

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES, FOREIGNER TALK, AND REPAIR IN INTERLANGUAGE¹

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A framework for the study of interlanguage strategies of communication, production, and learning is established, and rigorous criteria are proposed to define communication strategies within that framework. Research on communication strategies is related to research on foreigner talk (Hatch 1979, Hatch, Shapira, and Gough 1978), and repair in interlanguage (Schwartz 1977, Fathman 1980). The claim is made that much of this research focuses on the same kind of phenomenon in interlanguage communication, but that the conceptual frameworks used by researchers investigating communication strategies, foreigner talk, and repair have in the main been different, and hence caused researchers to "see" different things in the same data.

A substantial body of research has been accumulated, using techniques of discourse analysis, on the nature of foreigner talk and repairs in interactions involving second language learners (e.g., Schwartz 1977, Hatch, Shapira, and Gough 1978, Hatch 1979, Hatch and Long, 1980). A smaller body of research is developing which focuses on the nature of "communication strategies" in interlanguage (e.g., Varadi 1973, Tarone 1978, 1979, Galvan and Campbell 1978, Faerch and Kasper 1980). Both bodies of research emphasize the interactional nature of human communication and stress the importance of including the interlocutor's input in descriptions of learners' use of their interlanguage. Hatch (1979) has called for an overall framework which can relate these two bodies of research to one another. This paper is an attempt to suggest ways in which these two areas of research are related.

I would first like to briefly describe and define the nature of "communication strategies," then relate these to the model of communicative competence proposed by Canale and Swain (1980), and finally, relate this area of research to work on foreigner talk and on repair.

In the subsequent discussion, I believe it will be helpful to maintain a distinction among the following three notions: the observable phenomenon, the conceptual framework used to think about that phenomenon, and the

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terminology used to talk about the framework. Researchers may be able to agree that certain observable phenomena occur in interlanguage (IL) communication, but they may place those data within different conceptual frameworks. Different researchers may therefore differ in what they think is important about the phenomenon which they have all observed; one may focus on linguistic form, and another on language function, for example. Even if two researchers agree on the conceptual framework they are using, they may attach different terms to the same concept; one may use the term "communication strategy," and another "communication tactic" for the same concept. In trying to relate work on communication strategies to work on repair in discourse analysis, for example, we have to determine whether these two bodies of research are (a) observing different phenomena, (b) observing the same phenomenon but placing what they observe into different conceptual frameworks, or (c) observing the same phenomenon, using the same conceptual framework but simply using different terms for the same concepts.

Work on "communication strategies" (sometimes called "communication tactics" to distinguish them from broader approaches to communication which might be studied) has pointed to a phenomenon which has been shown to occur in interactions of interlanguage speakers with others. This phenomenon consists of the fact that second language learners are able to use their restricted interlanguage (Selinker 1972) in such a way as to transcend its limitations. For example, if a learner lacks a lexical item, he or she may use other terms or syntactic structures or mime to get across the intended notion or to achieve the communicative goal. Examples of some of the ways in which learners are able to accomplish this are provided in Appendix A.

Most of the research which has been done on the nature of communication strategies (CS) has focused on the various types of CS used to communicate an *intended meaning* x in situations where the speaker has believed that the requisite meaning structure was not shared. The central issue has been, what alternative strategies may be used to communicate that meaning? Various typologies of these alternative means, or communication strategies, have been proposed by various researchers: Varadi's typology (1973) was progressively modified by Tarone, Cohen, and Dumas (1975), Galvan and Campbell (1978), and Tarone (1978). Faerch and Kasper (1980) have developed a different typology, dividing CS into achievement strategies (attempts to solve the communicative problem) and functional reduction strategies (attempts to reduce the communicative task) and relating these to psycholinguistic models. Other researchers such as Bialystok and Fröhlich (1980) and Paribakht

Table 1
Definitions and criteria for some strategies (based on Tarone 1979)

STRATEGIES OF LANGUAGE USE

Communication Strategy (CS)—a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared. (Meaning structures include both linguistic and sociolinguistic structures.)

Necessary criteria:

1. A speaker desires to communicate a meaning *x* to a listener.*
2. The speaker believes the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure desired to communicate meaning *x* is unavailable or is not shared with the listener.
3. The speaker chooses to:
 - a. avoid—not attempt to communicate meaning *x* or
 - b. attempt alternate means to communicate meaning *x*. The speaker stops trying alternatives when it seems clear to the speaker that there is shared meaning.

Examples: listed in Appendix A

Production Strategy (PS)—an attempt to use one's linguistic system efficiently and clearly, with a minimum of effort.

Criterion 3b above is absent; there is no use of alternative means to the negotiation of meaning.

Examples: simplification, rehearsal, discourse planning

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY (LS)—an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language.

Criterion 1 above is not necessary for LS; basic motivation is not to communicate, but to learn

Examples: memorization, repetition with purpose of remembering, mnemonics, initiation of conversation with native speakers, inferencing, spelling

* This intended meaning, or communicative goal, may be defined in notional/functional terms (cf. Van Ek 1975).

(1980) are attempting to relate type of CS used to proficiency level and/or experimental task. Palmberg (1979) has even studied laughter as a marker of CS use! But overall, it is fair to say that most effort in this area has been devoted to identifying and categorizing the various types of CS used by learners when they attempt to transcend gaps in their IL systems in getting across an intended meaning.

Tarone (1979) proposed a conceptual framework for use in *defining* communication strategies more clearly, and in distinguishing these from learning strategies or production strategies. This framework has since been slightly modified (at the suggestion of Bialystok) in order to make it clear that there are two *types* of strategies: language *learning* strategies and strategies of language *use* (including communication strategies and production strategies). This framework is presented in Table 1.

Communication strategies are most clearly defined here as "mutual attempts of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where the requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared." CS are seen as tools used in a joint negotiation of meaning, in situations where both interlocutors are attempting to agree as to communicative goal. (Appendix B provides a transcript of the way in which such CS are used in negotiation.) Note that three criteria are necessary in order to clearly define the use of a communication strategy; if *any* of these criteria is absent, we do not have a communication strategy. It is suggested in Tarone (1979) that other kinds of strategies, such as learning strategies or production strategies, differ in that they lack one or another of these criteria.

For example, in Table 1 we see that a production strategy (PS) is defined as "an attempt to use one's linguistic system efficiently and clearly, with a minimum of effort." Examples include discourse planning, use of prefabricated patterns and rehearsed segments, and simplification of syntactic structure. The key difference between production strategies and communication strategies seems to be that PS are not used for the *primary* purpose of negotiating meaning; that is, criterion 3b is missing. Aono and Hillis (1979) present preliminary data which demonstrate some of the ways in which PS seem to behave differently from CS in this regard.

In Table 1 we see that a learning strategy (LS) is defined as "an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language." Criterion 1—the desire to communicate a meaning *x*—is not necessary for learning strategies, since the primary purpose for using a learning strategy is *not* to communicate but to *learn*. So, for example, repeating a grammar structure or a lexical item with a view to committing it to memory is behavior

which cannot be called a communication strategy, but rather is a learning strategy. Seliger (1980) discusses the nature of learning strategies in much greater detail than is possible here.

The question of how communication strategies relate to learning is an important one. Several researchers have tried to suggest that learning may result from use of CS. Faerch and Kasper (1980) suggest that some communication strategies promote learning and others do not; they suggest that expansion strategies (such as paraphrase, circumlocution, etc.) are good for learning while mime and language switch are not (and reduction strategies are *either* + potential learning). However, I believe that such a categorical distinction is very difficult to make. If we take the interactional aspect of CS seriously, and observe their *use* in the interaction between two interlocutors, we see that the conversational *effect* of the use of, for example, mime or message abandonment (indeed, of all the communication strategies) is often to get the interlocutor to help the speaker to find the right structure to say what he or she wants to say. Thus, *in use*, all CS may be "expansion strategies." Bialystok and Frölich (1980) suggest that CS are used in order to test linguistic hypotheses. I think that this is to confuse learning strategies with communication strategies; the testing of linguistic hypotheses implies a primary intention to learn, not to communicate a meaning.

While learning *may* result from the use of a communication strategy, it does not have to. So we cannot *assume* that all CS are also LS. While communication *may* result from the testing of a linguistic hypothesis, it does not have to. So we cannot *assume* that all LS are also CS. Thus, although communication and learning strategies may overlap in some cases, we can show that in other cases they may be clearly distinguished in terms of the presence or absence of criterion 1, the desire to communicate an idea, or to reach a communicative goal, as opposed to an implied parallel criterion in learning strategies—the desire to learn a meaning structure of the target language. Hence, I feel it is important to keep the two concepts—CS and LS—distinct. Seliger asserts (personal communication), and I agree, that it must be impossible for a learner to focus on LS and CS at the same time and that there must be some switching back and forth of focus from one to the other in conversation. The question of precisely how *communication strategies*, as we have defined them here, promote or inhibit *learning* is a question to be resolved by research; it is not a question whose answer can be assumed.

Canale and Swain (1980) propose a model of communicative competence which consists of three components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Grammatical competence consists of

a knowledge of linguistic structures; sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of what is acceptable usage within the speech community. Both these components seem to me to be specific to a particular language and language group. The third component, strategic competence, consists of the ability to employ strategies of language use in the attempt to reach communicative goals. It seems to me that the component of strategic competence must have some universal aspect, in that it is used to bridge the gaps between two linguistic or sociolinguistic systems. All speakers must have the ability to use such strategies to bridge differences in grammatical and sociolinguistic competence, although, as Canale points out (personal communication), the particular *types* of strategy preferred for use in such situations may be culture-specific or language-specific.

Let us now turn to work on "foreigner talk." Hatch (1979) defines foreigner talk as "aspects of input which promote comprehension and/or language learning." A central question of research on foreigner talk is, What kind of linguistic and discoursal input does a second language learner have to work with in *learning*? Certain aspects of the native speaker's linguistic and discoursal input to learners have been referred to as "foreigner talk"; it is suggested that this foreigner talk promotes learning as well as communication with the learner. Let us examine some of the characteristics of foreigner talk, provided in Table 2. These characteristics include slower speech rate, longer pauses, and reduced vowels; in vocabulary (most of these vocabulary data are taken from a study by Chaudron [1979]), use of high frequency words, semantic feature information, gestures; in syntax, short MLU, left dislocation of topics; in discourse, restating wh-questions as yes/no or or-choice questions, and so on.

How does foreigner talk, thus described, relate to the notion of communication strategy? First of all, foreigner talk is a modification of the speech of *one* of the interlocutors, the native speaker, whereas communication strategies, by definition, are a *joint* attempt of both interlocutors to agree on a meaning. Second, foreigner talk has been defined in *linguistic* terms. The focus of research on foreigner talk has been the description of the unique *form* of this speech modification, coupled with some suggestions of the way in which this form *might* promote learning and/or communication. Communication strategies, on the other hand, have been defined in *functional* terms. The notion of intended meaning, or communicative goal, which has been the central focus of research on communication strategies, has not, to my knowledge, been considered in research on foreigner talk. If we look at foreigner talk in terms of its *function*, we see that its communicative purpose often

Table 2
Summary table of aspects of input which promote
comprehension and/or language learning (from Hatch 1979; proposed benefits omitted)

Slow Rate—clearer articulation (little “sandhi variation”)
Final stops are released and voiced final stops more heavily voiced
Some glottal stops used before words beginning with vowels
Fewer reduced vowels and fewer contractions
Longer pauses
Extra volume and exaggerated intonation
Vocabulary
High frequency vocabulary, less slang, fewer idioms
Fewer pro forms of all kinds, high use of names
Definitions will be marked
Explicit marking by use of formulas in TESLese (e.g., “This means x”)
Implicit marking via intonation (e.g., “A nickel? A 5-cent piece?”)
Derivational morphology frames in definitions (e.g., “miracle—anything that was miraculous?” “sum up—summarize?”)
Form class information (e.g., “funds or money,” “industrious and busy”)
Semantic feature information (e.g., “A cathedral usually means a church that’s a very high ceilings”)
Context information (e.g., “If you go for a job in a factory, they talk about a wage scale”)
Gestures and pictures—make reference clear
Endearment terms
Syntax
Short MLU, simple propositional syntax
Left dislocation of topics (e.g., “Friday, Saturday, did you have a nice weekend?”)
Repetition and restatement
Less preverb modification
Native speaker summarizes learner’s nonsyntactic utterances
Native speaker “fills in the blank” for learner’s incomplete utterances
Discourse
Native speaker gives reply within his or her questions (e.g., Wh-questions are restated as yes/no questions or as or-choice questions)
Native speaker uses tag questions
Native speaker offers correction
Speech Setting
Child-child language play
Language during play
Adult-child interactions
Adult-adult speech event encounters

seems to be to maintain some broad sort of phatic contact between interlocutors. Hatch cites examples where the native speaker, using foreigner talk, actually abandons his or her intended communicative goal, accepts the learner's mistaken interpretation of what he or she said, and responds to that—the opposite of the sort of painstaking negotiation of intended meaning displayed in Appendix B as typical of CS use.

If we view it within the “strategy framework” outlined in Table 1, foreigner talk seems to consist of both production strategies and communication strategies: the language use strategies. I suggest that the native speaker is *in part* attempting to use the linguistic system efficiently and clearly with the least possible effort required to stay in contact with the learner; slow rate, simplified morphology, short MLU, left dislocation of topic, repetitions with the intention of buying time—all *may* be used for ease of learner processing. If so, these are production strategies, in that they have to do with the efficient and clear use of the linguistic system, and do not necessarily enter into any negotiation of the speaker's intended meaning. On the other hand, many examples listed in Table 2 as characteristics of foreigner talk may be communication strategies on the part of the native speaker in that they seem to be extended efforts to negotiate some clarification of the learner's intended meaning, or to provide alternate means of communicating the native speaker's intended meaning. These examples include restatement for the purpose of checking the learner's intended meaning (paraphrase), “filling in the blank” in response to the learner's message abandonment strategy, provision of context information (circumlocution), use of gesture or pictures (mime), etc. Much of the repair behavior listed in Table 2 (“native speaker summarizes a learner's nonsyntactic utterances” or “native speaker offers correction”) may be considered communication strategies, as we shall see, if the intention of the native speaker is to clarify intended meaning rather than simply correct linguistic form. Considering foreigner talk as a whole would enable us to observe the complex interaction of production strategy and communication strategy in the speech of the native speaker.

However, as Hatch (1979) has pointed out, we do not really know for sure what the effect of the native speaker's use of foreigner talk is on the learner's success in learning the target language. Similarly, as I have already pointed out, we do not know the relationship between learning and the use of communication strategies either. This is a very fruitful area for research. Just as in the case of communication strategies, I think it is important not to *assume* that the native speaker's use of foreigner talk necessarily promotes language learning on the part of the nonnative speaker. It *may* do so, but it certainly

does not have to. It is a question for research to answer.

Let us now briefly examine some of the work on repairs, and the way in which this work may be related to work on strategic competence. In an M.A. thesis, Schwartz (1977) described some of the repairs which occurred in the interactions of nonnative speakers of English with each other, and these seem similar to communication strategies. Schwartz defines repair as "a strategy for achieving understanding when there is some kind of breakdown or trouble, or some is anticipated" (p. 4). This definition seems identical to our definition of communication strategy. Schwartz goes on to focus on the "negotiated" nature of repairs in what she terms the "word search" sections of her data ("word search" is an activity in which both interlocutors attempt to agree on what is meant). Appendix C contains a "word search" which occurred in Schwartz's data (1977). The similarity between the interactions recorded in Appendix B (exemplifying use of communication strategies) and Appendix C (exemplifying the role of repair in "word search") is very apparent to me. It does seem that in the case of "word search," Tarone (1978) and Schwartz (1977) are pointing to the same communicative phenomenon as important, but using different conceptual frameworks in analyzing it. Operating within Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks's framework (1977), Schwartz examines the interaction from the point of view of (a) who initiates the repair: the self or the other, (b) the types of hesitation phenomena accompanying initiation of repair, and (c) accompanying nonverbal patterns. The notion of "intended meaning" or "communicative goal" is not central to her analysis of this exchange. Further, she does not systematically explore the specific types of communication strategy used to accomplish repair—the various alternatives open to the communicator—in the way that research on communication strategies has. However, it is clear from the data provided in her thesis that in the "word searches" it is the same communicative phenomenon being observed, even though the conceptual framework for analyzing it is different.

How do communication strategies relate to repairs in general, as opposed to repair in word search? Are these simply different terms for the same concept? Or are the concepts referred to by the terms "repair" and "communication strategy" different?

In theory one can repair an utterance to move it either (a) closer to correspondence with intended *meaning* or (b) closer to correspondence with socially accepted *form*. Repairs, as we shall see, occur primarily when the speaker perceives that the first-attempt utterance contains a linguistic or sociolinguistic structure which does not communicate an intended meaning closely enough to ensure that there will be shared meaning. Hence, repairs

(either by the self or the other) occur at step 3b (Table 1) as a result of an unsuccessful previous try. Most of the repairs in Fathman's study (1980) focus on lexicon; she speculates that this is because repairs are mostly used in her data to bring utterances more closely into agreement with intended meaning, rather than agreement with accepted form.

But what about repairs which do not seem to alter the meaning of the utterance, but rather simply alter the form, as in many phonological or morphological repairs?

Fathman (1980) provides a typology of repairs in which there are five separate categories:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| I. Phonological | I was looking to a kit—a cat. |
| II. Morphological | I live here two year—two years. |
| III. Syntactic | The boy's going to take off the cat—take the cat off the tree. |
| IV. Meaning | Daddy went home—I mean, went to work and came home. |
| V. Lexicon | The boy—the children are coming. |

Are those repairs which occur at the phonological or morphological level to be considered communication strategies? Morphological and phonological variants *may* function not so much to communicate referential meaning as to communicate social meaning, or group membership. Attempts to repair utterances which are faulty in phonological or morphological form but not faulty in terms of communicating intended meaning may perhaps be viewed as attempts to send a social message . . . a meta-communication . . . which says, "I'm a member of your group."

But to date, the notion of communication strategy has been used to refer only to negotiation of referential or sociolinguistic meaning, and not this kind of "social group membership" meaning. Given this fact, we would have to say that *repairs which focus on correction of linguistic form rather than better communication of intended meaning, are not communication strategies*. The key is whether the purpose of the repair is to move the utterance closer to intended meaning or closer to socially accepted form.²

Thus, I think the terms "communication strategy" and "repair" do in fact refer to different concepts; the concept referred to by the term "repair" is broader, in the sense that it incorporates corrections of both form and content, whereas the concept referred to by the term "communication strategy"

² For example, Fathman points out (personal communication) that *appeal to authority* may be used to get help with problems of phonological or morphological form, and in such instances, would not be a communication strategy.

incorporates only corrections which are designed to better transmit intended meaning.

To summarize then, the research on communication strategies, foreigner talk, and repair in interlanguage has, in many cases, focused on the same phenomenon in communication. But the conceptual frameworks used in these three areas of research, although they overlap somewhat, have in the main been different.

Analysis in terms of communication strategies has meant a focus on *both* interlocutors' attempts to use alternative strategies to agree on one interlocutor's intended meaning. Communication strategies are, thus, defined in *functional* terms.

Analysis in terms of foreigner talk has meant a focus on the *linguistic* and *discoursal structure* of the native speaker's input to the learner, with a view to eventually determining the influence of that structure on second language learning.

Analysis in terms of repair has primarily meant a focus on (a) the *discoursal rules* for who corrects whom, when, and (b) the correction of *linguistic form* as well as *negotiation of intended meaning*. It is only in this latter focus that work on repair potentially overlaps work on communication strategies; yet even the "word search" segments of Schwartz's thesis do not share the strong focus on identification of alternate strategies for achieving agreement on intended meaning which has been so typical of work on communication strategies.

All three areas of research are very important in our attempt to sort out what is going on in attempts to communicate across languages and cultures; all three types of research will be necessary in analyzing such interactions. It is hoped that this brief paper will be of some help to those doing research in these areas, making us more aware of closely related research interests in our field.

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APPENDIX A

A Typology of Communication Strategies (from Tarone 1978)

Paraphrase

- Approximation
 - Use of a single target language vocabulary item or structure, which the learner knows is not correct, but which shares enough semantic features in common with the desired item to satisfy the speaker (e.g., “pipe” for “waterpipe”).
- Word coinage
 - The learner makes up a new word in order to communicate a desired concept (e.g., “airball” for “balloon”).
- Circumlocution
 - The learner describes the characteristics or elements of the object or action instead of using the appropriate TL structure (“She is, uh, smoking something. I don’t know what’s its name. That’s, uh, Persian, and we use in Turkey, a lot of”).

Transfer

- Literal translation
 - The learner translates word for word from the native language (e.g., “He invites him to drink” for “They toast one another”).
- Language switch
 - The learner uses the NL term without bothering to translate (e.g., “balon” for “balloon” or “tirtil” for “caterpillar”).
- Appeal for assistance
 - The learner asks for the correct term or structure (e.g., “What is this?”).
- Mime
 - The learner uses nonverbal strategies in place of a meaning structure (e.g., clapping one’s hands to illustrate applause).

Avoidance

- Topic avoidance
 - Occurs when the learner simply does not talk about concepts for which the vocabulary or other meaning structure is not known.
- Message abandonment
 - Occurs when the learner begins to talk about a concept but is unable to continue due to lack of meaning structure, and stops in mid-utterance.

APPENDIX B
Conversation Between M.S. and E.T.
(from Tarone 1978)

Strategy	ET: Do you have a single word in Mandarin that describes this?
Approximation	MS: No. Uh, yes, um, we, maybe we have one, jus, just like uh do you know, um a, a poison there is, uh, no . . .
Approximation	ET: A drug? [Opium?]
Circumlocution	MS: [Yeah,] smoking . . .
	ET: Opium.
Phonetic approximation	MS: Op . . .
	ET: Opium.
Learning strategy?	MS: How do you spell?
	ET: O-P-I-U-M.
Leaning strategy?	MS: O-P-I-U-M. Is a . . .
Approximation	ET: It's a [drug.]
Approximation	MS: [Is a] kind of, plant?
Approximation	ET: Mm hm. It's a [poppy.]
Learning strategy?	MS: [Opium.]
Circumlocution	ET: It's a poppy plant that grows and the flower is [very bright.]
	MS: [Yes, yes.] Oh.
	ET: Opium.
Literal translation	MS: Oh. Yes, we, we have one called . . . Mandarin is ya pien yen (literally, opium pipe).

APPENDIX C “Word Search” (from Schwartz 1977)

- Hamid: Do you- do you spend uh (.4) some drugs =
 Mari: =mmhm=
 Hamid: =in your food?
 Mari: MM hm (.2) ye:s=
 Hamid: =like saffron, or salt, or pepper something like that?
 Mari: m hmmm
 Mari: Oh: I: see. Yes mm (1.0) Japanese?
 Hamid: Yes, in [Japanese food]
 Mari: [o:h] in Japanese food. Mmm Japanese food
 no:t spi-cy: (.2)
 Mari: almost=
 Hamid: =what does it mean? spicy
 Mari: Spicy means uh mm (1.0) mm mm m not- do you know spice?
 (.2)
 Mari: Spicy meaning uh sometimes with sed with uh tree seeds or uh:
 nuts
 Hamid: Yes=
 Mari: = mm example um tabasuko? and uh, muhstad [mm and pepper]
 Hamid: [yes I got it]
 Mari: not spicy Japanese food
 (.2)
 Mari: very soft taste
 Hamid: Yeah
 Mari: Yeah [mm]
 Hamid: [It's] different from u:h Indian food.

Transcription key

- = “Latching”; no interval between the end of a prior turn and the start of the next.
- Hyphen after a word or partial word indicates self-interruption or cut-off.
- ... Indicates pause longer than .5 seconds.
- (1.5) Pauses in tenths of seconds.
- [mm]
[It's] Brackets indicate overlapped speech. The first bracket shows where speaker 1's speech begins to overlap speaker 2's; the second bracket shows where overlap ends.
- Ch: Colon indicates prior syllable is prolonged.