CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical Background

Introduction

Strategic competence is one of the most discussed notions in language acquisition. It has raised many questions and generated various interpretations. The most promising ones are in respect of its role in facilitating the processes of acquisition and learning. A number of studies have targeted the strategic behaviour of foreign language learner and yielded various conclusions accompanied by various methodologies and theoretical perspectives. So far, no consensus has emerged on all these issues: its nature, definition, typology and taxonomy, exercise a deep impact on other competencies and training. However, "studying some aspects of second language learners’ strategic competence, we must never forget that we investigate one small part of an extremely complex and to a large extent mysterious phenomenon."¹

This chapter is going to state and explain briefly the theoretical basis of this study that will be chosen after reviewing the available literature. It will include the definitions of the common terms and the main issues related to the concept of strategic competence. Also, it will present some of the difficulties encountered by Yemeni English language learners in establishing the environment that helps them in learning and using

English as a foreign language. In terms of solving such difficulties, this researcher expects that through developing strategic competence the Yemeni learners can overcome the different types of problems that hinder them from creating a simulation to the natural environment of learning foreign languages. The expectations of this researcher about the role of strategic competence in resolving problems of English language learning will depend mainly on the results of this study and of the previous studies that dealt with the impact of strategic competence on language acquisition and learning. This will lead to the statement of the problem of this study, and then, to the significance of describing how the English Majors in Yemen manage their way to resolve problems in terms of learning and communicating through the medium of English.

**Defining strategic competence**

Since the beginning, most of the definitions of strategic competence have been restricted to compensatory behaviour that the learners resort to overcome their limited linguistic resources in the target language. Afterward, other definitions that are based on the psychological orientation of language production model seem to be prominent and to some extent acceptable but they too remained entangled in the same trap of compensatory behaviour. Recently, a different perspective has emerged that is introduced by Bachman (1990\(^2\), 1996)\(^3\), which projects a wider view of strategic competence. In Canale and Swain’s definition


(1980), the major role of strategic competence is "to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or insufficient competence". This is not different from that of a previous definition by Tarone (1977', cited in Faerch and Kasper, 1985) "conscious communication strategies are used by an individual to overcome a crisis which occurs when language structures are inadequate to convey the individual’s thought". In a later definition, Tarone (1980) focuses on meaning negotiation between two interlocutors, while that of Canale is extendable to all aspects of language use.

From the point of view of Little (1997)

"two problems arise from Canale’s and Swan’s (1980) and Tarone’s, (1980) definitions: (1) there are many communicative situations in which strategic processes play an "offensive" rather than a "defensive" role, (2) a definition of strategic competence that concentrates exclusively on language use may encourage the assumption that there is a psychological disjunction at the strategic level between language use and language learning".

According to Bachman’s (1990, cited in Brown, 1987) former definition, "strategic competence is a set of general abilities that utilize all

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8 Canale’s and Swan (1980) 30.
9 Tarone, p. 419.
10 Bachman, p. 100.
of the elements of language competence”. In a later definition, Bachman and Palmer (1996) conceive of strategic competence as:

“We conceive of strategic competence as a set of metacognitive components, or strategies, which can be thought of as a higher order executive processes that provide a cognitive management function in language use, as well as in other cognitive activities. Using language involves the language user’s topical knowledge and affective schemata, as well as all the areas of language knowledge discussed above. What makes language use possible is the integration of all of these components as language users create and interpret discourse in situationally appropriate ways.”

They identify three general areas in which metacognitive components operate: “goal setting, assessment, and planning”. “Those other cognitive activities include language learning in all its ramifications” (Little, 1997). Therefore, they extend the concept of strategic competence to “include all kinds of human activity that underlie human behaviour and operates sometimes below as well as above the threshold of conscious awareness”, (Little 1997).

Bialystok (1990) agrees with the view of Bachman and Palmer:

“Regarding explanations of how strategies work and procedures for training strategies, the most powerful models and most successful programs follow from positing strategies at the highest levels of cognition. Assigning them executive status in explanations of performance lead to the most fruitful results.”

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However, “strategic competence is helpful in various circumstances, particularly at the beginning stages of second language learning” (Canale & Swain, 1980)\textsuperscript{14} or when there are limited chances of using language in a real communication outside the language classroom. At the early stages of language learning, learners aspire for using what they have learnt but they always face difficulties in using their very limited linguistic resources to communicate their ideas in the second language. This can be viewed in that learning processes are accompanied by some mental activities that mainly target enhancing and fostering the ability to acquire language (learning strategies). However, having acquired the language as a linguistic system is not enough if it is not accompanied by developing the ability of applying and using this knowledge in real communicative situations (communication strategies) which in turn uncover the deficiencies of learning and urge for instant solutions and a subsequent treatment. So, some of those who can exploit all what they have learnt in communicating their ideas with other people successfully acquire an extraordinary strategic competence. In addition, they tend to develop their communicative competence since they become more informed about their weaknesses. This increases the chance to learn new items. On the contrary, there are many others who have an acceptable linguistic ability but they fail to express themselves clearly since they do not activate their strategic competence that enables them to exploit all the available resources (verbal or non-verbal) to use the language for the purpose of communication either written or spoken. So, this is why strategic competence is very important and a crucial factor in shaping and developing the learners’ communicative competence.

\textsuperscript{14} Canale and Swain, p. 31.
Therefore, the definition of strategic competence should be deduced from the role it plays in the whole system of language use and language learning. Realizing that, Brown (1987) asserts that the definition of strategic competence should not be restricted to the notion of competence strategies:

Actually, definitions of strategic competence, that are limited to the notion of “competence strategies”, fall short of encompassing the full spectrum of the construct.\(^{15}\)

Although, Savignon’s (1983\(^{16}\), cited in Brown, 1987\(^{17}\)) definition of strategic competence was intended to include many things related to communication production, it was merely a paraphrase of Canale’s definition. It entails:

“the strategies that one uses to compensate for imperfect knowledge of rules—or limiting factors in their application such as fatigue, distraction, and inattention.” through “paraphrase, circumlocution, repetition, hesitation, avoidance, and guessing, as well as shifts in register and style.”\(^{18}\)

Thus, considering strategic competence a component of communicative competence is useful since it shows how we access and use our grammatical, discourse and sociolinguistic competences in the stream of communication. However, the inclusion of strategic competence as a component of communicative competence within a wider framework (as of Bachman and Palmer, 1996) than that of Canale and Swain (1980)

\(^{15}\) Brown, p. 200.
\(^{17}\) Brown, p. 200.
\(^{18}\) Savignon, pp. 40-41.
will raise the question of the relation of learning strategy and other metacognitive strategies to communicative competence. As a matter of fact, differentiating metacognitive strategies that work on language learning from those that work on language use is not reasonable. In addition, most of the researches on learning strategies such as Oxford (1989\(^{19}\) and 1990\(^{20}\), Rubin (1987\(^{21}\), and Stern (1992\(^{22}\) have included compensatory strategies as one of the components of learning strategies. Thus, this will stimulate the proposal of considering strategic competence a multi-fold concept: while one fold works with language input (language learning), another with language output (language use) and the other folds (which represent all other factors which interfere by one way or another) work on the construct of input or output. Similar to this idea, Little (1996\(^{23}\) considers “the relation between language learning and language use bidirectional: successful language learning depends in part on language use, but equally, successful language use depends in part on our capacity to update and extend our communicative repertoire by further learning.”

**Competence**

Since its emergence, the term competence has acquired various implications, and appended revolutionary ideas to the literature of language learning and teaching. However, the definition of this term

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remained problematic since Chomsky used it. Here, we are going to present some of the connotations that will serve the purpose of this study. Davies (1989\textsuperscript{24}, cited in North, 1997\textsuperscript{25}) considers competence “as a set of scripts or ritual interchanges, plus individual differences in terms of proficiency as realized in fluency, style and creativity”. This definition seems to be more sophisticated in comparison to the Chomskyan one. He does not consider it a mere knowledge of language but adds to it other personal features that lead to individual differences among people in terms of proficiency as realized in the way one behaves, ideas he creates and their fluency. Besides, it emphasizes the role one intends as a socio-cultural variable. In fact, most of the definitions of competence are associated with either a Chomskyan definition (linguistic knowledge) or that of Hymes’ (communicative competence). However, Widdowson (1983) prefers capacity to refer to the ethno-methodological aspect of the communicative ability as opposed to the ethnographical as used by Hymes. He states:

Hymes’ capability is, then, essentially ethnographic. Capacity, in the sense I intend, is essentially ethnomethodological. That is to say, it is the ability to use knowledge of language as a resource for the creation of meaning, and is concerned not with assessment but interpretation.\textsuperscript{26}

Apart from those connotations, competence is always contrasted with performance. “It refers to the underlying knowledge one has of a system, event, or fact”, (Brown, 1987)\textsuperscript{27}. Since we seek a measurable definition of the term competence, the above connotations will not take us away from


\textsuperscript{25} Brian North, “Perspectives on Language Proficiency and Aspects of Competence”, \textit{Language Teaching}, Vol.: 30/2 pp.93-100 (1997) 94.


\textsuperscript{27} Brown, p. 24.
the complication that may arise from the difficulty in assessment and identification. So, here the term competence will be equated to the ability one has in accomplishing a given task.

**Communication strategy and learning strategy**

Up to now, most of those who have dealt with learner strategies have differentiated between two related terms, communication strategies and learning strategies. For example, Tarone (1980)\(^2^8\) considers communication strategies completely different from learning strategies and holds that they do not lead to learning. She suggested three definition criteria:\(^2^9\)

- A speaker desires to communicate meaning x to a listener.
- The speaker believes the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure desired to communicate meaning x is unavailable or is not shared with the listener.
- The speaker chooses to either avoid or attempt alternate means to communicate meaning x.

In her point of view, learning strategies lack one of these criteria. She asserts, “the primary purpose for using a learning strategy is not to communicate but to learn.”\(^3^0\) This researcher will follow Bachman and Palmer (1996). Communication strategy and learning strategy will be assumed under the all-encompassing term ‘strategic competence’ for the purposes of this study. Communication strategies will be viewed as the active use of language by language-learners in learning situations where learners have limited chances to use foreign or second language in real

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\(^2^9\) ibid., p. 423.

\(^3^0\) ibid., p. 420.
communications. The expression ‘active use of language’ refers here to the intention of the learners who use their linguistic knowledge in communications that are expected to lead to a kind of consolidation rather than in communication that they have to convey their real proposals.

**Process and strategy**

The aim of this study is not to solve the problem of distinguishing process from strategy. However, the distinction of the term ‘strategy’ from ‘process’ raises many methodological problems. So, this researcher will trace the studies that target the nature of strategy and how it relates to process. This, in fact, will be useful to have a clear view of strategic competence and strategies of communication and learning will be tangible and easier to spot.

According to some scholars, strategies are different from processes. For example: Selinker (1972) identifies five central processes behind second language learners’ errors. Communication strategies and learning strategies are two of them. He implicitly considers strategy “a subclass of process” and “thereby implying an opposition between strategic processes vs. non-strategic processes”, (Faerch and Kasper, 1983). Blum and Levenston (1978) distinguish strategy from process by applying a temporal criterion.

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Processes are inferable from strategies, just as strategies are inferable from spoken and written interlanguage performance. A single form used as a strategy of communication can either disappear from the learner's speech or becomes fossilized and part of a stable interlanguage.

Referring to the dictionary meaning, they suggest that “strategy should be used when referring to a single usage” while “process presupposes that a number of operations have taken place”. Based on those definitions, they account “strategy refers to the way the learner arrives at certain usage at a specific point in time while process refers to the systematic series of steps by which the learner arrives at the same usage over a period of time”. This distinction can be useful for differentiating between two types of errors namely: fossilized errors and deviances that are always associated with a communication strategy application.

Faerch and Kasper (1983) hold that process contrasts with product (not with strategy) and that strategy is a subclass of plan. In their view, strategy is a part of the planning and the execution process. Thus, strategies work as solutions for the problems in the planning and the execution processes of language production.

Taking into account the role of strategies in language acquisition, Seliger (1984, cited in Bialystok, 1990) differentiates between strategies and tactics. “Strategies are universal age- and context-independent and when engaged must be assumed to lead to long-term acquisition. Tactics on the
other hand are used to meet the immediate demands of situations and are dependent on a wide variety of factors such as environment, age, personality, affective constraints, and first language”.

Brown (1987), however, differentiates among three terms: strategy, process, and style. He defines process as “the most general of the three concepts”. The other term is style. It is defined as “the consistent and rather enduring tendencies or preferences within an individual. Styles are those general characteristics of intellectual functioning and personality type that especially pertain to one as an individual, which differentiate him from someone else”.

Strategy, on the other hand, is defined as “specific method of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information. Strategies are conceptualized that might vary from moment to moment or day to day or year to year. Strategies vary intra-individually; each of us has a whole host of possible ways to solve a particular problem and we choose one or several of those in sequence for a given problem”.

In her model of language learning, Bialystok (1978) distinguishes strategy from process by considering the optionality and the obligatory of the event. In Bialystok’s (1990) argument of the criterion of optionality that distinguishes strategy from process, she exposes two systems where strategy is a different entity from process. In the first, she presumes

“the learner’s strategic intervention in the usual processes governing language production leads to observably distinct forms of behaviour.”

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38 Brown, p. 78.
39 ibid., p. 79.
40 ibid.
Thus, an examination of the form of speech produced by a learner should indicate whether or not that speech is the result of normal production processes or has been shaped as well by communication (or other) strategies.  

In the second system:

"contrary to the first system in which the level of analysis determined whether the same behaviour should be described as the result of a strategy or process, in this system, the behaviour itself is different if its initiation is attributed to production processes or communication strategies. Strategies, that is, should reliably produce forms of language that are different from those that one would expect to emanate from the autonomous processing system."

Finally, she fails to get a way to distinguish the speech produced by the intervention of strategy from that produced by normal processes. She attributes this failure to the fact that speech production cannot be without any strategic intervention and norm for isolating is not possible. Furthermore, "the presumption that language production under the guidance of strategies is somehow less normal than that under usual processing conditions is incorrect."

Thus, the definition of Blum and Levenston (1983) is a practical description to distinguish between errors and communication strategy. In addition, Bachman and Cohen (1998) define strategies within the field of language use as "mental operations or processes that learners consciously select and apply when attempting to accomplish language

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42 Bialystok, p. 19.
43 ibid.
44 ibid., p. 20.
tasks”. It seems that both definitions will serve the purpose of this study because they ignore the difference between ‘process’ and ‘strategy’.

**Strategic and non-strategic**

Answering the question, whether this behaviour is strategic or non-strategic gets us right back to the question on the difference between process and strategy. That also urges us to identify clear features of each behaviour in so that it will be easier to identify the strategic type of behaviour that can be a subject of this study. Here, this kind of activity that the second language learners resort to in order to overcome difficulties in communication in second language can be unnoticeable to the observer where the learner uses strategies within a normal production process. Therefore, it seems very difficult to differentiate between normal behaviour and the strategic one. To identify the features of each also adds its own burden on the researcher.

According to Bialystok (1990), there are three characteristics common among the varying definitions and approaches to communication strategies: problemacticity, consciousness and intentionality. She argues:

> “While some communicative situations may be described as more problematic than others, it would be impossible to determine a boundary between communication which presents some degree of challenge and communication which entirely unencumbered by problems.”

She adds:

> “Similarly, mental representations which are highly explicit, that is, analyzed, are more amenable to conscious inspection than are those which are less so. But a categorical boundary between processing

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46 Bialystok, p. 136.
which is conscious and that which is not seems not to exist, and so the use of such a boundary as a criterion for describing a phenomenon is inevitably ineffectual."\textsuperscript{47}

The third one is the criterion of intentionality on which Bialystok (1990) notes:

"Were strategy selection intentional, we would expect systematic choice- certain kinds of learners in certain kinds of situations would be more likely to choose certain kind of strategies. The general lack of predictability in choice and absence of pure examples of single strategies militates against the interpretation that these strategies have been selected by learners in some intentional way to solve a perceived problem."\textsuperscript{48}

Following Bialystok strategic behaviour being selective, this researcher can argue that the strategic behaviour of language learners always accompanies new learnt items of the language or items that have not been acquired yet or transferred to their linguistic repertoire. Thus, it is proposed that the learner himself can decide exactly which of his behaviour is strategic or non-strategic, because he is more aware of his linguistic repertoire than the observer. As a matter of fact, on some occasions the learner cannot differentiate between strategic and non-strategic but this way has a greater validity than the judgment of the researcher or that of the observer alone. Therefore, this study will rely on the “interview technique” with the learners to decide which behaviour is strategic or non-strategic by examining whether the learner actually resorts to a specific communication strategy or he just behaves normally (non strategically). This researcher will take into consideration the fact that two major difficulties may arise in spotting the communication

\textsuperscript{47} ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} ibid.
strategy. First, when the learner commits mistakes and second, the hesitations and pauses that might occur at the time of speaking and in so doing, the following criteria will be followed:

1- If the learner realizes that he makes a slip and he can recall the correct form by self-repairing, then this cannot be considered a communication strategy.
2- If he does not realize that he makes a mistake (i.e. he thinks he produces the correct form) and does not know the correct form then this can be considered a fossilized error.
3- If he is not sure of the correctness of the word or form and he produces the form or the word as a creative use of language then this kind can be considered a communication strategy.

Most of the cases of committing mistakes arise because of ignorance of the correct form but there may at other times be certain other factors such as lapse of memory and communication strategy. Thus, knowing the type of mistake that can be attributed to the application of communication strategy will reduce the effect of other irrelevant factors that cause the learners’ hesitations and pauses at the time of speaking or writing.

1- The type of hesitation that is followed by a correct form is not a communication strategy (taking into account criterion no.1).
2- But the pause or hesitation that is followed by a deviant is a communication strategy if the learner admits the strategic intervention, even if it is due to a failure in memory recalling.

Many researchers relied on a native speaker interlocutor to identify the use of strategy. This researcher argues that having the opinion of one
interlocutor only even if he is a native speaker without taking into consideration the speaker’s own judgment may invalidate the judgment on the use of communication strategy. This is because the learner sometimes has no linguistic problem to overcome but he has a difficulty in recalling a word or phrase that, he thinks, suits the meaning of his cognitive content, so he pauses but finally he succeeds in uttering the right word wished-for. However, sometimes he commits a fossilized error that is not associated with any kind of hesitations. This type of error is very difficult to be identified without the learner’s confession. In these two cases the learner resorts to pausing but after that he does not use any strategy and in the later case he commits an error but without hesitation. In this situation, the pause itself cannot be considered a valid cue to a communication strategy if a learner uses it as a kind of ‘recalling strategy.’

Teaching strategic competence

For teaching strategies, “Wenden (198549, cited in Brown, 198750) outlines the significance of identifying successful learning strategies in students of second languages and she asserts that learner strategies are key to learner autonomy.” Brown comments “teachers, therefore, can benefit from an understanding of what makes learners successful and unsuccessful, and establish in the classroom a milieu for the realization of successful strategies.” In a more sophisticated perspective on this matter, Little (1996) suggests:

“to answer the question of the possibility of teaching communication strategy and learning strategy satisfactorily it is necessary to take

50 Brown, p. 94.
account of two separate but related issues: the teachability of strategies and the relation between 'strategy training' and the rest of language teaching. The successful deployment of strategies, like the successful deployment of grammatical rules, depends on the gradual development of psychological entities and processes. Pedagogical measures may facilitate but cannot replace this development, which depends crucially on appropriately reflected practice."

This study is going to deal with the various perspectives on this topic and suggest the possibilities of strategic competence training and its role in the development of learners’ communicative ability. Moreover, the suggestion of the necessity of training will rely on benefits that we can gain to overcome the difficulties of teaching English language to the Yemeni learners.

**Approaches to the study of strategic competence**

There are two general approaches to the study of strategic competence, the interactional and the psycholinguistic. In the former, communication strategies are seen as meaning negotiation in learners’ communications and attempts to achieve conversational maintenance. This approach has been criticized by some scholars such as Bialystok (1990) and Kellerman *et al.* (1987), in particular, for the validity of the resultant classifications of the types of communication strategies, which focus on the surface description of the language. The latter approach looks at communication strategies as cognitive processes within the mind of the speaker either to

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51 ibid.
52 Little, pp. 96-97.
solve a problem, (Faerch and Kasper, 1983), or to compensate for a missing vocabulary (Kellerman et al. 1987). Still, another alternation of account has resulted in a different classification assumed to describe underlying processes of the language production such as that of Bialystok (1990).

**Problems of English departments in Arab countries**

The problems that the English departments face in most of the Arab countries are mainly in relation to language use and communication. Many researchers (such as Abdul Haq, 1975, Harrison, Prator and Tucker, 1975, Abbad, 1988 and Wahba, 1998; cited in Rababah, 2003) clearly state that the Arab learners of English face problems in both speaking and writing. Abdul Haq (1982 in Rabab'ah, 2003) states “there are general outcries about the continuous deterioration of the level of English proficiency of students among school teachers, university instructors and all who are concerned with English language teaching.”

Rabab’ah (2003) has, also, shed the light on the problems of Arab learners of English in some other Arab countries such as Yemen, Saudi

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56 Aziza Abbad, An Analysis of Communicative Competence Features in English Language Texts in Yemen Arab Republic, PhD Dissertation, (University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign, 1988).
58 Rabab’ah, p. 15.
Arabia, Sudan and Egypt. Unfortunately, the learners who join the English Department in those Arab countries must have real challenges due to the heavy duty they have to do in the four academic years of English language learning.

Problems of English departments in Yemen

Teaching foreign languages in a society gets its importance from the role they play in the public life at all levels: political, economic, social and educational. Accordingly, the governments estimate the importance of a specific language and plan to spend on teaching that language according to the expected benefits. English is one of those languages that play an important role in most of the world’s economic and scientific affairs. From that consideration, Yemen government teaches English language as a main subject in schools and as a requirement in the universities.

In Yemen, English is the only foreign language that is taught in schools and universities beside the native language (Arabic). Teaching English starts in public schools from class seven onwards as a compulsory subject. This means that during the period of the first seven years in school the Yemeni student has to build linguistic skills only in his mother tongue, which is the medium of teaching for all courses. Thus, he does not feel within this period of time that his language is influenced by any foreign or second language other than that of his parents and the society around him.

All Yemenis speak only one language “Arabic” except some who speak Somali, Ethiopian, and Hindi but they are few in number and make
limited use of their language even within the same group. Thus, in Yemen English language as foreign language suffers from two problems. First, nobody uses it for communication except for specific purpose and confined to specific places. Second, it is taught in schools late. These two problems have their negative effect on the efficiency of language teaching and on the level of the learners’ achievement.

Regarding the first problem, the negative effect of the limited use comes from the limited chances that the leaner has to put the learnt items of the foreign language into practice. Furthermore, speaking a language other than Arabic in public may lead others to make fun of you if you do not belong to one of the non-Yemeni nationals or speak to foreign personnel e.g. a tourist. In that case, where speaking is not fully acceptable in public, learners do not get enough chances of practising speaking the foreign language.

Another reason behind the first problem is educational. The high rate of illiteracy among the people of Yemen adds a bad effect to the process of teaching and learning foreign language. The Yemeni English language learners do not find their parents’ support and encouragement at home so they depend mainly on teaching in the classroom. On the contrary those whose parents can speak another language can get help in practicing that language at home i.e. they will get a chance of learning English from another source, to some extent an informal situation.

The second problem is the late introduction of English in the school curriculum. Despite the fact that it is justified in economic terms, it is bound to reflect adversely on the economy in future. Educational planners think that the government cannot afford the huge expenditure of teaching
English from the first elementary class that the budget cannot afford to spend on the huge number of teaching staff and the required infrastructure. Perhaps this is right because the education in Yemeni schools is free.

To a large extent, this situation affects the level of learning English to the most. Learners at the seventh class feel that learning English is a great burden. Most of them do not cope with this new subject imposed on them at this late stage of study, so they struggle but with poor results. Others achieve some progress although the second language remains at the level of usage not use. Only those of the second category of students are nominated to pursue their higher studies in the scientific fields such as computer, engineering, and medicine, which are of great importance for the development of the economy of the country.

**Statement of the problem of the study**

English is not the medium of instruction even at universities in Yemen, except in Medical colleges, and is not widely used in society at large. So learning second language after leaving public school is either in private institutes, or in English departments at universities. The main disadvantage of learning English in private institutes is that it is quite expensive and learners cannot afford studying all the courses that are usually distributed into four stages at four levels. Thus studying for a short period of time does not, by any means, give the learner sufficient proficiency to speak and communicate in the foreign language. To a large extent, studying in private institutes does not always build tangible communicative development, because the learners just focus only on linguistic items not using the language for communicative purpose.
Then the choice turns towards the English departments in the universities. This really puts a heavy burden on English Departments at the Yemeni universities, where the learners join the university without a certain required level of proficiency in English language except whatever English they have learnt in the secondary schools. English departments at all Yemeni universities receive those students who have the minimum background with a consideration that their poor level will affect the efficiency of the offered courses of the program. Despite that the program starts with an intensive course targeting the four skills and language usage with some preliminary courses in literature in the first two years of study. These procedures, in fact, help to a large extent to offer the learners with the needful skills for being able to cope with the other courses.

Difficulties emerge at the time the learners need to communicate their own ideas in classes other than those which are targeted for language skills, especially in literature classes where a lot of questions need to be asked by students and many ideas need to be formulated in their own foreign language for the purpose of note-taking activities that learners rely on for studying. In fact, in literature courses such as novel, drama and poetry learners are not encouraged to talk while the teachers are lecturing. This is because almost lecture-style of teaching is followed in literature classes. If an interactive method is followed, the teacher finds the time limit as an impediment for completing his task. Therefore, literature courses do not provide sufficient opportunity to the learners to participate and, in turn, develop their language skills.

Remarkably, learners of Taiz University seem to achieve a lot and their communicative competence in general is satisfactory, especially the
students at the fourth level (Hezam, 2000). Besides that, the English language majors of Taiz University try to communicate with their teachers, who are not Arabs, and most of communication turns out to be successful. This phenomenon is interesting to be studied: how the learners develop their communicative skills and express their ideas successfully with those who do not speak their language or share the same culture. This phenomenon has been attributed to the kind of behaviour that enables most foreign language learners to acquire many skills that they have not been introduced to in classrooms and maintain the course of communication though they have not full control over the target language. The kind of ability that facilitates managing and monitoring the processes of developing and using the target language is called strategic competence. Studying some of its aspects and functions definitely will expand our understanding of the second language learning and teaching processes in general.

Objectives of the study:

This study will focus on describing aspects of the use of English language by the English major learners of Taiz University. Mainly, it will describe the techniques used by them to communicate their ideas in terms of using multi-verbal strategies to achieve their goals. This researcher will also focus on the other aspect of the learners’ strategic competence: ‘the learning strategies’, describing and investigating the mutual effect of each aspect on developing the other and on facilitating the whole educational system of teaching second language in non-native environment.

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This researcher believes there are other variables that have possible relations to the use of communication strategies and learning strategies. This study will try to reveal some aspects of the effect of the academic level, the type of task, and other possible factors.

Questions of the study

This researcher will try to answer the following questions:

1. *How do English Majors of Taiz University deploy their strategic competence when they want to achieve their communicative goals, in terms of using communication strategies?*

2. *How do English majors manage their strategic competence when they learn new items in English, in terms of using learning strategies?*

3. *How can teaching the strategies of learning and communication help the English major students at Taiz University to develop their strategic competence?*

This question will lead us to answer the following secondary questions:

*I* - *Is teaching strategic competence necessary and useful for second language acquisition?*

*II* - *What are the difficulties faced by the Yemeni English language learners in terms of learning and practising English language and how can strategic competence overcome such difficulties?*
Significance of the study

This is the first study to target the strategic competence of students of Taiz University learning English as a foreign language. As it is mentioned above, English language major learners of Taiz do not live in the helpful environment to improve their ability of using the language for real life situations. This, in fact, will affect their ability to achieve the expected results from the courses offered by the English department’s program. Since, this study has chosen the learner-related factors that tend to be the key for solving those problems, it will look for the solutions of the problems the learners of English face in using and learning the language and the effect of each factor on the other.