Chapter 4

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

4.1 An Overview

One of the main concerns of researchers, and issues in the study of communication strategies, apart from their classification aspect, is the pedagogical implications of these strategies. A vexed question, probed since the beginning of studies, is that whether we should or not teach the strategies as we teach the grammar and vocabulary to develop the competence, or precisely the strategic competence.

On the one hand, the available literature confirms the existence of strategic competence as a separate entity distinct from the grammatical or sociolinguistic competences, as the components of communicative competence (Hymes, 1974). For example, the findings of Paribakht (1985) come as confirmation of such competence and transferability of the L1 strategic competence into L2 learning situations.

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Depending on different results collected from the tests administered to different age groups, LI backgrounds, and language proficiency, the researchers fall into two categories, one advising the direct and inductive teaching of the communication strategies (e.g. Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991), Yule and Tarone (1997), Tarone and Yule (1989)); the second group which doesn't believe in teaching communication strategies as such, for example, Kellerman (1991), Bialystok (1990), Poulisse (1994), and Marton (1988). The first group is composed of those who take strategies as taxonomic classification in which the generalization are mainly based on the research on second language learners, and the second group is composed of those who favor the process description of strategies, that is developed based on the research on children's language acquisition and subsequently extended research on the second language learners. Tarone has classified these two in two approaches of Pros and Cons, referring to proponents of the expansion of strategies, and reduction of strategies on being parsimonious.

As is briefly mentioned in Chapter One, this difference of opinion has been explicitly reflected in the statements of these two groups. For example, Bialystok (1990, p.147) disfavoring direct teaching of strategies says, “what one has to teach students of a language is not strategy, but language”, Kellerman (1991, p.158) says “teach the learners more language and let the strategies look after themselves.” These statements are derived from the essential theoretical background of these approaches. They believe that strategies used by second language learners are matters of cognitive processes and as the learners have
already mastered the cognitive processing in their L1 acquisition and maturation process, then any attempt to teach strategies will be considered as redundant teaching of cognitive processing which is a groundless and useless effort. They evince that the application of communication strategies is not restricted to L2 learning, rather it is used in L1 acquisition, as well. Moreover, the learners have already gained sufficient competence through learning their L1, and what we have to teach is only the linguistic forms which enable the learners to perform that competence.

Drawing conclusions based on the available literature, Marton (1988, p.35) says:

Learning strategy promoted by the communicative strategy is essentially the same as basic strategy of first language acquisition and can be defined in the same way as creative construction. It is the same because it is based on common psychological learning processes of which generalization, and overgeneralization, of language rules and reduction of elements perceived by the learners as redundant seems to play crucial role.

However, some other researchers contend that it is not identical because some other process, namely, transfer from L1, is also involved.

One should keep in mind that the assumption that second language learning follows the same process of creative construction which is used in L1 learning, emerges from the idea that development of second language is assumed to be done in a naturalistic setting, not in formal classroom setting.
On the other hand, following their main predominant principle that "performance creates competence", (Yule and Tarone, 1997), the proponents of the other approach, view the problem differently. This principle is patronized by Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991), Tarone, (1989), Yule and Tarone (1997), and Corder (1983). They back up their view by quoting the successes in the new approaches of language teaching in which instead of sole supplying of set of information by the teacher, the emphasis is being laid on the "provision of classroom activities and tasks in which learners develop a range of abilities in the L2". Yule and Tarone (1997) further hold:

By employing tasks which introduce and foster different types of communication strategies, the Pros' approach not only promotes greater awareness, less inhibition and purposeful language practice, it provides relevant learner-produced L2 linguistic performance which can be reflected on later with a specific focus on form.

In this regard Corder (1983, p. 18), stands behind with the idea of teaching of communication strategies, saying "... it is a part of good language teaching to encourage resource expansion strategies, and as we have seen, successful strategies of communication may eventually lead to language learning."

In other words, the necessity of teaching of CSs is unquestionable. However, he has not given any suggestion about the contents of the curriculum. But it should be noted that the conclusions drawn by either group are said to be not drawn from the empirical and educational researches, rather it is understood
that they have been drawn according to mere theoretical principles forming the foundation of these approaches.

The main aspects relevant to the teaching of communication strategies can be summarized and discussed under the following headings:

4.1.1 Nature of the Taxonomies and their Basis in the Language Use

4.1.1.1 Psychological Validity of the Teaching of CSs

The issue of lack of correspondence between the taxonomic classification and decisions made by the learners has been raised time and then by different researchers. For example, Bialystok (1990, p.141) argues:

Classification of strategies into the distinctions used by linguistic taxonomies lacks psychological validity. The distinction, that is, are descriptions of utterances and not descriptions of learner's solutions.

Thus, students are taught directly the linguistic alternatives for expressing different solutions without being taught how those solutions relate either to the problem or to the teacher.

Similarly, Marton (1988, p.36) criticizes the "loose" formulation of those researchers who believe that "fully successful language acquisition is byproduct of communication [see Yule and Tarone (1997)], of negotiation of meaning, so that the traditional attitude to language learning and teaching must be reversed. This traditional attitude could be described as belief that we learn and teach
language in order to be able to try to communicate, while the new approach assumes that in order to learn a language we have to try to communicate in it."

The *Strong View of Instruction*, introduced by Kellerman cited in Bialystok (1990, pp. 139-147), in contrast with the *Moderate View of Instruction* which is referred to the process description of communication strategies puts the necessity of teaching of CSs at the two ends of a continuum. In the strong view the elicited strategies are taken literally, as the means and ends, and the students are taught the strategies such as paraphrasing, word coinage, transfer, and so on. But the moderate view considers the strategies as the general solutions and ways of problem-solving which are available for the learner in the communication. Bialystok (1990, p. 143) distinguishes the former from the later asserting:

In a taxonomic classification, the relevant distinctions are between strategies, therefore, the students need to learn about circumlocutions, paraphrase, etc. In a process approach the relevant distinction is between processes; therefore, students need not learn how to analyze and control their linguistic systems. Partly because of this difference, the moderate view is considerably less prescriptive than the strong view in determining instructional procedures.

On the other hand, some other researchers who are so-called as the advocates of the *Strong View of Instruction* assume the taxonomic classification as the serving factor for the explanations of communicative behavior. Accordingly, the strategies, listed in their classification, are considered as the solemn solutions to communicative problems. So the students are taught to learn
the range of solutions and ways which can be applied. The curriculums are set around the taxonomic classification, and students are directed to use these strategies to solve the communicative problems. It is claimed that to equip the language learners with the resources to solve their communicative problems, we have to teach them the strategies along with the linguistic means. Furthermore, the learners have to know and recognize the occasions when these strategies can be applied. In other words, the language learners may not know the appropriate context of the use of certain strategy, so they should be instructed about the situations.

In this regard, an equivocal statement has been put forward by Faerch and Kasper (1983b, p.55):

If by teaching we mean passing on new information only, there is probably no need to teach strategies: FL learners no doubt implicit knowledge about both learning and communication strategies and make use of this. But if by teaching we also mean making learners conscious about aspects of their (already existing) behaviour it is obvious that we should teach them about strategies, in particular how to use learning and communication strategies most appropriately.

4.1.1.2 Context Dependency of the Strategies

The second argument against the strong view of instruction or Pros, in this connection, is the fact that the selection of strategies depends on the context, and the students are taught to select the salient features of the concept to describe
it. Here, the question is how these features would be selected and taught especially when the selection of strategies depends on context. The research on children’s communication shows that children already know how to accomplish this task.

4.1.1.3 Ad hoc and Accidental Categorization of Strategies

The classification of strategies in certain categories, as claimed by Scholfield (1987), on Paribakht’s classification is sometimes ad hoc and accidental, (see Chapter One for details). Bialystok (1990, p.141), too, quoting an example of word coinage strategy, argues airball could have been, with equal chance, ball with air, changing the word coinage into circumlocution, hence, could have eliminated the only available example of the word coinage form the literature. She continues “accordingly teaching learners about the various means for expressing a concept …is difficult when those different means themselves cannot be distinguished with certainty.”

The above criticisms about the conceptualization of strategies as taxonomic classification weaken the use of taxonomies as basis for classification.

4.1.2 The Viability of Teaching the Communication Strategies Specifically

The problem of teaching at the level of specific strategies is a point which has been widely discussed by the researchers. The teaching has been intervened by the research on cognitive studies. Several studies such as the one by...
Scardamalia and Paris (qtd. in Bialystok, 1990) have proved the failure to increase the coherence of the text through teaching of the specific techniques and discourse markers, such as *for example, in contrast, although, similarly*. They have suggested that the training on general operating solutions rather than teaching specific techniques, as in their study, increases the number of discourse markers without any change in the coherence of the text. So, the evidences like these do not preclude us from expecting identical results from training the second language learners, in the linguistic devices listed in the communication strategy taxonomies. Finally, Bialystok (1990, p 142) has suggested that:

Instruction must include an explanation of the learners the way in which the strategy functions to facilitate performance. An analysis of why certain learners failed to employ the usual communication strategies would undoubtedly reveal problems more fundamental than their lack of awareness of these strategies a solutions. An explanation for deployment of communication strategies, that is, goes beyond the listing of those strategies in a linguistic taxonomy.

However, she believes that explicit strategy teaching may not prove positive and develop the communication proficiency.

The main support for this view comes from studies on children’s referential communication. Two reasons have been given by Kahan and Richards (qtd. in Bialystok, 1990) about the communication failure of children, a) children are different in cognitive style and that makes some to be more effective than others
in communication, b) "children suffer from information processing constraints that limit their ability to use language effectively for communication" Shatz (qtd. in Bialystok, 1990). She, hence, concluded that "the restraining factor in performance on referential communication task is information-processing capacity." Kahan and Richards showed how older children first could recognize the appropriate strategy, even if they could not use it, but finally were able to put it in spontaneous use. It is based on the extension of such researches that researchers concluded that second language learners (adults) gain capability to use these automated CSs and they don't need to be formally taught about the CSs. Based on these Bialystok goes on:

The interpretation that follows from studies as these is that there is little point in teaching strategies per se. The children suffer from an insufficient basis in language processing, and it is processing that must be nurtured. With regard to second-language learners, these speakers do not lack a repertoire of possible solutions such as those listed in the taxonomies, but rather the mean to deploy those solutions.

It is followed by her conclusion that "what instruction can hope to achieve is to enhance the processing skills that are possible for effective use of strategies. These are sub skills of analysis and control. Instruction in communication strategies, then, would consist of training aimed at improving mastery of analysis and control over the target language" (ibid.).
4.2 Pedagogical Problems Related to the Teaching and Use of Communication Strategies

As far as our knowledge goes, the teaching of strategic competence has not been taken seriously or rather has not been taken up by the researchers and curriculum designers. According to Tarone who has engineered the pedagogical aspect of the communication strategies, there seems to be a scarcity of the material and textbooks designed to foster the strategic, and sociolinguistic competence. But in recent years, an increase in production of such textbooks has been seen.

Tarone urges more focus and, more radically, an explicitly didactic approach in the teaching procedure and tends to disagree with the researchers “who argue that communication strategies cannot be explicitly taught and who would probably argue that we should use inductive approach here as well as in teaching sociolinguistic skills” (1989, p.114).

Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991, p. 22), following the taxonomic classification, present some techniques which are mainly designed for providing “a sense of security in the language by providing him space to maneuver in times of difficulty…They also facilitate spontaneous improvisation skills, and linguistic creativity” and finally they may be used as “ice breakers or warmers or games” as the students enjoy such activities.

The use of techniques such as fillers (e.g. well; I mean; actually; you know; etc), called discourse markers by Bialystok (1990), is also tuned with the Tarone’s viewpoint, as the application of these fillers, or going off the point as
the means to evade the undesired or inexpressible questions; or paraphrase and
 circumlocution in the form of explanations, definitions, and paraphrasing,
 cooperative meaning negotiation prevent the breakdown of the communication
 and increase the chances of conveying the meaning even though the specific
 linguistic structure is not immediately available. In this regard, the classroom
 activities should be designed either a) “to promote the overall skill of the learner
 in successfully performing communication acts” or b) “to promote the learner’s
 ability to use communication strategies when procedures are encountered” (Yule
 and Tarone, 1989). A similar procedure developed by Nelson (qtd. in Yule and
 Tarone, 1989) in the form of classroom activities (e.g. exercises focusing on
 communication acts, practice in narration, pictures used for vocabulary teaching,
 etc), identifying the essential structure (e.g. of narration), and maintaining a
 balance. What Yule and Tarone implicitly suggest here, is that the procedure
 used for the elicitation of communication strategies can be used as classroom
 activities for teaching the communication strategies.

If we go through the characteristics of a typical communicative class, we
 perceive that the communicative teaching methods can be an ideal place for the
 instruction of communication strategies. Some of these characteristics are:

1) Concentration on speaking activities,
2) Sole use of target language in class,
3) Emphasis on spontaneous use of unplanned discourse,
4) Activities on negotiation of meaning and exchange of information rather
 than emphasis on the form of utterances,
5) No inductive teaching of the grammar as it is assumed to be a byproduct of communication which will automatically be acquired without any necessity for formal teaching of the grammar,

6) Concentration on the message rather than on learners' erroneous utterances, because the errors are tolerated to a great extent and are not corrected on the spot, (this characteristic derives form the principle that diversion of the attention from the communication and meaning negotiation into linguistic correctness hampers the real purpose of the language use,

7) Having a student-centered class rather than having a teacher-centered one,

8) Drills and practice in unraveling problems, and finally the most relevant characteristic,

9) Deployment of communication strategies.

Tarone's (1990, 179-194) goals can be achieved in a class having the above characteristics. Yule and Tarone (1990) have developed an elicitation procedure which could be used as classroom activities within which 1) the learner-listener communication is based on the real time information, forcing the learner not to depend much on the cooperative strategies, 2) the emphasis laid on the creativity and willingness to the application of resource expansion strategies rather than message reduction strategies, 3) genuine communicative activities are undertaken, 4) the operation of the grammatical competence in controlled by the teacher during the course of communication, 5) almost a real atmosphere for extensive spoken language practice is created.
Holing up the mirror for the same principles, O’Mally (qtd. in Dörnyei and Thurrell, 1991, pp. 16-23) maintain that “teachers should be confident that there exist a number of strategies which can be embedded into their curricula, that can be taught to students with only modest extra effort, and that can improve the overall class performance.... Further research should be directed to refining the strategy training approaches, identifying effects, associated with individual strategies, and deterring procedure for strengthening the impact of the strategies on student outcomes.” However, it is also said that there are some pedagogical risks connected with the use of communication strategies and blindly following of the principles of teaching communicative strategy. These problems are discussed in the following section.

4.2.1 Impasses of Deployment and Teaching of Communication Strategies

No matter to what extent the application of communication strategies can be helpful in maintaining the communication continua, their application is subject to a number of risks and impasses. The communicative method which disallows the correction of the learners’ errors eventuates in some risks in the form of 1) fossilization of learners errors, 2) excessive use of communication strategies, 3) pidginization.
4.1.4.1 Fossilization of Errors

The ignorance of the errors ensues from the considerations that L2 learning is similar to the L1 acquisition where the learning is mainly based on the hypothesis formation and hypothesis testing, and the errors occurred are not taken to be permanent in the face of constant language contact, revisions, and correction of the erroneous hypothesis. Brown (1987) explains the fossilization process as internalization of incorrect or non-native-like forms of the language, which occurs in L2 learning. This process of fossilization is really no different in learning. In other words, it is an implication for the identical process of internalization of correct and incorrect forms. In Brown's own words:

Fossilized items, then, are those ungrammatical or in correct items in the speech of a learner which gain first affective feedback ("I like it") then positive cognitive feedback ("I understand") reinforcing an incorrect form of language, [are responsible for] emergence of a frozen competence which is not susceptible to improvement and development in spite of continuing exposure to the target language.

4.2.1.2 Prodigal Deployment of Communication Strategies

In teaching situations such as the one of communicative approach, where the learners adopt a superfluous application of communication strategies, subsequently there develops a strategic competence which, to some extent, is regarded the outcome of attempts to overcome the problematic sequences of the communication, by conveying the message through the available means. This is
considered to be an inadequate competence, if compared with that of ideal speaker of that language. Although employment of communication strategies is considered a very desirable thing for learners, as an auxiliary source to successfully compensate till the time they attain full competency in the language, but it may have its own dangers, such as loss of motivation for further learning and linguistic development. This may be in some sense analogous to threshold level in second language learning where the learners feel no compelling force for being studious, as they may feel that they have sufficient means for effective communication.

Besides the development of lack of motivation for further learning, there is another drawback for much dependence on strategic competence. Haastrup and Phillipson’s (1983, pp. 140-154) findings confirm this fact that “frequent use of communication strategies over large stretches of discourse has a very disconcerting effect on the interlocutor, who must invest much effort in trying to figure out what the speaker really wants to say.” The listener may lose his patience for listening, or ambiguity may be created due to the use of CS (e.g. generalization). Remaining in pidginized stage especially in the early second language acquisition stages where the learner tends not to acculturate, is another problem. Omaggio (qtd. in Bialystok, 1990) in another research on the second language proficiency achievement concluded that the fossilized lexical, and grammatical items (due to excessive tolerance of errors by the teacher) are not remediable, and these students do not reach the higher levels of language proficiency, “so we should reconsider our push towards communication.”
4.2.1.3 Pidginization of the Learner's Language

Pidginization of the learner's L2 is regarded another threat for the communication strategies as it is claimed to contribute to the development of a pidgin. With this argument, the pedagogical effectiveness of the use of communication strategies has gone under the cloud of doubt. In this connection, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991) believe that the learners who have been taught in communicative method tend to make errors in the real and natural communication, but still it has not been proved that they make more errors than those who have been taught by other methods. With this argument, the preference is given to the production of some language, even a pidgin, than saying nothing and not being fluent in the language.

Two counteractive measures have been proposed to minimize the danger of pidginization of errors. First, is to increase the indirect correction of errors of the learners, second, to avoid communicative learning strategy in a class which forces the learners to considerably outperform their actual competence, which causes a great proliferation of error. Marton (1988), in this regard, talks about the dire consequences of the correction of errors, when the learner commits a number of errors in one utterance, and if the teacher tries to expand the idea or correct the errors, it is very much possible that the learner may not be able to acquire all the points expanded or corrected by the teacher, and he may consider the teacher's explanation as the confirmation of his utterances.

The final point to be taken into account is the situations with which the teacher is faced. That is to say, the aim of teaching should be clear, i.e. whether
the emphasis is on the development of fluency and communication ability, or on the development of linguistically accurate knowledge which is normally the base for the future education, or the combination of the two. The purpose, whichever may be, should take care of the other side of the token, as well.

4.3 Conclusion

The way the CSs are perceived by the two schools of thought, in regard to the nature of CSs, it may be concluded that CSs are cognitive based, and so is language learning. That is to say, with the development of cognition, the learners' attitude towards the use of CSs will change. If by this idea of Yule and Tarone that "performance creates competence" it is meant that through the process of hypothesization, trial and error, and feedback, the learner employs the communication strategies in order to enhance his linguistic competence, then, we could say that this has no contradiction with the principles of the other school, in which the L2 learner by the help of his L1 experience, can employ the already acquired mechanisms in order to make up for the deficiency in his L2 linguistic competence. On the other side of the token, to support this conclusion, we could say that the learner could enjoy his L1 experience, in order to solve the communicative problems, but it is felt that it is not the only and sufficient for the development of strategic competence.

A point worthy noted here, is that strategic competence affects linguistic competence (which is enhanced) but linguistic competence may not necessarily
affect strategic competence. If we take this prescription of the Cons (Expansionists) that consciousness raising about existence of the communication strategies, as the means of solving problems, equal to acceptance of existence of strategic competence, then, we can safely conclude that this consciousness raising is the amelioration of the strategic competence through an auxiliary measure which enhances the effectiveness of communication. This may indirectly lead to the improvement of linguistic competence, as well. What was not said explicitly in the above lines is the acceptance of existence of the strategic competence by both groups and the necessity of improving it. However, what seems yet unresolved is the means of improving, though that may be less important issue.

The next issue is the endorsement of accuracy or fluency, or the coalescence of the two in our view, as accuracy and fluency go side by side, as we perceive. This relates to the aims of teaching, on the one hand, and the decisions which have to be made, after careful examination of the benefits/disadvantages of CSs, psychological feasibility of teaching CSs, context dependency of CSs as a deterrent factor in possibility of teaching of CSs, the impasses of employment of CSs, such as fossilization of errors, prodigal development of CSs, and pidginization of learner’s language, on the other. No doubt, the employment of CSs will lead to an uninterrupted and accurate speech. But the question which is immediately raised is how we define the accuracy (as a criterion for an acceptable piece of language, as it is implied). As it is implied, no one can guarantee the dangers of prodigal use of CSs for sure, but what
would be the best suggestion, here, is that CSs could be used as accelerators or catalysts to improve strategic competence at the early stages of language learning, when the risks such as fossilization and pidginization are almost negligible, because at these stages, they are normally assumed to be used with an exploratory, and learning aim; so the application of these strategies could lead to learning. However, as per the findings of some researches on fossilization and pidginization, the best conclusion is that the use of CSs should not be encouraged at the later stages of the language learning. We have seen as per the findings of this research, that the high proficiency learners have automatically used less number of strategies.

Teaching CSs also will not by itself be useful but only along with other components of the curriculum, e.g. grammar and vocabulary. According to Hymes' (1974) classification of the components of the competence, the strategic competence is distinct from the grammar or vocabulary competence, and teaching of CSs will directly eventuate to the improvement of the strategic competence, but not necessarily the grammatical competence. These aspects need separate programs.

Learners can be made aware of their CSs, as the means for overcoming the problem. Textbook designers and curriculum planners and teachers can incorporate CSs in the syllabus or in their teaching methods, as a part of the course. Thereby, they could prevent fossilization, pidginization of the language. The examination of the characteristics of the communicative method showed
that a communicative class, through a functional syllabus may have more possibilities for inclusion of CSs.

According to the assumptions and consequently by the findings of the study, the communicative problems are solved, almost differently in oral versus written contexts. What is speculated here is that the development of oral and interactive skills is benefited more by teaching CSs. The finding of the research by Scardamalia and Paris (qtd. in Bialystok, 1990), on the failure of the attempts to improve the strategic competence of the learners in their writings comes as the endorsement of our conclusion. One reason, here, could be that the nature of writing skill, such as the need to be more formal, precise and accurate contributes to this situation.