meet the criteria of problematicity —the speaker needs to have experienced a problem and to have tried to solve it by means of a CS— and consciousness —if the speaker is not conscious of this process, it cannot be known for sure whether what seems to be the result of a CS is in fact due to strategic behaviour or to the automatic application of an interlanguage rule.

A third criterion was added to the previous two: lexicality. Due mainly to methodological constraints, most research on CS has focused only on those strategies used to solve lexical problems. In order to make the results of our analysis comparable to those of previous investigations and to narrow down what otherwise would be too wide a scope, we also opted to limit the focus of our research to lexical CS.

Different sources of evidence guided the identification of these CS. Errors, non-native like forms, a high rate of non-fluencies such as pauses, repetition, false starts and, in general, any kind of hesitation phenomenon, and explicit statements like *I mean, how do you say...?* usually indicate problems in language production. Although they are not always the result of a lexical difficulty, these phenomena are quite helpful in spotting possible CS uses. Together with these, differences between native language version content and foreign language production were considered to be indications of a possible language difficulty and, therefore, of CS use.

In the interview, the speakers were asked to corroborate the strategies identified by these two procedures. The subjects' introspective comments on their performances turned out to be the most fruitful source of evidence of strategic behaviour, clarifying the researcher's initial analysis and disclosing new cases of CS use. Obviously, this last approach is not free of problems either, since there may always be CS in our data whose presence remains unnoticed, either because the speakers were unaware of the strategic nature of their behaviour or because they had just forgotten about it. This is a problem inherent to any introspective technique which must always be taken into account.

As a result of this analysis, and despite the weaknesses observed, a total of 629 CS uses were identified in our data. Given the cognitive nature of strategic behaviour, there seems to exist no definite method of CS identification, but, in this case, the triangulation of three different sources of evidence ensures a considerable degree of reliability.[7]

3.3.2. CS classification

The strategies identified were classified in a taxonomy specially adapted for this purpose from Tarone's 1977 and Corder's 1978 studies.

To obtain the kind of data needed to test our hypotheses, strategies were first divided into avoidance and achievement, thus distinguishing those uses in which the

[7] The CS identification procedure was carried out by the researcher on her own. Since there were three different sources of evidence for a particular utterance to be considered as the result of a CS, it was not found necessary to have more researchers involved in the identification process.

The conversation was introduced in order to elicit as much of a natural speech sample as possible. Whereas in the former two tasks the researcher, myself, only participated as an observer, in the conversation she played an active role as interlocutor, providing feedback to the learner and making communication much more natural. Although the task started as an exchange of researcher's questions and subject's answers, it soon developed into a normal fluent conversation, at least with the intermediate and advanced subjects. Secondary school students were more reluctant to abandon this question-answer pattern, probably because of their lower proficiency level and the interlocutor's perceived role and status.[6] But in general this piece of data may be considered quite a fair example of normal everyday communication.

The conversation imposes higher demands on the CS identification process. Since there is no control over topic and, therefore, no possibility of eliciting a second native language version, the researcher has little means of knowing whether the learner is in fact communicating their initial intended message or making use of a CS. However, in our study, retrospective data obtained from our subjects allowed us to overcome this difficulty.

A retrospective interview was held between the researcher and each of the subjects one day after the accomplishment of the communicative tasks –the time necessary to carry out the transcription and an initial analysis. Subjects were asked to have a look at the transcripts of their performance in the three tasks and report where they had experienced any linguistic problem or difficulty in expressing their messages and how they had tried to solve it. The purpose of this interview was to elicit the speakers' intuitions on their communicative performance and the process underlying it to be used in the identification and analysis of CS, since it is known, from previous studies (Tarone 1977; Poulisse, Bongaerts and Kellerman 1990), that there are always some instances of CS which can only be identified with the speaker's help. In our study, subjects were highly collaborative, corroborating and clarifying the researcher's initial analysis and providing new cases of CS use impossible to detect by external observation.

3.3. Analysis and results

Analysis of the data comprised two different kinds of processes: identification and classification of CS uses, and quantitative analysis of these uses in order to test possible influences of learner- and task-related factors.

3.3.1. CS identification

The goal of our research was the study of those strategies language learners use to solve problems encountered in foreign language communication due to their linguistic shortcomings. This means that, for a particular interlanguage phenomenon

[6] I was introduced to secondary school students as their teacher's colleague and therefore they tended to perceive me as a higher proficient and higher status interlocutor, whereas university students seemed to see me as another student like themselves. According to previous related research, the interlocutor's perceived role and status does have an effect on the interaction (Yule and Macdonald 1990).

Chi-square test was the instrument used to evaluate whether quantitative differences found in CS use across subjects and tasks were statistically significant and therefore relevant.[9]

This analysis was divided into three different sections so that the possible relationship of CS use with proficiency level, native language and task demands could be tested independently.

3.3.3.1. Relationship between foreign language learners' proficiency level and CS use

To test the possible relationship between foreign language learners' proficiency level and CS use, subjects were divided into three different groups: elementary, intermediate and advanced level students. The performance of each of these three groups, in terms of frequency and choice of CS, was analysed independently and the results compared.

Hypothesis 1. When performing the same tasks, less proficient students will make more frequent use of CS than more proficient ones.

A simple numerical count of CS instances shows that different proficiency level groups used a significantly different number of CS in the accomplishment of the same communicative tasks. However, as can be seen in Table 2, these results do not show the expected inverse relationship between CS use and proficiency level.

	Elementary level students	Intermediate students	Advanced students	Total
Number of CS	266	140	223	629

	Value	D.F.	Significance
Pearson's Chi-square	39,132	2	,000

Table 2. Proficiency level and Number of CS

Elementary level students used more strategies than either of the other two groups, thus corroborating our initial assumption that they would need to resort to CS more frequently because, due to their more limited command of the target language, they would encounter more lexical problems in their interlanguage production. However, contrary to our expectations, intermediate students did not use more CS than advanced ones.

One possibility is that the differences in proficiency level of these two groups of subjects were not great enough for the accomplishment of the particular tasks proposed; this means that even intermediate students may have enough interlanguage resources to carry out these tasks without encountering many problems.

[9] The statistical analyses were conducted at the Computer Centre of the University of Santiago de Compostela.

speaker, feeling unable to maintain the original intended meaning, was forced to either reduce, alter or abandon it, from those in which they attempted to preserve their original message intact. Strategies from this last group were further divided into paraphrase or L2-based strategies (the speaker finds an alternative means to convey their original message by exploiting their resources in the target language) and conscious transfer or L1-based strategies (the speaker needs to get help from their mother tongue or any other language they know). Within these broad groups further distinctions were made according to the criteria in Table 1:

Communication strategy	Description of strategy
AVOIDANCE STRATEGIES	
A: Topic avoidance	The speaker, lacking the necessary vocabulary to refer to an object or action, avoids any kind of reference to it. E.g. '*wears a ... pair of enormous trousers*' (braces).
B: Message abandonment	The speaker begins to talk about a concept but, feeling unable to continue, stops before reaching their communicative goal. E.g. '*a shirt with ... eh ... umm ... ... I don't know*' (braces).
C: Semantic avoidance	The speaker says something different from what was originally intended. E.g. '*an eye mm ... very damaged*' (black eye).
D: Message reduction	The learner reduces their original message, reports the same idea but with less precision and detail. E.g. '*some kind of ... uniform*' (school uniform).
ACHIEVEMENT STRATEGIES	
1. Paraphrase	
A: Approximation	The speaker substitutes the desired unknown target language item by a new one, which is assumed to share enough semantic features with it to be correctly interpreted. E.g. '*you can see aaa ... a pigeon hole*' (letterbox).
B: Word coinage	The learner makes up a new word following the target language rules of derivation and composition. E.g. '*houseshoes*' (slippers).
C: Circumlocution	The learner describes an object or action instead of using the appropriate target language item. E.g. '*aaa ... a jersey ... without sleeves*' (waistcoat).
2. Conscious transfer	
A: Borrowing	The learner uses an L1 item or structure modified in accordance with the features of the target language. E.g. 'a bit more ... a bit more debilish no well' (weak).
B: Language switch	The speaker uses an L1 item with no modification at all. E.g. 'and he has mm... umm ... unha pucha' (cap).
3. Appeal for assistance[8]	The learner asks the interlocutor for lexical help.
4. Mime	The learner uses a gesture or any other paralinguistic form.

Table 1. Communication strategies taxonomy

3.3.3. Quantitative analysis

In order to test the set of hypotheses formulated at the beginning of our study, CS uses were tabulated in numerical terms and submitted to statistical analysis. The

[8] Although the speakers did sometimes make use of appeal for assistance and mime strategies, the instruments employed in the data collection did not guarantee a totally free and natural use of these strategies. On account of this, we decided to follow previous similar research and leave these strategies out of our study.

However, when the performance of intermediate and advanced students is compared, we can see that, although intermediate students used a higher percentage of avoidance strategies than advanced ones, this difference is too small to be significant.

Similar results were found in relation to the choice between L1- and L2-based strategies; i.e. conscious transfer and paraphrase strategies. In Table 4 we can see there is a significant difference between the three groups of subjects because elementary level students, as expected and as suggested in previous research (Bialystok and Fröhlich 1980; Bialystok 1983), made use of a higher percentage of L1-based strategies than the other two groups. They needed to resort to their mother tongues in 34.5% of achievement strategy use, we assume this happened because they felt unable to find alternative means in their interlanguage system to convey their messages. Although these strategies allowed them to keep their original communicative goals, it is known from previous research that L1-based strategies tend to be less effective than L2-based ones, at least in interactions with interlocutors who do not share the speaker's L1 (Bialystok and Fröhlich 1980; Bialystok 1983; Poulisse, Bongaerts and Kellerman 1990). In this sort of communication, elementary level students would have more problems than more advanced ones to make themselves understood.

	Elementary level students		Intermediate students		Advanced students	
Paraphrase strategies	76	65.5%	72	84.7%	117	85.4%
Conscious transfer strategies	40	34.5%	13	15.3%	20	14.6%
Total	116	100%	85	100%	137	100%

	Value	D.F.	Significance
Pearson's Chi-square	17,332	2	,000

Table 4. Proficiency level and Choice of Achievement CS

As we also found when considering the choice between achievement and avoidance strategies, the differences between intermediate and advanced students in their choice of L1- and L2-based strategies are not significant.

Again, these unexpected results could be explained in relation to possible differences between our subjects in their interpretation and consequent performance of the tasks proposed. Differences relating to the amount of information considered necessary for the successful accomplishment of the task and the perceived importance of this information may have affected our subjects' choice of CS.

It now seems obvious that, in order to provide a fair picture of foreign language learners' use of CS, conclusions cannot be drawn only from quantitative analyses of the data. A more detailed analysis, more qualitative in nature is needed.

But it is also possible that the advanced students' use of CS increased because they set higher communicative goals due to their more advanced level in the language; in other words, they tried to produce more language and provide more accurate and complex information, thus encountering more linguistic difficulties than the intermediates. Hyde (1982) and Poulisse, Bongaerts and Kellerman (1990) have suggested that the relationship between CS instances and amount of detail is more important than the total number of CS used in the accomplishment of a task.

Following previous research in the field, we based the analysis of CS frequency on a raw count of the number of CS instances. However, the mixed results obtained seem to suggest quantitative data alone cannot explain all the different patterns of CS use. In future research, a different kind of analysis, more qualitative in nature, seems to be needed, so that the number of CS produced by different subjects can be related to their different performance of the same tasks in terms of amount of information provided and referential expressions used to convey it.

Hypothesis 2. When performing the same tasks, the choice of CS will vary according to the speakers' target language proficiency level.

At the beginning of this study we also hypothesised that the frequency of use of each type of CS would vary according to the speaker's proficiency level. Taking into account the level of interlanguage development of our subjects, we might expect them to make use of the same types of CS but in a different proportion. We assumed that more advanced students would be able to make more frequent use of those strategies which allow them to maintain their original communicative goals, i.e. achievement strategies, and, within these, of those which exploit interlanguage system resources without needing to resort to the speaker's mother tongue, i.e. paraphrase or L2-based strategies.

	Elementary level students		Intermediate students		Advanced students	
Avoidance strategies	150	56.39%	55	39.29%	86	38.57%
Achievement strategies	116	43.61%	85	60.71%	137	61.43%
Total	266	100%	140	100%	223	100%

	Value	D.F.	Significance
Pearson's Chi-square	19,032	2	,000

Table 3. Proficiency level and Choice of CS

In Table 3 we can see that, as expected, there exist important differences across the three groups of subjects in their choice between avoidance and achievement strategies. Elementary level students used a significantly lower percentage of achievement strategies than more advanced students. Furthermore, the group of elementary level students employed a higher number and percentage of avoidance than achievement strategies, which means that in most instances they were unable to keep their original communicative goals, and were forced to either alter, abandon or avoid them.

This hypothesis was confirmed by the results of our analysis. As can be seen in Table 6, Galician- and Spanish-speaking students used a similar percentage of avoidance and achievement strategies. Although there are differences, these are too small to be statistically significant.[13]

	Galician students: 7		Spanish students: 8	
Avoidance strategies	122	49.8%	169	44.0%
Achievement strategies	123	50.2%	215	56.0%
Total	245	100%	384	100%

	Value	D.F.	Significance
Pearson's Chi-square	2,014	1	,156

Table 6. Native language and Choice of CS

Even the use of L1-based strategies, which might be more susceptible to the effect of the speaker's native language, does not differ between the two groups of subjects, thus corroborating our hypothesis.

Thus, our initial hypothesis (that the different native languages of our subjects will not influence their use of CS) was corroborated only in part. Further research involving a wider range of students and a more detailed analysis of their performance seems to be necessary before we can draw a definite conclusion on this issue.

	Galician students: 7		Spanish students: 8	
Paraphrase strategies	103	83.7%	162	75.3%
Conscious transfer strategies	20	16.3%	53	24.7%
Total	123	100%	215	100%

	Value	D.F.	Significance
Pearson's Chi-square	3,253	1	,071

Table 7. Native language and Choice of achievement CS

3.3.3.3. Relationship between nature of data collection instruments and CS use

The final hypothesis formulated concerned the possibility, suggested in previous research (Poulisse, Bongaerts and Kellerman 1990), of a relationship between a range of task-related factors and CS use.

Hypothesis 5. Task-related factors will have an influence on the type of CS employed by the foreign language learner.

In order to test this hypothesis, subjects' performances on the three data collection instruments used in our study were analysed independently and the results compared. The results of this analysis, shown in Tables 8 and 9, provide evidence of

[13] The result of the Chi-square test does not reach the .05 value, the lowest rate of significance generally considered by most scholars.

3.3.3.2. Relationship between foreign language learners' native language and CS use

It is probable that two different native languages will affect CS use in different ways only if one of them is perceived as being more closely related to the foreign language than the other. If that is the case, we can expect a higher percentage of L1-based strategies and, therefore, also of achievement strategies, in the subjects with the more closely related native language. However, since our subjects belong to the same bilingual community and their native languages have a similar relationship with the foreign language, no differences in CS use should be expected between them.

In order to test this assumption the students involved in our research were divided into two different groups, a group of Galician native speakers and a group of Spanish speakers, with balanced proficiency levels.

Hypothesis 3. Galician and Spanish native speakers will not differ in the frequency of CS use when communicating in English as a foreign language.

Contrary to our expectations the results of our analyses evidenced a significant difference between the two groups in frequency of CS use. The group of Galician-speaking students used a mean of 35 strategies per subject and the Spanish-speaking group 48, a statistically significant difference according to the Chi-square test (Table 5).[10]

	Galician students: 7[11]	Spanish students: 8[12]	Total
Number of CS	245	384	629
Mean number of CS	35	48	41.93

	Value	D.F.	Significance
Pearson's Chi-square	15,046	1	,000

Table 5. Native language and Number of CS

On the basis of the data obtained for this study and the kind of analyses carried out, we have not been able to find any well-founded explanation for these results. It seems, however, a highly interesting issue to be looked at in future research.

Hypothesis 4. Galician and Spanish native speakers will not differ in the choice of CS when communicating in English as a foreign language.

[10] To make sure these results were not biased by a different average proficiency level of the two groups of students, an analysis contrasting the number of CS used by Galician and Spanish native speakers across the three different proficiency levels of our subjects was also carried out. The results show that this pattern remains constant across the three proficiency level groups: Galician elementary level students used less CS than Spanish elementary level students, Galician intermediate students employed less CS than Spanish intermediate students and Galician advanced level students resorted to less CS than Spanish advanced level students.

[11] Number of subjects having Galician as L1.

[12] Number of subjects having Spanish as L2.

followed in their accomplishment was the same and the role of the interlocutor was also similar. Furthermore, both tasks forced the speaker to communicate a well-defined and pre-selected content, allowing little possibility for avoidance behaviour. However, research on referential communication tasks suggests that narration tasks are cognitively more complex than descriptive ones (Yule 1997), which would explain the higher percentage of avoidance strategies in our data. Changes in time and place, shifts of characters and background information create problems of reference for speakers which distract their attention and make the use of more elaborated achievement strategies even more difficult.

In sum, these results show that the use of different kinds of tasks permits elicitation of a wider range of discourses and, in this way, the possibility of obtaining a more representative sample of interlanguage oral production. But it also affects the kind of data collected and this effect needs to be taken into account before drawing final conclusions on our subjects' use of CS.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The methodology employed in our research allowed us to collect, from a relatively small number of subjects, almost 10 hours of oral production in English, and to identify and classify 629 different CS instances in these speech samples. We have thus obtained a fairly comprehensive description of the range, type and frequency of CS used by Galician learners of English when trying to communicate in the foreign language.

The quantitative and statistical analyses carried out on these data allowed us to test the set of hypotheses formulated at the beginning of our study and to establish reasonably reliable relationships between CS use and learner- and task-related factors. However, they were not able to explain all the patterns of CS use found in the data, suggesting that, in future research, a more detailed analysis, more qualitative in nature, would be also required.

The results obtained evidence that our subjects' use of CS is influenced, in terms of frequency and choice, by their proficiency level in the second language, but in a complex and unpredicted way. It seems that once a certain proficiency level is reached, this factor alone cannot further account for differences in CS use across subjects. The use of CS needs to be related to other language-related features of the specific task being performed, particularly to the complexity of the target discourse; bearing in mind that the same task presented with exactly the same instructions to different subjects may be interpreted and realised in different ways, thus affecting our data and results.

When considering the learners' native language, no significant differences were identified between Galician and Spanish native speakers in their choice of specific CS types. However, the divergence in frequency of strategy use clearly indicates that further research is still needed on this issue.

statistically significant differences across tasks in choosing between avoidance and achievement strategies and also between L1- and L2-based strategies.

	Picture story		Description		Conversation	
Avoidance strategies	160	61.8%	77	38.5%	54	31.8%
Achievement strategies	99	38.2%	123	61.5%	116	68.2%
Total	259	100%	200	100%	170	100%

	Value	D.F.	Significance
Pearson's Chi-square	44,294	2	,000

Table 8. Task and Choice of CS

	Picture story		Description		Conversation	
Paraphrase strategies	85	85.9%	104	84.6%	76	65.5%
Conscious transfer strategies	14	14.1%	19	15.4%	40	34.5%
Total	99	100%	123	100%	116	100%

	Value	D.F.	Significance
Pearson's Chi-square	17,372	2	,000

Table 9. Task and Choice of Achievement of CS

In the conversation and the photograph description, the students used a considerably higher number of achievement strategies than in the picture story narration. Differences are even more striking when the use of conscious transfer and paraphrase strategies is compared, the conversation being, by far, the task in which most L1-based strategies were used.

The high percentage of L1-based strategies used in the conversation may be related to the interlocutor's role in this task. Whereas in the narration and the description the researcher was merely an observer who refrained from taking part in the communication as much as possible, she played a very active role in the conversation. This may have affected the use of L1-based strategies in two different ways. Firstly, L1-based strategies are considered to be quite risky and less likely to succeed in communication. However, the presence of an interlocutor providing feedback in the conversation task must have enabled the speaker to check the comprehensibility of these strategies, and, if any of them was not understood, it could always be repaired by adding a different achievement strategy. In addition, the interlocutor in our study was known to be a bilingual Spanish and Galician speaker, who would obviously understand without problem utterances resulting from any kind of transfer strategy. These two conditions quite probably influenced our subjects' strategic behaviour.

There are other differences in the results of Tables 8 and 9 which need to be further explained. Although the percentage of L1-based strategies was similar in the narration and the description, a considerably higher percentage of avoidance strategies was used in the narration task than in the description. These two tasks imposed apparently similar demands on the language learner. The procedure

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A strong effect on CS use was found for certain factors related to task design, i.e. type of discourse elicited and cognitive complexity, interlocutor's role and linguistic profile. These results seem to suggest that, in future research, more detailed attention needs to be paid to these features. In order to provide a fair picture of our students' use of CS, data must be obtained from a comprehensive range of discourse types and a variety of interactions, involving native and non-native interlocutors with different roles and perceived status.

In sum, the results of our study allowed us to draw significant conclusions on the use made by Galician- and Spanish-speaking students of English of CS. However, before a full account of this use can be given, further research is still needed.

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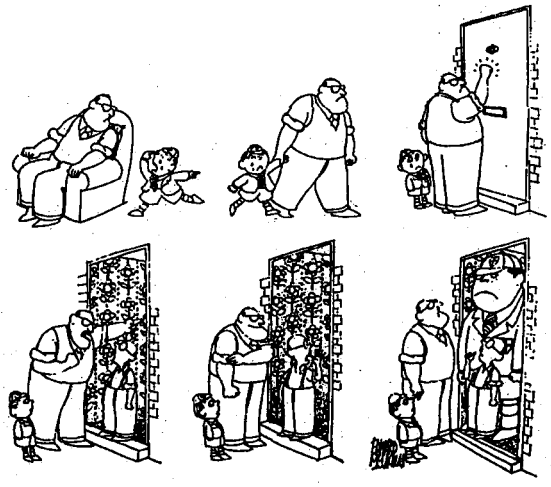
APPENDIX

Picture story narration task[14]

Look at the following pictures and try to tell the story they narrate in as much detail as possible. Use your imagination but do not invent a radically different story since afterwards you will have to retell it in your mother tongue.



Photograph description task[15]

Look at the following photograph and try to describe it in as much detail as possible. Remember you will have to repeat the task in your mother tongue.

[14] Adapted from J. Haunton 1989: *Think First Certificate*. Essex: Longman. 74.
[15] From K. Gude 1996: *Advanced Listening and Speaking*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 116.

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