The Effects of Awareness-Raising Training on Oral Communication Strategy Use

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This study examines current patterns of oral communication strategy (OCS) use, to what degree these strategies can be explicitly taught, and the extent to which strategy use can lead to improvements in oral communication ability.

In a 12-week English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course based on a communicative approach, 62 female learners were divided into 2 groups. The strategy training group ($n = 28$) received metacognitive training, focusing on OCS use, whereas the control group ($n = 34$) received only the normal communicative course, with no explicit focus on OCSs. The effects of the training were assessed by 3 types of data collection: the participants' pre- and postcourse oral communication test scores, transcription data from the tests, and retrospective protocol data for their task performance.

The findings revealed that participants in the strategy training group significantly improved their oral proficiency test scores, whereas improvements in the control group were not significant. The results of the transcription and retrospective protocol data analyses confirmed that the participants' success was partly due to an increased general awareness of OCSs and to the use of specific OCSs, such as maintenance of fluency and negotiation of meaning to solve interactional difficulties.

INITIAL RESEARCH INTO LEARNING strategies sought to identify the characteristics of good language learners (Rubin, 1975; Wong-Fillmore, 1979). The researchers assumed that proficient learners might be using special techniques that differed from those of less proficient learners. Since then, numerous Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies have identified the particular strategies of effective learners (e.g., Bialystok, 1978; Brown & Palincsar, 1982). Questions have also been raised about how to introduce the strategies of good learners to students in foreign (FL) or second language (L2) classrooms (e.g., Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Oxford, 1990). Recent research in SLA has argued that use of specific strategies plays an important role in learning the target language (e.g., McDonough, 1995; Oxford, 1996). In particular, many scholars believe that metacognitive strategies, which focus on raising the learner's awareness of the learning process, might enhance L2 skills (Cohen, 1998; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1991). It has also been suggested that learners' communicative skills can be improved by developing strategies for communication (e.g., Cohen, Weaver, & Li, 1998; Dörnyei, 1995). It seems reasonable to hypothesize that raising learners' awareness of strategies that they might use to solve potential communication problems could develop their oral proficiency.

Despite agreement over the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies, little concrete work has been done to provide a method of metacognitive strategy training that would equip students to use communication strategies appropriately and effectively. Until recently, research on strategy

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training for communication has been limited almost exclusively to cognitive strategy applications for vocabulary learning tasks (e.g., Kitajima, 1997; Poulisse, 1990). Only a small amount of research has attempted to confirm how strategies are used for oral production as learners engage in interactional tasks. Furthermore, there are no studies that examine how learners' actual strategy use contributes to their English as a foreign language (EFL) oral proficiency.

By combining several assessment methods, such as analysis of learners' conversation test scores, transcription data from the tests, and retrospective verbal reports, this study investigates the effect on EFL learners of awareness training about strategy use in conversational interaction and examines the relationship of strategy use to EFL oral proficiency.

BACKGROUND

Strategic Competence and Metacognitive Strategy Training

Although it is generally agreed that strategy training should enhance learners' *strategic competence*, there is little agreement over the definition of this concept. For instance, Canale and Swain (1980) regarded strategic competence as the ability to use verbal and nonverbal strategies in order to avoid communication breakdowns that might be caused by a learner's lack of appropriate knowledge of the target language. Canale (1983) modified this view and defined strategic competence as the skills underlying actual communication. He expanded this concept to include both the compensatory characteristics of communication strategies and the enhancement characteristics of production strategies. Bachman (1990) separated strategic competence clearly from *language competence* (knowledge of and about a language) by regarding strategic competence as a capacity that projects language competence into real communication contexts. The concept was further broadened by Bachman and Palmer (1996) who defined strategic competence as "a set of metacognitive components, or strategies, which can be thought of as higher order executive processes that provide a cognitive management function in language use" (p. 70). They proposed a clear model of strategic competence that included three components: *goal-setting*, *assessment,* and *planning*. According to this model, learners need to make a conscious effort to set task goals, assess what is needed to work with the task, and plan how to use their topic and language knowledge. The model emphasizes the importance of knowing how to manage the language as well as language knowledge itself. The underlying concept of this model is that FL learning requires awareness of metacognitive strategy use.

It is evident that the term *strategic competence* is used differently by different scholars. This article follows the argument of Bachman and Palmer (1996), which is based on the cognitive theory that language learning involves many conscious decisions at both the cognitive and the metacognitive levels. For the purposes of this study, *strategic competence* is defined as the ability to manage communication not only during an interaction, but also before and after the interaction, in order to achieve an intended interactional goal. Strategic competence is the ability to use metacognitive strategies consciously in order to solve language-related difficulties in communicative situations.

Metacognitive strategy training has been reported to be effective (Cohen, 1998; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1999). Because language or FL learning involves complex cognitive skills, learners are heavily engaged in conscious internal mental activity. The production of unfamiliar FL speech is particularly difficult. In order to cope with difficulties that arise in oral communication in the FL, learners need to use a variety of communication strategies. The question then becomes: How can they come to use strategies effectively in order to learn the FL?

Schmidt (1990) focused on the role of the learner's consciousness as one of the important factors of target language acquisition. He argued that the frequency and salience of target language input may be essential conditions for extracting meaning from that input. The more frequently learners recognize specific features of input, the better chance they have of accessing that input. The more perceptually salient the features of input, the greater the chance they can influence conscious learning. Thus we may say that the degree to which target language data are integrated into a learner's schematic system depends on the learner's awareness of the learning process. However, when generating the target language, learners have to recognize a communicative goal and manage their inadequate interlanguage system to achieve collaborative interaction by intentionally using strategic and contextual knowledge.

The EFL learners in this study tended to be unskilled at channeling their attention and at deciding on which part of an utterance to focus. They had little idea when to apply knowledge of specific contexts in order to solve problems during FL communication. They were not familiar with using strategies to generate the target language functionally. Accordingly, it can be said that they

lacked the metacognitive skills needed to learn the FL through interaction.

Therefore, in the training program in this study, the focus was on metacognitive strategies that could enhance the learners' creative use of language to get meaning across in contexts of authentic interactions despite their target language deficiencies. In particular, the current study examined the applicability of awareness training in order to develop communication strategies for interaction.

Studies on Strategy Training for Communication

In view of the importance of metacognitive strategy training, let us consider how previous, representative studies have evaluated its usefulness in actual learning programs. Only a small amount of research has attempted to confirm how strategies for oral production are used as learners engage in actual tasks. O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzares, Russo, and Kupper (1985) examined whether metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies could be taught successfully in an English as a second language (ESL) classroom context. They integrated tasks involving listening, speaking, and vocabulary training and found that their strategy training had a significant effect on performance in a speaking task, but that it had no effect on performance in vocabulary and listening tasks. This mixed finding on strategy training in the classroom setting suggests that, although learning strategies can be taught, the success rate of the instruction is not always predictable. In general, O'Malley et al.'s results indicate the usefulness of metacognitive training that aims at raising students' awareness of strategies to help them deliver meaningful messages in speaking tasks. However, the researchers only dealt with training students to deliver a monologue to an audience. There was no task-training for conversation with others in the target language. Therefore, it is worthwhile in this study to examine the effects of metacognitive strategy training on conversation tasks.

Unlike O'Malley and his colleagues, Dörnyei (1995) looked at speaking skills in conversation. He examined the teachability of communication strategies by focusing on whether the training of a specific strategy enhanced the quantity and quality of learners' strategy use. His study was conducted in high school EFL classes in Hungary over a period of 6 weeks. He used three types of communication strategy: topic avoidance and replacement, circumlocution, and using fillers and hesitation in order to remain in the conversation and gain time to think. The focus was on strategies for solving a learner's own performance problems, which did not require interaction with others. A significant improvement was found among the participants in the strategy training group in the quality and quantity of strategy use and in their overall speech performance. In addition, participants in this group showed positive attitudes towards their training. These results indicate that strategy training might be effective for developing conversation skills. However, the study excluded the types of negotiation behaviors used when learners carry out trouble shooting exchanges cooperatively. Also, Dörnyei's study did not seem to address clearly the question of how to integrate metacognitive strategy training directly into a strategy-based program in order to develop learners' strategic competence.

An initial attempt to introduce metacognitive strategies for target language communication training was made by Cohen et al. (1998). In their study, they taught students specific strategies for oral communication, such as preparation, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. In order to evaluate the effect of the training, the researchers analyzed the results of pre- and posttraining speaking tests and checklists that the students filled out to document their strategy use. The students who received strategy training partially improved their test scores on the posttests. Yet the results of the strategy checklists suggested that high-proficiency students did not always use more strategies than lower-proficiency students. Although Cohen et al. attempted to improve the learners' target language communication ability, their instruction model did not seem to introduce efficiently such interaction skills as negotiation of meaning between interlocutors as a crucial component for learning the target language. Their results reflect their approach to the evaluation of speech performances. By using semidirect, one-way audiotaped recordings they did not pay attention to the interactional aspects of oral production.

In summary, the preceding discussion has highlighted several important points. First, research suggests that pairing communication strategies with appropriate metacognitive strategy training could enhance learners' awareness of strategy use and develop their communicative skills. Second, strategy training studies have, to date, excluded strategies for negotiation aimed at achieving communicative goals in the target language. It is necessary to examine whether EFL learners can be guided to communicative success through the effective use of strategies for interaction.

Definitions of Oral Communication Strategies

In order to avoid using terms that may cause the confusion in this research area, the term *oral communication strategy* (OCS) is used instead of *communication strategy*. Oral communication strategies specifically focus on oral interaction and interlocutors' negotiation behavior for coping with communication breakdowns.

As Dörnyei (1995) pointed out, opinions diverge on what constitutes a communication strategy. In particular, two different types of definition have evolved. Focusing on the range of problem-solving activities open to the individual has come to be regarded as *the psycholinguistic view* (e.g., Bialystok, 1983; Kitajima, 1997; Poulisse, 1990). Focusing on the interaction between interlocutors and negotiation of meaning has come to be recognized as *the interactional view* (e.g., Rost & Ross, 1991; Willems, 1987). The position adopted in this article is close to that of the interactional view because I am particularly interested in EFL learners' strategy use during interaction with their communication partners in classroom tasks.

Many researchers have stated that learners can comprehend the target language and assist in their acquisition of it through negotiation of meaning with an interlocutor (e.g., Gass, 1998; Nakahama, Tyler, & van Lier, 2001; Pica, 1996). It has also been suggested that the use of communication strategies could improve learners' skills for interpersonal communication (Bejarano, Levine, Olshtain, & Steiner, 1997; Clennel, 1995). Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine whether attempts by EFL learners to solve communicative problems that occur during interaction could be shaped into important components of a strategy-based program for communication performance. However, there is little research that investigates learners' use of strategies for communication by using their actual discourse data, and there remains the unsettled question of taxonomies of strategies for communication. The following section reports on how the EFL learners' use of OCSs was analyzed in this study.

METHOD

Research Design

The present study investigated how students with low speaking ability changed their use of OCSs after undergoing strategy training. These changes were then related to the students' gains in oral communication ability after the course. The study asked the following three questions.

1. How does explicit instruction in oral communication strategies affect students' speaking proficiency?
2. What kind of impact does strategy training have on students' discourse?
3. How do the students perceive their test performance and strategy use in their retrospective verbal report protocols?

Participants

The participants consisted of 62 female students enrolled in mixed-level 12-week EFL classes (90 minutes per week) at a private college in Japan. They ranged in age from 18 to 19 years old. Each student had completed 6 years of English study prior to entering the college. The students chose these classes because of class availability at particular times, which means that they were not randomly assigned to groups. This is a potential weakness of the study. Given that female-only participant groups were chosen, the results of the current study might not relate to populations that do not share similar characteristics.

The strategy training group comprised 28 students who received the OCS training. Another 34 students served as a control group. Both groups were taught by the same instructor using a basic communicative approach, including information gap activities. In addition, the strategy training group received explicit strategy training. Though the participants were not randomly assigned to groups, there was no significant difference between the two groups in the results of the oral communication pretest ($t = 0.497$, $p = .614$). Therefore, it can be said that the participants were evenly distributed between the two groups according to the results of the pretest.

Strategy Training Group

For the strategy training group, explicit strategy instruction was introduced to help the learners become aware of their own learning processes. In order to develop their metacognitive skills, specific oral communication strategies that might enhance skills for managing interaction actively during spontaneous communication were selected and described on an oral communication strategy sheet, which was delivered to students at the beginning of the course. The sheet listed examples of achievement strategies (see "Achievement Strategies" section for detailed explanation) that the students could use in each lesson. From these lists, the students could locate strategies that they believed useful for interaction in

specific tasks. The students also used a strategy diary (see Appendix A) to make plans, monitor, and evaluate their performance. I did not analyze the diary data for the current research project. The strategy diary was specifically used for self-reflective training by the learners. The strategy training consisted of a five-phase instructional sequence: *review*, *presentation*, *rehearsal*, *performance,* and *evaluation*. In the review phase, the students reflected on the previous lesson and repeated its simulation task at the beginning of each new lesson, which enabled them to warm up for a new task. In the presentation stage, according to an instructor's guideline, the students recognized the goals and procedures of the new task and discussed through brainstorming sessions basic dialogues that they were asked to create and the possible OCSs for doing so. During the next stage, the students rehearsed once with their peers and used their diaries to make plans for using specific OCSs. When they then performed the tasks, they monitored their own performance according to the guidelines of the strategy diary. They were encouraged to use OCSs intentionally during the task. During the evaluation stage, the students checked and reflected on their own learning in order to develop their metacognitive awareness. They reflected on their strategy use and analyzed their self-assessment of their performance assessment by using the strategy diary.

Control Group

The control group took part in communicative tasks based on materials similar to those used for the strategy training group but without any specific strategic focus. They were exposed to a conversation-training supplement that was similar in length to the strategic supplement of the strategy training group (usually 15 to 20 minutes). Hence, they engaged in communication activities, such as pair work and group work, for a longer period than did the students in the strategy training group. When reviewing their lessons, the instructor summarized the contents, and the students did not self-evaluate. The students in the control group focused more on conversation with peers and spent more time practicing speaking than did the strategy training group. Therefore, we can say that the students in the control group were expected to learn English by using the target language as much as possible in authentic interaction but that they had much less time for reflection.

Test Items and Assessment Scale

Speaking Tasks. All participants were asked to complete simulated authentic conversation tasks on both a pretest and posttest to determine whether they were able to improve their speaking ability over 12 weeks. Different tasks (see Appendix B) were used for the pretest and the posttest to avoid improvement of scores through familiarization with the test content. The difficulty of these two tests was examined in the pilot study and no significant difference was found between them. The tasks were similar to daily classroom activities. Students were given a card describing a hypothetical situation that they might encounter while traveling alone in a foreign country. They were given 5 minutes to prepare a role-play in which the student test takers assumed the role of a customer and the interviewer was a clerk. The student and interviewer engaged in a simulated conversation derived from a situation described on a card. The interviewer in the role-play tasks did not carry out any assessment during the conversation; instead, the interaction was recorded on videotape.

Assessment Procedures. I used the Oral Communication Assessment Scale for Japanese EFL Students (see Appendix C), which was established by an action research project at the college (Nakatani, 2002). This scale consists of seven different levels and focuses on the learner's fluency, ability to interact with the interlocutor, and flexibility in developing dialogue. Two independent assessors, who were native speakers of English, did the scoring. Neither was involved in the tests. Each rater was asked to watch the video of the tasks and to score the first 6 minutes of each participant's conversation. The raters were not given any information about the candidates' English proficiency so there was no halo effect. The interrater reliability of the pretest, estimated by Cronbach's alpha, was .896, a high degree of coefficiency.

DISCOURSE DATA

All the videotaped pretests and posttests were transcribed and analyzed. The transcripts consisted of the 62 participants' pre- and posttest discourse. A third trained English-speaking observer reviewed the transcripts while watching the videotapes and focused specifically on the segmentation and content of each utterance. A detailed analysis of the discourse in the oral proficiency tasks was conducted as follows: (a) The quantity of speech production was measured by the number of words per c-unit (an utterance, such as a word, phrase, or sentence, that gives referential or pragmatic meaning to interaction [see Brock, 1986]) in each participant's transcript; and (b) the degree to which the participants

exhibited different patterns of achievement and reduction strategy use was analyzed on the pretest and posttests.

Speech Production

The participants' speech production rates were counted by the number of words per c-unit, which indicates how many words the students used for an utterance. C-unit analysis was useful for assessing the Japanese EFL students' performance because their discourse consisted of many 1-word utterances and incomplete sentences. The participants' false starts, slips, and unnecessary self-repetitions for buying time were excluded from the number of words because they did not seem to have any pragmatic meaning. For example, fillers whose use was not appropriate in English but was rather influenced by Japanese such as "*Ee*?" 'Really?' were excluded.

Strategy Use

In the evaluation of the participants' strategy use, the focus was on how strategies were used for the purpose of communication and on how this use represented the extent of discourse in the oral proficiency tests. According to previous research dealing with transcription data analysis, strategies for communication have been categorized into achievement and reduction strategies (see, e.g., Dörnyei, 1995). The general consensus is that the former present learners' active behavior in repairing and maintaining interaction, and the latter reflect learners' negative behavior as they try to avoid solving communication difficulties, which is a common behavior among low-proficiency learners. These two types of strategies observed in the transcription data of this study were further subcategorized into several groupings based on previous representative studies (e.g., Bialystok, 1983; Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Tarone, 1983). A detailed explanation of these strategies and of the examples collected in the current research follows.

Achievement Strategies

The following categories were classified as achievement strategies: *help-seeking, modified interaction, modified output, time-gaining, maintenance*, and *self-solving* strategies.

Help-Seeking Strategies. The help-seeking strategies were of two types: *an appeal for help* and *asking for repetition*. The former was used when seeking an interlocutor's assistance in solving problems caused by the lack of target language knowledge. The latter was used when the participant did not hear or understand what the partner had said. These strategies are exemplified by the following student utterances.

Appeal for help: *I'm sorry, I don't understand.*
Asking for repetition: *I beg your pardon?*

Modified Interaction Strategies. The modified interaction strategy was the process whereby the students sent signals for negotiation in order to overcome communication difficulties. This process included *confirmation checks*, *comprehension checks*, and *clarification requests*. Confirmation checks are used to confirm that the speaker has understood something correctly, for example *"My reservation no? No bargain?"* Comprehension checks are used to see if the listener has understood correctly, for example, "I have a little money, so change to double room. *Do you see?*" Clarification requests ask for an explanation when the speaker does not entirely comprehend something, for example, *"Why? What kinds of tour?"*

Modified Output Strategies. When using this type of strategy, the participants rephrased an utterance in response to their conversation partners' signals for negotiation. The students were given opportunities to produce specific grammar points in creative and complex ways when speaking in the target language, which could lead them to improve their interlanguage. Modified output is exemplified as follows.

Customer (student): 10 o'clock? I heard 9 o'clock.
Travel agent (interviewer): Which one? Pardon?
Customer: *I heard the flight time is 9 o'clock.*

Time-Gaining Strategies. When the speakers had difficulties expressing an idea, they used these strategies to give themselves time to think and to keep the communication channel open. The conscious use of fillers such as "Well, let me see . . . " and filled pauses such as "Oh . . . " enabled them to keep the conversation going. Time-gaining strategies are exemplified as follows.

Travel agent (interviewer): When will you start?
Customer (student): *Let me see* . . . tomorrow.

Maintenance Strategies. Maintenance strategies consisted of two types: *providing active response* and *shadowing*. The former entailed making positive comments or using other conversation gambits such as "I know what you mean" and "Sounds

good." The latter type presented exact, partial, or expanded repetitions of the interlocutor's preceding utterance in order to show the listener's understanding of important issues. Therefore, shadowing was functionally different from other types of repetition such as false starts and self-repetitions.

The following exemplifies providing active response.

Customer (student): *Really?*
Customer (student): *I see, OK.*

Shadowing can be seen in the next example.

Travel agent (interviewer): We have a bargain tour for four days.
Customer (student): *Four days.* Ah . . . OK.

Self-Solving Strategies. When the learners encountered difficulties caused by their own insufficient linguistic resources, they used these strategies to solve the problems without their interlocutor's help. They tried to find relevant linguistic items or expressions by using *paraphrase, approximation,* and *restructuring*. Paraphrasing took the form of exemplification or circumlocution for describing characteristic properties or functions of the intended term. In using approximation the learners used an alternative expression that had semantic features similar to those of the intended term. In restructuring, the learners changed to another expression in order to communicate the intended message when they realized their problem in completing a sentence.

Paraphrase: Trying to explain the word *harbor*
Customer (student): *the place for ships . . . like bay* (instead of *harbor*)

Approximation of the word *accept*
Customer (student): Do you *available* travelers' check?

Restructuring of request
Customer (student): *May I see . . . sorry, can I use travelers' check?*

Reduction Strategies

The following strategies were categorized as reduction strategies: *message abandonment strategies, first-language-based strategies, interlanguage-based reduction strategies,* and *false starts.*

Message Abandonment Strategies. The students used these strategies to avoid engaging in communication when they faced problems in the target language. When they were not able to find appropriate forms or rules, they stopped speaking in midsentence and left a message unfinished. They sometimes paused for a long time without appealing to the interlocutor to help finish the utterance. In the worst case, they kept silent without any response. These can be seen in the following example.

Travel agent (interviewer): . . . Also we request our customer to pay beforehand.
Customer (student): . . . *before* . . . [long pause]

First-Language-Based Strategies. These strategies consisted of interjections in Japanese for a lexical item when the learner experienced communication difficulties. The students occasionally used Japanese either intentionally or unintentionally.

Interjection of Japanese words:

Hotel clerk (interviewer): . . . Anything else?
Customer (student): How can I go . . . [pause] *minato* (harbor) . . . *yotto* (yacht) . . .

Interlanguage-Based Reduction Strategies. When the learners faced communication problems due to a lack of linguistic resources, they sometimes coped by using their interlanguage system to reduce intended utterances and avoided using certain language structures or specific topics. By cutting out some intended elements, they occasionally produced inappropriate word order based on their interlanguage system. For example:

Travel agent (interviewer): . . . and a standard 3-day tour costs $200.
Customer (student): *More more cheaply.*

Travel agent (interviewer): The flight arrives at L.A. at 10 o'clock.
Customer (student): I . . . *I heard leaves* L.A. at 9 o'clock.

False Starts. False starts referred to occasions in the conversational discourse when the learners ran into difficulties in executing their utterance and repeated one or more of the preceding words. This repetition caused disruptions in their plans for producing the intended utterances accurately. The learners sometimes used false starts with pauses, and occasionally they used them when they realized that there were problems with the expression they were using, such as: *I . . . I don' t . . . I don't breakfast . . . I have . . . I don't have . . .*

Retrospective Verbal Protocol

Verbal protocol analysis has been recognized as an essential method in investigating learners' intentions behind their strategy use during

communicative tasks (e.g., Clennel, 1995; Cohen, 1998; O'Malley et al., 1985). This method can provide researchers with useful information regarding how and why learners choose specific strategies. When this information is compared with learners' actual discourse data, it can provide researchers further insight into the EFL learners' conscious strategy use.

In this study, all students were asked to review their performance on the pre- and posttest tasks by listening to the audiotape recording made during the tests. They were instructed to record their thoughts, in Japanese, on another tape while listening to their performance. They were supposed to report what they were thinking during the tests when they encountered interaction difficulties and what their reactions were to their communication problems.

These retrospective verbal reports were transcribed and used to understand the students' reasons for their strategy use and personal reactions to them. The verbatim transcripts were coded for the appearance and incidence of OCSs by using the taxonomy presented in the preceding section of this article. An additional, independent reader who was asked to examine the transcripts independently verified the transcriptions and provided similar results on the coding. I have translated these retrospective data into English in this article.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: The Effect of Strategy Training on Speaking Proficiency

Paired-samples t tests (two-tailed) were introduced to examine whether there was a significant difference in score gains within each group. These results are presented in Table 1. The improvement in the students' speech scores was significant in the strategy training group (mean gain: 1.38, $t = 4.11$, $p < .01$). By contrast, there was no significant change in the control group scores (mean gain: 0.25, $t = 1.05$). The interrater reliability of the posttest, estimated by Cronbach's alpha, was .92, a high degree of coefficiency, which clearly demonstrates that raters were able to differentiate between the two groups with enough consistency.

TABLE 2
Comparison of the Two Groups' Production Rate on Pre- and Posttest by t tests

	Strategy Training Group ($n = 28$)		Control Group ($n = 34$)			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Pretest	2.49	0.43	2.35	0.63	1.1	*ns*
Posttest	2.95	0.41	2.45	0.5	4.3	<.01

In short, the students in the strategy-training group improved their proficiency in the oral communication tests significantly more than those in the control group. Instruction based on OCSs seemed to facilitate target language development during the simulated tasks. The lack of a significant improvement in the control group indicates that simply offering students communication practice was not sufficient to develop their speaking ability.

Research Question 2: The Impact of Strategy Training on Students' Discourse

Production Rate. Table 2 shows the results of independent two-tailed t tests comparing the two groups' production rates on the pre- and posttests. As can be seen in the table, there was no significant difference between the two groups on the pretest. In contrast, on the posttest, the strategy training group produced more words per c-unit than the control group ($p < .01$). The results indicate that, through explicit strategy training, the students in the strategy training group learned to make longer utterances that enhanced their abilities to negotiate meaning and maintain the conversation flow than the control group.

Changes in Strategy Use. In order to examine the differences between the two groups, a repeated-measures two-way ANOVA with one between-subject factor (training) and one within-subject

TABLE 1
Results of t tests on Test Score Gains between the Two Groups

Group	*df*	Pretest *M* (*SD*)	Posttest *M* (*SD*)	Gain	*t*	*p*
Strategy Training Group ($n = 28$)	26	2.23 (1.25)	3.61 (1.59)	1.38	4.11	.01
Control Group ($n = 34$)	32	2.41 (1.54)	2.66 (1.35)	0.25	1.05	*ns*

TABLE 3
Means and Standard Deviations of Strategy Use on Pre- and Posttests

	Strategy Training				Control			
	Pretest		Posttest		Pretest		Posttest	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Achievement Strategies								
Help-Seeking	0.64	0.9	0.96	1.1	0.79	1.0	0.71	0.9
Modified Interaction	2.46	2.9	4.82	2.8	2.06	2.4	1.76	2.2
Modified Output	0.18	0.4	1.79	1.1	0.09	0.3	0.29	0.6
Time-Gaining	0.14	0.5	2.21	2	0.56	1.3	0.44	0.8
Maintenance	3.46	4	8.61	6.3	2.53	3.5	3.53	3.4
Self-Solving	0.96	0.8	1.14	1.2	1.44	1.6	1.38	1.4
Total	7.84	5.5	19.53	8.7	7.47	7.2	8.11	6
Reduction Strategies								
Message Abandonment	18.4	7	9.57	4.5	19.9	8.6	20.4	6.6
First-Language-Based	1.21	2	0.5	0.9	1.85	2.4	2.15	2.8
Interlanguage-Based Reduction	5.82	2.9	4.82	2.1	3.5	2.4	3.5	2.6
False Starts	3.93	3	3.11	2.4	2.59	3.1	3.09	2.2
Total	29.36	9	18	6.1	27.84	9.9	29.14	8

factor (test) was conducted for each category of strategies. Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations for each achievement and reduction strategy used on the pre- and posttests by both groups respectively. Table 4 presents a summary of the results of ANOVAs for each category of these strategy types. (See Appendix D for the full results of ANOVAs for each category.)

Among the achievement strategies, the results of the ANOVAs revealed that there was a significant effect for training ($p < .01$), a significant effect for test ($p < .01$), and significant interaction between test and training ($p < .01$) in the following strategies: modified interaction, modified output, time-gaining, and maintenance strategies. These results indicate that the strategy training group significantly increased their use of these strategies compared to the control group. No significant difference was found in the use of help-seeking strategies or self-solving strategies.

TABLE 4
Summary of ANOVA Results for Categories of Strategy Use

	F ratio		
	Training	Test	Interaction
Achievement Strategies			
Help-Seeking	0.08	0.52	1.6
Modified Interaction	9.72**	8.57**	14.16**
Modified Output	45.21**	65.5**	39.12**
Time-Gaining	8.3**	19.39**	24.34**
Maintenance	9.27**	33.97**	15.45**
Self-Solving	1.62	0.12	0.47
Total	15.83**	60.83**	44.04**
Reduction Strategies			
Message Abandonment	15.72**	26.05**	32.28**
First-Language-Based	5.64*	0.57	3.27
Interlanguage-Based Reduction	13.55**	1.52	1.52
False Starts	1.42	0.18	3.03
Total	29.63**	216.36**	28.95**

Note. $df = 1$.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Regarding the use of reduction strategies, the results of the ANOVAs indicate that the strategy training group decreased the number of reduction strategies, especially message abandonment strategies, compared to the control group ($p < .01$). No change was found in the use of first-language-based, interlanguage-based, or false start strategies, which suggests that the use of these strategies could not be significantly changed by the strategy training.

Examination of the transcription data indicates that the strategy training helped learners improve their ability to develop discourse by applying achievement strategies and avoiding reduction strategies. In particular, the students in the strategy training group significantly increased their use of strategies for negotiation in order to solve communication difficulties and avoid misunderstanding. For instance, they came to use more confirmation and comprehension checks after the training. It can be assumed that they actively confirmed the interlocutor's utterances in order to improve their comprehension. These strategies enabled the students to receive precise, modified input concerning the interlocutor's previous utterance. The students also learned to modify their utterances actively when they received negotiation signals from the interlocutor. They appeared to make use of these opportunities to try out new forms and modify other forms, thereby adjusting their utterances to achieve mutual comprehension. Moreover, these students reduced the number of conversation gaps in their discourse by using strategies for taking the floor, buying time to think of an appropriate expression, and responding flexibly, tactics that enabled them to maintain the conversation flow. It seems reasonable to say that this explicit strategy training can enhance EFL learners' OCS use and thus help to develop their target language interaction.

Research Question 3: Student Perceptions of Test Performance and Strategy Use

The focus of the verbal protocol analyses presented in this article is on qualitative examples of the strategies that provide evidence of the learners' awareness of strategy use. The following verbal protocol data for the pre- and posttests present what participants in each group thought when facing communication difficulties and how they reacted to their communication problems in the conversation tests. The presentation of these results consists of two sections. First, pretest verbal protocol data are used to examine how the students perceived their task performance before the training. Then, their posttest data are analyzed in order to compare the types of strategies used by the two groups.

Before the Training. When reviewing their pretests, the participants in both groups clearly reported their communication problems. The results indicate that before the course they sometimes lacked sufficient linguistic knowledge for spontaneous communication or that they lacked strategic knowledge to maintain their interaction before the course, or both. They felt under pressure to produce the FL accurately but could not always find ways to respond to unpredictable situations. They may have been unable to respond appropriately because they had rarely used English to make real decisions about what they wished to achieve, and they had rarely adjusted their language according to such decisions. As seen in the following pretest verbal protocol data, neither the strategy training group nor the control group reported using any achievement strategies; they used only the message abandonment strategy.

Strategy Training Group

> I've learned English for 6 years, but it is still very difficult for me to make myself understood in English. In this task, there were many unexpected questions and responses from the hotel clerk. I often lost track of what I was saying.
>
> I attempted to use appropriate forms again and again but I got confused and I didn't. I spoke disjointedly with many pauses. I was frustrated because I couldn't say what I wanted to say.

Control Group

> I couldn't catch what the speaker said because he spoke too fast, and so I couldn't respond. I just waited until the speaker gave me some help.
>
> I took too much time to think how to make English sentences. I feel strongly that I lack knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar.
>
> When I was asked difficult questions, I had a very hard time thinking what kind of language I should use in such unexpected situations.

After the Training. Students in the strategy training group reported that they had learned to use achievement strategies on the posttest. In particular, they showed awareness of using modified interaction, modified input, time-gaining, and maintenance strategies in order to solve their communication difficulties.

The following examples illustrate ways in which they negotiated meaning with their interlocutors by using modified interaction and modified output. The first student example shows the use of clarification requests that could help mutual understanding. The second student example shows her positive attitude toward providing comprehension checks to maintain discourse. The third student example illustrates the use of confirmation checks learned during the strategy training. The fourth and fifth student examples illustrate the use of modified output in order to adjust to an appropriate way of speaking when receiving signals for negotiation.

Modified Interaction

S1: When I did not understand what the speaker said, I tried to request his explanation. I could manage to carry on my conversation by signaling my difficulties to the partner.

S2: I often checked whether I could make myself understood. I paid attention to whether the listener followed my speech. Such behavior seemed to help us maintain the conversation.

S3: When I heard a difficult expression, I didn't let it pass. I attempted to check the meaning by repeating a part of speaker's utterance. This is a useful technique that I have learned during lessons.

Modified Output

S4: I tried to change my utterances when the clerk couldn't understand my intention. After the training, I got used to helping my communication partner understand what I wanted to say.

S5: I attempted to repeat or change the speaker's previous utterance in order to check whether my understanding was correct.

With respect to gaining time to think of an appropriate expression, the following data indicate that students in the strategy training group used fillers and filled pauses. They became aware of how to avoid communication breakdowns by using time-gaining strategies. However, the third student reported that with the use of some strategies, it was not always easy to improve the form of her utterances.

Time-Gaining Strategies

S1: When I needed time to think, I said 'well' and 'let me see' instead of keeping silent.

S2: I tried not to make communication gaps. I intentionally used fillers.

S3: It was not so easy to use some strategies spontaneously. I could only use fillers to avoid communication breakdowns as they were easy to use. I had still problems making myself understood in English.

It might therefore be difficult to conclude that strategy training affects all students positively because such training might not fit some students' general approaches to learning.

There were also instances when the students seemed to realize that they could better maintain and develop their conversation by using maintenance strategies. In these instances, the first student reported that she attempted to express things in her own way. The second student indicated that she made efforts to keep the conversation flowing by reacting smoothly and signaling her understanding of the important point. The third student clearly noticed the effectiveness of shadowing.

Maintenance Strategies

S1: I frequently signaled my understanding and tried to react smoothly. I realized that I could express myself in my own words to some extent.

S2: I signaled that I'd understood by nodding and giving positive responses such as "Yes," "Ah." I often used shadowing in order to confirm that I've understood.

S3: I think shadowing is a very useful strategy. By using it, I could interact well and make our conversation fluent.

As seen in the following examples, some students in the control group indicated an improvement in their attitude on the posttest. They seemed to be able to control affective factors such as anxiety. They had been involved in communication-centered lessons, and they appeared to have gained confidence expressing themselves in English. However, they reported using few strategies for maintaining interaction when they had communication difficulties. They did not seem to recognize any particular strategies for solving problems, such as negotiation of meaning or gaining time to think. They reported that they had no choice but to use message abandonment strategies when facing conversation problems.

S1: Last time I was totally confused and I couldn't say what I wanted. So this time, I tried to relax during the conversation and I spoke more smoothly.

S2: Generally, I feel much better about speaking English, but I sometimes stopped my conversation.

S3: I couldn't speak well in the test. When I didn't understand the speaker's utterances, I lost my words. I got into a sort of panic.

S4: When I didn't understand a word I paid too much attention to it, and consequently I couldn't say anything.

S5: When I had trouble understanding the interlocutor's utterance, I couldn't respond and became silent. I paused a lot in unexpected situations, which made my conversation awkward.

In summary, only students in the strategy training group students became aware of how to use achievement strategies and avoid reduction strategies. Accordingly, the students' reports about strategy use were almost consistent with their actual performance in the discourse data. Given that EFL learners tend to face many communication breakdowns, they need to acquire such skills in order to maintain and develop their conversational interactions. During the interactions carried out in the training tasks, the students often struggled to produce the target language, and they were given numerous opportunities to overcome their communication difficulties by using strategies. As seen in the retrospective verbal protocols, some students in the strategy training group readily recognized the usefulness of OCSs, which led them to use the strategies consciously. Therefore, the success of the strategy training group could be attributed in part to their conscious use of strategies during conversation. They increased the number of strategies they used to maintain conversation flow and solve potential communication problems. It is clear that this increase was the effect of metacognitive strategy training. Through such training, the students learned not only which type of strategy to use but also how to use it appropriately.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of oral communication strategy training on the discourse of Japanese EFL learners, who are believed to be relatively ineffective speakers of English in comparison with some other EFL learners. The findings indicate that the students in the strategy training group significantly improved their oral test scores as compared to the students who did not have the training. The transcription analysis of the discourse also revealed that the students in the strategy training group came to make longer utterances and use more achievement strategies, such as modified interaction, modified output, time-gaining, and maintenance strategies than the control group. At the same time, this group used fewer reduction strategies, such as message abandonment. Although we must recognize that training does not always improve learning for all students, the retrospective protocol data indicated that the students at least became aware of specific strategies that they could use to improve their discourse. It can be concluded that training focused on conscious practice in using OCSs is likely to improve Japanese female EFL learners' communication during simulated tasks.

The findings of the present study suggest that EFL learners who lack metacognitive skills need to learn to recognize and analyze specific linguistic and sociolinguistic cues in order to comprehend and integrate input into their schemata. They should consciously use their interlanguage system to control their performance and to maintain interaction. In order to achieve these goals, learners' strategic competence can be developed through raising their awareness of managing and supervising specific strategy use. Therefore, if the goal of instruction is to offer opportunities to students to acquire independent learning skills, they can develop metacognitive strategies in order to make plans, monitor, and evaluate their interaction for future target language learning contexts.

Given that this type of strategy research is still in its initial stage, further in-depth investigations should be pursued to add to the findings of the present study. In particular, the current study was conducted with a rather small number of participants within a short period of time. For example, because the research was conducted in real classroom settings within 12 weeks, it was not possible to conduct a delayed posttest that could provide information concerning the longitudinal effects of the strategy training on the students' oral proficiency. It is important, therefore, to examine whether the training group's advantage lasts for a long time, and whether the OCSs that they learned are accessible for their future target language study beyond the classroom. Another vital area of future research should focus on students' target language learning processes in the strategy training lessons. Detailed and precise information on what actually occurs in the classroom is important for validating the research results. It might be useful to make videos of student performance in classrooms and collect ethnographic data. Furthermore, this case study dealt mainly with meaning-focused strategy training and thus there is room for further investigation regarding the impact of strategy training on the forms of utterances.

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APPENDIX A
Strategy Diary

Date:

Review: What did you learn last week?
Objectives of this lesson
1. Useful expressions and grammar
2. Words and phrases

Metacognitive Training
1. Before the task: Preview your performance.
   Goal and procedures:
   Required linguistic resources:
   Planning how you should react to your partner:
   Advance organization: Utilize your knowledge of the context.
2. During the task: Interact with your partner.
   (a) Attending to the oral communication strategies:
   Appeal for help: *Asking for repetition:*
   Confirmation checks: *Comprehension checks:*
   Clarification requests: *Using fillers:*
   Maintenance: *Offering assistance:*
   (b) Monitoring: Monitor your comprehension and production.
3. After the task: Self-assessment.
   Review your performance and evaluate your oral communication strategy use.
   Evaluate your task objectives.
4. Assimilation: Reflect on what you have learned.

APPENDIX B
Oral Communication Tasks for Pre- and Posttest

Pretest: Hotel Check-In

Role A: You are on a trip to Australia. You need to check into a resort hotel. Two months ago, you booked a single room from Japan by telephone for two nights. You did not ask the price of the room at that time but your travel guidebook has information about the prices, which states that your desired room costs 20 Australian dollars per night. Please use a traveler's check for payment and ask about the time of breakfast tomorrow morning. You intend to join the yacht tour, which your guidebook states will start at 8:00 a.m.

Role B: You are the hotel clerk at the Oasis Inn. The hotel has undergone many changes recently and the hotel clerical staff have been replaced; thus, there is no previous information about the customers. You should not accept checks from foreigners. As this is a resort area, breakfast will be served relatively late at 8:00 a.m. The hotel has increased the room rates. Rates: Single room $30, Double room (no shower) $40, Twin room (shower) $45, Suite room $80. (All single rooms are booked for tonight.)

Posttest: Travel Agency

Role A: You are visiting a travel agency in San Francisco. One month ago you booked a cheap tour to Los Angeles for three days starting tomorrow. This tour was advertised in a newspaper ad at $150. You have come here to get the travel voucher. Please use a traveler's check for payment and ask about the flight schedule for tomorrow. You intend to go to the Disneyland tour, which your guidebook states will start in L.A. at 9:00 a.m. You are on a tight budget.

Role B: You are working at a travel agency. You are a new employee and do not know how to access the customers' data, which the clerk before you used. You can only accept cash or a credit card. All bargain 3-day tours starting tomorrow are booked. The following tours are available: Bargain tour for 4 days: $200, the flight leaves at 10 a.m. and arrives at 11 a.m. Standard tour for 3 days: $220, the flight leaves at 10 a.m. and arrives at 11 a.m.

APPENDIX C
Assessment Scale

The Oral Communication Assessment Scale for Japanese EFL Students

Level 7 Almost always communicates effectively in the task
Speech is generally natural and continuous.
Can interact in a real-life way with the interlocutor.
Can generally develop the dialogue spontaneously with few errors.

Level 6 Generally communicates effectively in the task
Is not quite fluent but interacts effectively.
Can generally react flexibly.
Makes a positive contribution to the dialogue.

Level 5 Communicates reasonably effectively in the task
Is sometimes fluent but with hesitancies.
Can interact fairly comfortably and gain flexibility.
Makes some contribution to the dialogue.

Level 4 Communicates moderately effectively in the task
Makes some pauses but fairly intelligible.
Shows some flexibility.
Is somewhat independent of the interlocutor in the dialogue.

Level 3 Communicates modestly in the task
Makes frequent pauses but somewhat intelligible.
Shows little flexibility.
Can maintain dialogue but in a rather passive way.

Level 2 Communicates marginally in the task
Makes numerous pauses, at times long ones.
Still depends on the interlocutor but begins to interact a little with him/her.
Given help, communicates quite basically. Requires some tolerance from the interlocutor.

Level 1 Communicates extremely restrictedly in the task
Can answer simple questions but with numerous long pauses.
Depends on interlocutor with only partial contribution to dialogue.
Some questions have to be repeated or rephrased.

Note. From Nakatani (2002).

APPENDIX D
Results of Repeated-Measures Two-Way ANOVAs

Help-Seeking Strategies

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Training (between groups)	0.09	1	0.09	0.08	.777
Test (within groups)	0.42	1	0.42	0.52	.475
Training × Test	1.29	1	1.29	1.60	.211

Modified Interaction Strategies

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Training	92.03	1	92.03	9.72	.003
Test	32.68	1	32.68	8.57	.005
Training × Test	53.97	1	53.97	14.16	.000

Modified Output

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Training	19.21	1	19.21	45.21	.000
Test	25.24	1	25.24	65.50	.000
Training × Test	15.07	1	15.07	39.12	.000

(Continued)

Time-Gaining Strategies

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Training	14.14	1	14.14	8.30	.005
Test	29.31	1	29.31	19.39	.000
Training × Test	36.79	1	36.79	24.34	.000

Maintenance Strategies

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Training	277.55	1	277.55	9.27	.003
Test	289.71	1	289.71	33.97	.000
Training × Test	131.77	1	131.77	15.45	.000

Self-Solving Strategies

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Training	3.94	1	3.94	1.62	.208
Test	0.11	1	0.11	0.12	.730
Training × Test	0.43	1	0.43	0.47	.495

Achievement Strategy Total

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Training	1123.82	1	1123.82	15.83	.000
Test	1222.69	1	1222.69	60.83	.000
Training × Test	885.14	1	885.14	44.04	.000

Message Abandonment Strategies

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Training	1185.12	1	1185.12	15.72	.000
Test	530.83	1	530.83	26.05	.000
Training × Test	657.79	1	657.79	32.28	.000

First-Language-Based Strategies

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Training	40.11	1	40.11	5.64	.021
Test	1.36	1	1.36	0.57	.454
Training × Test	7.81	1	7.81	3.27	.076

Interlanguage-Based Strategies

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Training	101.88	1	101.88	13.55	.000
Test	7.68	1	7.68	1.52	.223
Training × Test	7.68	1	7.68	1.52	.223

False Start

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Training	14.18	1	14.18	1.42	.238
Test	0.79	1	0.79	0.18	.673
Training × Test	13.41	1	13.41	3.03	.087

Reduction Strategy Total

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Training	1950.48	1	1950.48	29.63	.000
Test	9786.87	1	9786.87	216.36	.000
Training × Test	1309.67	1	1309.67	28.95	.000