Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics (IJAL), Vol. 14, No. 1, March 2011, 135-158

A New Approach to Communication Strategies: The Case of Iranian EFL Teachers

Vahid Rahmani Doqaruni [*]
M.A. in TEFL, University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Mazandaran, Iran

Baqer Yaqubi [†]
Assistant Professor, University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Mazandaran, Iran

Received 17 January 2010; revised 13 August 2010; accepted 20 September 2010

Abstract

This study focuses on the use of communication strategies in teacher talk. While previous studies have presented communication strategies largely from an outside researcher's perspective, the aim in this paper is to move the focus to that of classroom contexts, especially EFL teaching contexts. Furthermore, it is argued that communication strategies should also be studied in the situated talk of the classroom teacher, and not just second language learners. Showing some examples from our database, we underscore the crucial role these devices play in classroom interaction. The participants were five non-native Iranian teachers. The data consisted of a total of fifteen recordings, made up of three lessons for each teacher. The detailed examination of the database revealed that the teachers in the study made frequent use of different types of communication strategy in their talk with students and these strategies were potentially an important aspect of teacher talk. The most important implications of this finding are that, first, an extended concept

[*] *E-mail address*: rahmani7@gmail.com
Corresponding address: English Language Department, Mazandaran University, Babolsar, Mazandaran, Iran

[†] *E-mail address*: yaqubi@umz.ac.ir

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

of communication strategies that moves beyond learners to include teachers' communication strategies should be taken into account and, second, developing these strategies are necessary for effective L2 communicative language use.

Keywords: Communication Strategies; Teacher Talk; EFL Contexts; Iranian Teachers

Introduction

The studies specifically dealing with second/foreign language communication strategies (CSs) have a rich and long history in second/foreign language acquisition research. Indeed researchers seem to have always been interested in the ways in which L2 learners make use of their acquired linguistic knowledge to fill gaps emerging from language-related activities. Although researchers seem to have failed to reach a consensus as to the definition of communication strategies, Bialystok's (1990) definition is a serviceable definition and indeed is a widely accepted point of departure. According to Bialystok, L2 users of any language occasionally make attempts in talk exchanges to get hold of appropriate forms when struggling to verbally communicate their pragmatic intentions. The tension thus created leads to the noticing of an existing gap between what they intend to communicate and their linguistic resources. The ways in which L2 users try to fill the perceived gap have come to be known as communication strategies. In other words, communication strategies are potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular goal (Faerch and Kasper, 1983b). On the whole, communication strategies are immensely valuable for dealing with trouble spots that may ultimately lead to communication breakdowns. These include cases such as not knowing a particular word, or misunderstanding the other speaker. They can also enhance fluency and add to the efficiency of communication. Knowing such strategies is particularly useful for those L2 users who experience difficulties on a regular basis in conversation. This is simply because communication strategies provide them with an efficient tool for dealing with recognized knowledge gaps emerging in talk exchanges, thus affording them a sense of security in the language and extra room to maneuver.

In this paper, it is argued that although both interactional and psycholinguistic research on CSs which currently dominate the field have been useful in helping us to understand this issue, we may now change our perspective and pay closer

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

attention to the natural context in which CSs tend to occur. While previous studies have researched CSs mainly in controlled laboratory-like settings (e.g., Bialystok, 1983; Dechert, 1983; Haastrup and Phillipson, 1983; Jourdain, 2000; Littlemore, 2003; Maleki, 2007; Nakatani, 2006; Paribakht, 1985; Raupach, 1983; Varadi, 1983; Wagner, 1983), the aim in this paper is to move the focus to that of classroom contexts, especially EFL teaching contexts. Furthermore, it seems reasonable for CSs to be studied in the talk of the pivotal element of the classroom, that is, the non-native EFL teacher, and not just second language learners. Since many of these teachers have obvious deficiency of linguistic knowledge, they have another responsibility besides their main duty (i.e., teaching), that is improving their language on their own. Metaphorically, many non-native English teachers are learners of the very language they are teaching to other learners:

> In handling communication problems, teachers –like any speaker–are probably constantly planning ahead, making on-line adjustments and monitoring or responding to problems as they become manifest (Anani Sarab, 2004, p. 2).

The position adopted in this paper is that teachers play a much more central role than what is advocated under both interactional and psycholinguistic approaches, and that the teacher's role in EFL classroom context may need to be reconsidered. In light of the centrality of this role, our argument focuses principally on one of the most important, but often neglected, features of teacher talk that is CSs.

Literature Review

Since the appearance of the classic collection of papers on communication strategies in Faerch and Kasper's (1983a) book, there has been interest in how second language learners make use of their linguistic repertoire in order to fill the conversation gaps. Generally, there have been two different groups in approaching this question. The first group has been attempting to propose additional categories, maintain and expand existing taxonomies (e.g., Tarone et al., 1976). The second group denies the value of existing taxonomies and has always been trying to reduce the number of categories of analysis (e.g., The Nijmegen Group i.e., Kellerman, Bongaerts, and Poulisse). Yule and Tarone (1997), for ease of reference, call the proponents of the first group "the pros" since they are profligate in their liberal expansion of categories and the proponents of the second group "the cons" since

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

they are rather conservative, given their emphasis on parsimony. Concerning the first approach, the external and interactional perspective of learners is dealt with (e.g., Corder, 1983; Tarone, 1983; Varadi, 1983); but in the second approach, the internal and cognitive processes are taken into account (e.g., Bialystok, 1990; Faerch and Kasper, 1983b; and the Nijmegen Group). However, it should be noted that they seem to be superficial manifestations of two divergent theoretical perspectives, namely, interactional (sociolinguistic) and psycholinguistic. Due to their importance in CS research, a brief review of the studies of the leading scholars of these two opposing theoretical manifestations is represented in the following.

Varadi (1983) gave a talk at a small European conference which is considered the first systematic analysis of strategic language behavior. This talk dealt with message adjustment in particular and was deeply rooted in Error Analysis. Briefly, Tamas Varadi's classic paper, "Strategies of Target Language Communication: Message Adjustment", establishes a model of interlanguage production which focuses on the strategies the learner employs when their experiences a "hiatus" in his interlanguage repertoire. In order to adjust their message to their communicative resources, the learner either replaces the meaning or form of their intended message by using items which are part of their interlanguage, or the learner reduces thier intended message on either the formal or the functional level.

The relationship between CSs and meaning-negotiation mechanisms, for the first time, was presented by Tarone (1983), according to which CSs “relate to a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared” (p. 65). This definition is potentially broader than Tarone et al.'s (1976) earlier one. It represented an interactional perspective. In other words, CSs are seen as tools used in a joint negotiation of meaning where both interlocutors attempt to agree on a communicative goal. This interactional perspective covered various repair mechanisms, which Tarone considered CSs if their intention was to clarify intended meaning rather than simply correct linguistic form.

Finally, Corder's (1983) survey, "Strategies of Communication", represents a markedly different way of defining communication strategies. According to Corder, communication strategies are used by a speaker when faced with some difficulty due to their communicative ends outrunning thier communicative means.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

In other words, communicative strategies "are a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his meaning when faced with some difficulty" (p. 16). He proposes two options for classifying communication strategies into different types: either the speaker tailors the intended message to their linguistic resources or manipulates the available linguistic competence in order to make it consistent with the intended meaning. Corder calls the strategies produced by the first option "message adjustment strategies" and those by the second, "resource expansion strategies".

Most of the research conducted on communication strategies up to the second half of the 1980s follow a primarily linguistic approach to defining CSs (Dornyei and Scott, 1997). Instead of conducting product-oriented research, Faerch and Kasper (1983b), Bialystok (1990) and the Nijmegen Group recommended CS researchers adopt a new analytic perspective, focusing on the cognitive "deep structure" of strategic language behavior. In other words, these researchers considered communication strategies as mental plans enacted by the second language learner in response to an internal signal of an imminent problem, a form of self-help that does not have to engage the interlocutor's support for resolution. The intraindividual, psycholinguistic view locates CS in models of speech production (Faerch and Kasper, 1983b) or cognitive organization and processing (Bialystok, 1990; the Nijmegen Group).

In this way, Faerch and Kasper (1983b) adopted, for the first time, a psycholinguistic approach to communication strategies and attempted to distinguish strategies from processes, procedures, plans, tactics, etc. From this perspective, communication strategies are located within a general model of speech production, in which two phases are identified, the planning phase and the execution phase. Communication strategies are part of the planning phase and are utilized when learners are prevented from executing their original plan because of some communicative problem. Similar to Tarone's criteria, learners may choose avoidance by changing their original goal through some sort of "reduction" strategy. Alternatively, they may maintain their original goal through a substitute plan. This is referred to as an "achievement" strategy.

Bialystok (1990) believes that although considerable progress has been made through different approaches, the ultimate goal of integrating the observations into a coherent account of speech production has not been realized. According to

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

Bialystok, the only solution to this problem is an approach based on the process of using language for communicative purposes. In this way, Bialystok's alternative cognitive framework of communication strategies is based on two cognitive skills: *analysis of knowledge* and *cognitive control.* Analysis of knowledge is defined as the ability to make some kind of alteration to the message content by exploiting knowledge of the concept. Strategies employed to accomplish this may include providing a definition of a concept or object, or engaging in circumlocution. Cognitive control refers to the manipulation of the method of expression by integrating resources from outside the L2 in order to communicate the intended message. Strategies employed to accomplish this may include use of the L1 or non-linguistic strategies such as miming.

Perhaps the most extensive series of studies to date into communication strategies was undertaken by the Nijmegen project throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Dornyei and Scott, 1997). The Nijmegen Group researchers (i.e., Kellerman, Bongaerts, and Poulisse) also approached communication strategies from a psycholinguistic perspective and chiefly concerned with investigating a subset of communication strategies called "compensatory strategies". In the Nijmegen model, compensatory strategies will be one of two types, *conceptual* or *code* compensatory strategies (Kellerman and Bialystok, 1997). Conceptual strategies are those whereby the participant manipulates the concept of the target referent in an effort to explain the item and is consistent with Bialystok's notion of analysis of knowledge. Linguistic or code compensatory strategies are those where learners manipulate their linguistic knowledge.

A New Approach

Much of the research work conducted on communication strategies has been rather narrow (see Introduction section) in that they have been conducted almost exclusively using elicitation tasks in laboratory-like settings and almost no attention was paid to the natural context of the classrooms (for an exception see Anani Sarab, 2004). In other words, researchers have treated CSs as independent and isolated units of analysis, paying little or no attention at all to the interactional context in which they are used. Nakatani and Goh (2007) contend that "while many studies have been conducted into the use of CSs for negotiation and repairs in research settings, few have explored L2 learners' CS use in actual classroom

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

contexts where learners might use CSs that are quantitatively and qualitatively different from experimental settings" (p. 213).

Thus, there has been an increase in the number of investigations of communication strategies in classroom discourse. In the last few years, new studies have appeared adopting what can be considered as a strictly interactional approach to the description of CS use (Fernandez Dobao and Palacios Martinez, 2007). Following Yule and Tarone's (1991) claim that for a comprehensive understanding of strategic communication, attention needs to be paid to "both sides of the page", i.e. to the actions of both learners and interlocutors, scholars, such as Firth and Wagner (1996; also Wagner and Firth, 1997), have tried to describe strategic communication as an interactive activity. In these studies, CSs are analyzed as elements of the ongoing and co-constructed context of the interaction and their communicative function is established by taking into account the actions of all the conversational participants, not only students. It does not need just be the L2 student who is felt to have inadequate linguistic knowledge in classroom interaction; it may be the teacher (Rampton, 1997). As Willems (1987, p. 354) asserts "all of us [teachers] – and not just our pupils – have a natural tendency to use communication strategies when communication problems arise".

The latter argument is of particular importance in EFL classroom contexts where non-native English teachers perform their duties. It is interesting to know that many language teachers are themselves second/foreign language speakers and lag behind their very own linguistic knowledge. In this way, communication strategies become important for two main reasons: they function as support for facilitating the understanding of the second language learner and, at the same time, as a resource for helping the second language speaking teachers (Anani Sarab, 2004).

In addition, teacher talk can reveal and make explicit to a large extent the conditions and consequences of teaching and learning principles in classroom contexts. Cullen (1998, p. 179) believes,

> While the question of how much teachers talk is still important, more emphasis is given to how effectively they are able to facilitate learning and promote communicative interaction in their classroom through, for example, the kind of questions they ask, the speech modifications they make when talking to

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

> learners [such as communication strategies], or the way they react to student errors.

Thus, the importance of teacher talk relies on two aspects: first, its role as a source for L2 learning; second, its role as a key interactional constituent of the language learning context. Anani Sarab (2004, p. 1) states,

> The implications [of teacher talk] are of interest generally in contemporary language teaching, and of course for teacher education and teacher development. This interest is motivated by the growing recognition of the role of teacher talk in determining the patterns of interaction and in effect the learning opportunities provided for the learners. The consensus is that through the investigation of teacher talk and classroom interaction we can come to a better understanding of the teaching-learning process.

Research Questions

Thus, although teacher talk has been of considerable interest in understanding and attempting to develop second language teaching pedagogy, little attention has been paid to teachers, especially a very significant aspect of teacher talk that is communication strategies. This paper is an attempt to deal with this important, and neglected, feature of teacher talk and particularly focuses on Iranian English teachers and their EFL classrooms. More specifically, this paper is an attempt to shed some light on the widespread and diverse use of CSs in teacher talk to ascertain their importance in EFL classroom contexts. Therefore, in order to achieve the specific objective of the study, it was guided by the following questions:

1) What types of communication strategy occur in Iranian non-native English teachers' talk within Iranian EFL contexts?

2) Which type of communication strategy is most frequently used by Iranian non-native English teachers within Iranian EFL contexts?

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

Method

Participants

Five EFL teachers along with the students in their classes participated in this study. One class at pre-intermediate level was selected from each teacher. Each class had between 10 and 15 students who were between 14 and 20. All teachers were male and were between 21 and 47 years old, teaching in two private language institutes in Babolsar, Iran. The teachers were not made completely aware that the researchers intended to examine how they deal with linguistic gaps in their interlanguage repertoire. They were simply told that the study aimed at investigating general patterns of their talk in the classroom context.

Data Collection

To collect data, one of the researchers observed the classrooms without participating in the class activities and made audio-recordings of three lessons of each teacher. The reason for the researcher's presence in the classroom as a non-participant observer was that some of the communication strategies are simply non-verbal (such as miming), a fact justifying the researcher's presence in the classroom. The researcher made use of a tape-recorder for making the audio-recordings of the whole class. In addition, an MP3 player was put near to the teacher in each class both to record whole-class interaction and to capture the teacher's voice more clearly. Using the above-mentioned method, 27 hours of naturally occurring data was obtained from the five teachers (3 sessions for each teacher, with 9 sessions lasting about 120 minutes and 6 sessions lasting about 90 minutes) participating in this study.

Coding and Analysis of the Data

In order to show the widespread use of CSs and their importance in teacher talk, the researchers analyzed the audio-recordings of the classroom data. In this way, we first transcribed the data and then identified the communication strategies in them. The next step in analyzing the data was to develop the categories of analysis for coding the communication strategies. Different types of communication strategy identified in the database of our study were coded into one of the following CS types: 1) approximation, 2) circumlocution, 3) word coinage, 4)

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

avoidance, 5) miming, 6) appeal for assistance, 7) code switching, and 8) literal translation. Table 1 gives a detailed view of the results and provides an overall representation of the frequencies of CSs for each teacher.

Table 1
Distribution of communication strategies across teachers

CS Types / Teacher	Approxi-mation	Circum-locution	Word Coinage	Avoidance	Miming	Appeal for Assistance	Code Switching	Literal Translation	Row Total
T1[a]	40[b] (70.2%)	4 (7%)	0	7 (12.3%)	1 (1.8%)	3 (5.3%)	2 (3.5%)	0	57 (21.6%)
T2	97 (69.8%)	11 (7.9%)	0	13 (9.4%)	7 (5%)	6 (4.3%)	4 (2.9%)	1 (0.7%)	139 (52.7%)
T3	19 (59.4%)	1 (3.1%)	0	8 (25%)	1 (3.1%)	3 (9.4%)	0	0	32 (12.1%)
T4	17 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17 (6.4%)
T5	17 (89.5%)	1 (5.3%)	1 (5.3%)	0	0	0	0	0	19 (7.2%)
Column Total	190 (72%)	17 (6.4%)	1 (0.4%)	28 (10.6%)	9 (3.4%)	12 (4.5%)	6 (2.3%)	1 (0.4%)	Grand Total: 264 (100%)

[a] T stands for teacher
[b] Numbers show the frequencies

Different types of communication strategy identified in our study are defined and exemplified below. The extracts are based on the standard transcription system. The language used was not modified and standard conventions of punctuation are not used, the aim being to represent deficiencies of the exchanges as they occurred in the classroom. The only contractions in the following transcriptions are T that stands for "teacher", L that stands for "learner" and LL that stands for "several learners at once".

Examples of "communication strategies" from the EFL classrooms.
Approximation.

It is simply the use of a substitute word which shares some of the critical semantic features with the target item. Tarone (1977) identifies this type of CS within the

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

broad category of paraphrase and defines it as "the 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 learner" (p. 198). Approximation, then, includes virtually all word substitutions that the L2 speaker knowingly employs to serve in place of the more accurate term. The substitute word can refer to the correct concept but at an inappropriate level, such as worm for silkworm, or refer to another object that may give some hint to the intended referent, such as lamp for water pipe (Bialystok, 1990). The example below from the database illustrates approximation:

Extract 1:
1 T: The nationality of Thailand a quarter Chinese yes? it means some of his relative some of his father's relatives come from
2 L: China
3 T: China and some of them comes from Thai and even they're black it means they're from Africa maybe an eighth white an eighth white as you know a quarter is more than an eighth yes? an eighth white and American Indian
4 L: An eighth
5 T: An eighth and an eighth so look of course you know statistics yeah?

In this exchange, the teacher is talking about a famous golf player who is multinational. In line 5, the teacher is adding numbers but he says "statistics" instead of "mathematics". It should be noted that statistics is a branch of mathematics that deals with the collection and interpretation of numerical information. Although this expression does not seem to be entirely correct, it semantically conveys the meaning to the students.

Circumlocution.

This communication strategy is simply defined as the description of the characteristics or elements of the subject or action instead of using the appropriate target language structure. This strategy is also a subtype of paraphrase in Tarone's (1977) typology and is defined as "a wordly extended process in which the learner describes the characteristics or elements of the object or action instead of using the appropriate target language structure" (p. 198). The example Tarone gives from her study is a subject attempting to refer to water pipe: "she is, uh, smoking something. I don't know what's its name". Bialystok (1990) gives another example from her

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

study. The following circumlocutions were provided for bench: a little wooden chair, to rest your legs when you are tired, it doesn't have a back. The example below from our database illustrates circumlocution:

Extract 2:

1 T: (teacher is reading a text) parents these parents are some people who want to do something for their children they're nervous about they're worried about their children yeah? for example they send them to private classes they send them to different sort of classes
2 L: Scientific
3 T: Or even scientific classes sport classes all right? Because they want to do something for their children they are not eh… regardless of their children

In this extract, the teacher is reading a text and elaborates on its different parts. In line 1, he is referring to "prospective and caring" parents but it seems that he can not find an appropriate word for his meaning. In this way, he makes use of circumlocution in numbers 1 and 3 and describes the characteristics of what he is going to say.

Word coinage.

The third paraphrase strategy in Tarone's (1977) typology is word coinage in which the learner makes up a new word in order to communicate a desired concept. The most frequently cited example of this strategy is one originally reported by Varadi (1973) in which *airball* was created to refer to *balloon*. The following example illustrates this type of communication strategy:

Extract 3:

T: and the other is dress shoes of course mine is summer shoes but it's somehow like dress shoes Sirus is wearing yes somehow dress shoes ok all right?

In this extract, the teacher is talking about fashion styles. While he is trying to convey the meaning of dress shoes to the students, he refers to his own shoes to make explicit the difference between sandals and dress shoes. In this way, he creates the new word "summer shoes" to convey his meaning.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

Avoidance.

L2 speakers sometimes make a deliberate decision not to speak because they expect communication problems to arise. This avoidance is a common strategy for second language speakers, causing them to remain silent simply because some aspect of vocabulary or grammar is not known. Although normally difficult to detect, Tarone's (1977) methodology made it clear when a subject was deliberately using an avoidance strategy. Omitting salient but lexically difficult objects shown in the picture, such as mushroom or water-pipe, was interpreted as evidence of this strategy. Bialystok (1990, p. 40) believes, "Such interpretations were especially well-grounded since each subject also provided descriptions in their native language. Content discrepancies between the two data sets pointed to cases of avoidance".

Tarone refined this strategy by distinguishing between *topic avoidance* and *message abandonment*. For the former, specific topics or words are avoided to the best of the learner's ability. In other words, learners manage to prevent the occurrence of topics that are certain to present difficulties. For the latter, learners stumble into a topic that is too difficult and simply give up and go on to another. The examples below from our database illustrate both of these avoidance strategies:

Extract 4:
1 T: It will hurt your heart did you answer Mr. Danial?
2 L: No
3 T: why no? you wanna eh… you need some eh… gun to eh… ok forget it come on hurry up

In this extract, the teacher consciously avoids the topic. The hesitations and the statement "forget it" in line 3 show that the teacher finds this topic rather difficult to discuss and in this way prefers to avoid it. This extract is an example of the first type of avoidance that is topic avoidance.

Extract 5:
1 T: in summer when you're studying eat cucumber it helps you ok? and I've heard again again I've heard that eh… when you're studying in different seasons except summer eat eh… honey and eh… I forgot honey and…

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

2 L: jam
3 T: no honey and eh… forget honey and something (teacher laughs) I forget I can't remember ok let's continue

In this extract, the teacher is talking about healthy foods. It seems that in line 3 the teacher can not find the appropriate word to convey his meaning and suddenly leaves the message. This extract is an illustration of the second type of avoidance that is message abandonment.

Miming.

This strategy includes all non-verbal accompaniments to communication, particularly those that serve in the place of a missing target language word. Tarone's (1977) example makes this type of communication strategy more clear. The subject claps his hands to indicate applause. An example of miming is provided below:

Extract 6:
1 T: I've heard different reasons that some of them are interesting I've heard eh… from a person who smoke he said when I use cigarette in my hand even when I don't light it light here means turn it on
2 LL: turn it on
3 T: even when I don't light it when I keep it in my hand and I do this action **(**teacher rubs his fingers**)** ok when eh… it is finished you will clean it more this makes me comfortable or relax

In this exchange, the teacher is talking about the harmful effects of smoking cigarettes. In line 3, he is trying to show an action by his hand. It seems that in this especial situation the teacher could not remember the appropriate word, which was "rub", so he resorted to miming as a communication strategy.

Appeal for assistance.

This type of strategy occurs when the L2 speaker seeks direct or indirect help from one's interlocutor in resolving problems. An appeal for assistance occurs when the L2 speaker consults any source of authority: a native speaker, the experimenter, a dictionary. This strategy also takes into account other more verbal efforts such as

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

prosodic features, e.g., rising intonation, which implicitly elicits some assistance or validation from the listener. In other words, there are two kinds of appeal for assistance as follows: *1) Explicit appeal for assistance:* giving up one's efforts to express meaning and asking the interlocutor to help or using a dictionary; and *2) Implicit appeal for assistance:* disfluency marker realized in one's speech signaling linguistic problems in production. The examples below are drawn from our own database and deal with both types of appeal for assistance:

Extract 7:
1 L1: one mile how kilometers?
2 L2: one kilometer and forty
3 T: let me check (the teacher uses his dictionary)
4 L3: it's one thousand eighty
5 L4: one thousand kilometer fifty
6 T: what? Exactly one mile equals one point sixty kilometers one point six my answer would be one mile equals one kilometer point six ok

In this extract, one of the students asks a question. The teacher does not know the exact answer. Thus, he uses his dictionary to find the answer. This extract clearly depicts the use of an explicit appeal for assistance by an EFL teacher.

Extract 8:
1 T: conveyor belt what is conveyor belt? (the teacher writes on the board) convey means eh… convey eh…
2 L: Transport
3 T: Yes convey means transport move something from somewhere to somewhere else yes? this is convey

In this extract, the teacher is attempting to describe the meaning of the word "convey". At the end of line 1, the teacher uses disfluency markers to show that he can not remember the intended word and, in this way, implicitly appeals for assistance. In line 2, one of the students helped him and in line 3, the teacher confirmed that this word was his intended word.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

Code switching.

This strategy is simply defined as switching to a language other than L2. In Tarone's (1977) typology, code switching (that is referred to as language switch) is a manifestation of the broader category *conscious transfer*. In her definition, code switch is the straightforward insertion of words from another language. The example below clearly illustrates this type of communication strategy:

Extract 9:

T: can you remember then eh… when the people I mean the actors especially Akbar Abdi they wanted to eh… گزینش بشن (gozinesh beshan) for going to war yeah they said something interesting it was very interesting I laughed a lot

In this exchange, the teacher is talking about a movie he has recently seen. The teacher makes use of a first language word that is equivalent to "interview" in the second language. It seems that the teacher could not find the appropriate word for his intended meaning in the second language and finally resorted to code switching.

Literal translation.

The second manifestation of Tarone's (1977) conscious transfer is the literal translation of words or phrases. Her example of literal translation is a Mandarin speaker who translated the Mandarin toast and produced "he invites him to drink". The following example illustrates this type of communication strategy:

Extract 10:

1 T: are you sure calf /kalf/ or calf /kaf/
2 L: (one of the students checks it up in his dictionary)
3 T: (the student has problem with finding the word) as one of my friends said soil on head (خاک تو سرت) come on you're KAC 4 you don't know how to use dictionary?

In this exchange, a student tries to check the pronunciation of a word in dictionary but he can not find the word. The teacher is going to censure him but he can not find the appropriate word. In this way, he makes use of an L1 expression that conveys the same meaning.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

Discussion

Regarding the first research question, Table 1 presents us with a comprehensive answer. Looking at the data (Table 1) for each individual teacher, we can see that they have used various types of CS with different frequencies in their talk. It is worth mentioning that all of these CS types in Table 1 were basically developed based on Tarone's (1977) typology. The reason for choosing Tarone's typology is that her taxonomy is still seen as the most important one in the field since most of the following taxonomies relied on it and its comprehensiveness warrants its use (see Dornyei and Scott, 1997). In other words, with reference to the Tarone's typology, it can be concluded that these teachers have made use of all important and main types of CS in their talk.

Regarding the second research question, as shown in Table 1, the overall frequencies of CS types revealed that approximation (72%) was significantly more frequent than any other type of CS. The second most frequent CS, after approximation, is avoidance (10.6%) that has been used more frequently than any other type of CS. The third CS type, in terms of frequency, is circumlocution (6.4%). The other five CS types, appeal for assistance, miming, code switching, word coinage and literal translation, have occurred with the lowest frequency respectively.

Regarding *approximation* as the most frequently used communication strategy type by all the teachers, it seems that this finding is in accordance with previous literature (Willems, 1987; Anani Sarab, 2004). Willems (1987, p. 357) asserts, "Intuitively we tend to believe that *paraphrase* and *approximation* are the most commonly used communication strategies... this may be, the statement that skill in the use of *approximation* and *paraphrase* strategies in particular will be extremely useful for everyone trying to master or (later) use an L2, seems completely justified". Meanwhile, it is interesting to see that word coinage and literal translation are generally the lowest frequent types of CS.

Significantly higher frequency of approximation than the other CS types (see Table 1) might be due to several reasons. First, using approximations might enable teachers to obtain the maximum economy owing to the fact that they are fast and short. Approximations are possibly the *quickest* and *easiest* types of CS to be used by the teachers for dealing with their linguistic gaps and deficiencies: quickest in

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

the sense that they are less time-consuming, and easiest in the sense that they do not require the teachers to devote a lot of effort and energy for dealing with their linguistic problems; they just simply substitute a word for another. Second, approximations are less *intrusive* in the sense that because of being short and less time-consuming, they are less disruptive of the ongoing flow of talk while the problem is dealt with. Third, since the substitute word can refer to the correct concept but at an inappropriate level or refer to another object that may give some hint to the intended referent, it is obvious that just conveying the meaning to students is crucially more important than the grammatical structure of the talk. Therefore, the teachers tend to use this type of CS more than any other type in a flow of the talk where meaning is more important than form and when they are faced with a linguistic gap. These features might help us to understand why approximation is the most predominant type of CS in all teachers' talk.

Implications for Teaching

The discussion of the issues raised by the empirical findings of the present study enables us to argue for the following conceptual and pedagogical implications. As a conceptual implication, it is argued that an extended concept of CSs that move us beyond learners to teachers' categories should be taken into account. In this situation, the more proficient speakers (teachers) use CSs to compensate for their own language deficiencies. In fact, this extended notion of CSs was implied by Tarone's (1983) interactional definition about three decades ago where she emphasizes that CS is "a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared" regardless of their roles. The findings of this study contributed to a revival of this definition with an especial emphasis on teachers' role. Researchers have always dealt with CSs from second language learners' perspective in their studies and little attention has been paid to the other side of the page, that is, teachers.

As another conceptual implication, L2 classroom interaction as variety of institutional discourse has its own especial organization, which research can contribute to its description. Despite this fact, some pedagogical recommendations appear to rest on the implicit assumption that L2 classroom interaction has the same interactional structure as conversation. But, based on our empirical evidence, this is not true. For example, what is considered circumlocution or miming in classroom discourse may have a different meaning from its original

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

conceptualization. In natural conversation, a speaker uses circumlocution, most of the time, as a further support of his speech such as when he provides more information and not as an effective tool for conveying his intended meaning. The same is true for miming when a native speaker gestures or moves his hands to accompany his speech not to compensate for an unknown word. However, CSs in the L2 classroom are organized in a different fashion from conversation. Pedagogical recommendations about CSs apparently assume that L2 speakers do not know or remember their intended words; the evidence presented in conversation suggests that the assumption may be mistaken.

Practically, the findings of this study raise a number of interesting issues about current pedagogical practices, which further research might lead to more clear pedagogical implications. First is the issue of communication skills and strategies which L2 speakers in general and L2 teachers in particular need to develop. In this way, CSs are defined as very useful tactics taken by L2 speakers to solve oral communication problems and developing these skills and strategies are necessary for effective L2 communication language use. As this study has focused on the identification and description of the devices used by teachers to negotiate meaning for compensatory purposes, it is very interesting to know whether teachers' awareness of these strategies is helpful in acquisition. Although the relationship between communication strategies and learning has not been yet established, a number of researchers have suggested ways in which such strategies might aid acquisition, particularly lexical acquisition (e.g., Faerch and Kasper, 1983b; Tarone, 1983). In more specific terms, raising the awareness of teachers about the type of strategies which contribute to meaningful communication in language classrooms might, on the basis of the above argument, be helpful in learning.

In classes where the target language is solely used (like the classes in this study), teachers are pushed to make use of various CSs to compensate for both students' lexical gaps and their own difficulties in adapting to students' needs. This inevitably plays an important role in motivating the students to do so when they are caught in situations where they do not have access to the words they need to communicate their intended meanings. Bejarano et al. (1997, p. 212) assert "it appears that students need to acquire a 'repertoire of strategies' … in order to enable them to modify their interaction in the target language and thus be able to negotiate meaning more successfully, even when language proficiency is limited. The result of acquisition and use of these strategies will turn the students into better

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

interactants in small group settings". Although Skehan (1998) believes that learners who are adept in using communication strategies to overcome their linguistic problems may *fossilize* because they do not experience any communicative need to develop their interlanguage knowledge resources, this view that raising awareness about teachers' CSs might benefit the students in their efforts to learn the language through instruction is worth thinking.

A further practical aspect might be the documentation of the strategic aspect of teacher talk, which can enhance teachers' awareness of CSs. The issue is that the general guidelines to teachers as to adopt procedures which generate teacher-student interaction have not produced the expected results and the so-called communicative activities are reduced to drills and exercises basically because teachers use the traditional patterns of classroom interaction. Anani Sarab (2004, p. 19) believes that "one reason for the teachers' retreat to these patterns might be that interactional skills specifications, which can assist them in their facing the challenges of the communicative language pedagogy, have not been properly documented". Thus, raising the teachers' awareness of classroom interactional skills, including the devices used in managing communication problems, is likely to set the basis for their active experimentation and ultimately finding ways of employing these devices in more effective ways.

Conclusion

Many studies (e.g., Bialystok, 1983; Dechert, 1983; Haastrup & Phillipson, 1983; Jourdain, 2000; Littlemore, 2003; Maleki, 2007; Nakatani, 2006; Paribakht, 1985; Raupach, 1983; Varadi, 1983; Wagner, 1983) have examined the predominant view of communication strategies within second language acquisition research (SLA) individually, but they have failed to account in a satisfactory way for interactional and sociolinguistic dimensions of language. As such it may be far from realistic, and obviates insight into the nature of language. While previous studies have presented CSs mainly from an outside researcher's perspective, the aim in this paper was to move the focus to that of classroom contexts, especially Iranian EFL teaching contexts. Furthermore, it was proposed that CSs should be studied in the talk of the most important element of the classroom, that is teacher, and not just second language learners. In spite of the fact that the investigation of teacher talk within classroom discourse has been the focus of much attention for a number of years, it is still only partially understood. In this way, this study was an

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

attempt to enhance our understanding of this issue through investigating communication strategies in teacher talk within classroom discourse.

Any attempt to analyze communication in the L2 classroom must take into account both its uniqueness and complexity. By challenging prevailing views and concepts, our ultimate goal is to argue for a reconceptualization of CSs within SLA research. The reconceptualization requires a significantly enhanced awareness of the social, contextual, and interactional dimensions of language use within EFL contexts and paying more attention to the most important element of the EFL classroom context that is teacher. While findings and theories in SLA regarding CSs have been important and insightful, it is argued that effort to examine non-native/non-native discourse and interaction is scarce.

The process of communication in an EFL context is further complicated by the fact that misunderstandings, which definitely spoil teaching and learning, are potentially more frequent (Walsh, 2006). This is due to the differences in the backgrounds and language proficiency, expectations and perceptions of language learners, together with the status they attach to the teacher, who may be considered as the only reliable authority in the class. Disparity of expectations is a common aspect of the EFL context and frequently presents the teacher with enormous interactional difficulties. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of classroom discourse is essential for teachers to establish and preserve satisfactory communicative behavior. The first step in gaining such an understanding is familiarization with the features of L2 classroom discourse (such as communication strategies). As Kumaravadivelu (1999, p. 473) asserts,

> Teachers need to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to observe, analyze and evaluate their own classroom discourse so they can, without depending too much on external agencies, theorize what they practice and practice what they theorize, thus contributing to the debilitating dichotomy between theorists and teachers, between producers and consumers of pedagogic knowledge.

There have been a number of demands in recent years for L2 teachers to increase awareness of the interactional organization of their classes. Like Kumaravadivelu (1999), previous researchers make reference to the "knowledge

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

and skills", and the need for teachers to be able to "observe, analyze and evaluate their own classroom discourse".

References

Anani Sarab, M. R. (2004). The study of communication strategies in teacher talk. *Iranian Journal of Applied linguistics*, *7*(2), 1-44.

Bejarano, Y., Levine, T., Olshtain, E., & Steiner, J. (1997). The skilled use of interaction strategies: Creating a framework for improved small-group communicative interaction in the language classroom. *System, 25*(2), 203-14.

Bialystok, E. (1983). Some factors in the selection and implementation of communication strategies. In C. Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in Interlanguage Communication* (pp. 100-118). London: Longman.

Bialystok, E. (1990). *Communication strategies: A psychological analysis of second language use*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Corder, S. P. (1983). Strategies of communication. In C. Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in interlanguage communication* (pp.15-19). London: Longman.

Cullen, R. (1998). Teacher talk and the classroom context. *ELT Journal*, *52*(3), 179-187.

Dechert, H. (1983). How a story is done in a second language. In C. Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in Interlanguage Communication* (pp. 175-195). London: Longman.

Dornyei, Z., & Scott, M. L. (1997). Communication strategies in a second language: Definitions and taxonomies. *Language Learning, 47*(1), 173-209.

Faerch, C., & Kasper, G. (Eds.). (1983a). *Strategies in interlanguage communication*. London: Longman.

Faerch, C., & Kasper, G. (1983b). Plans and strategies in foreign language communication. In C. Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in interlanguage communication* (pp. 20-60). London: Longman.

Fernandez Dobao, A. M., & Palacios Martinez, I. M. (2007). Negotiating meaning in interaction between English and Spanish speakers via communication strategies. *Atlantis*, *29*(1), 87-105.

Firth, A., & Wagner, J. (1996). *On discourse, communication, and (some) fundamental concepts in SLA*. Paper presented at the AILA conference (Scientific Commission on Discourse Analysis), Finland.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

Haastrup, K., & Phillipson, R. (1983). Achievement strategies in learner/native speaker interaction. In C. Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in Interlanguage Communication* (pp. 140-158). London: Longman.

Jourdain, S. (2000). A native-like ability to circumlocute. *The Modern Language Journal*, *84*(2), 185-195.

Kellerman, E., & Bialystok, E. (1997). On psychological plausibility in the study of communication strategies. In G. Kasper & E. Kellerman (Eds.), *communication strategies: psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives* (pp. 31-48). New York: Longman.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (1999). Critical classroom discourse analysis. *TESOL Quarterly*, *33*, 453-84.

Littlemore, J. (2003). The communicative effectiveness of different types of communication strategy. *System*, *31*, 331-347.

Maleki, A. (2007). Teachability of communication strategies: an Iranian experience. *System*, *35*, 1-12.

Nakatani, Y. (2006). Developing an oral communication strategy inventory. *The Modern Language Journal*, *90*(2), 151-168.

Nakatani, Y., & Goh, C. (2007). A review of oral communication strategies: Focus on interactionist and psycholinguistic perspectives. In A. D. Cohen & E. Macaro (Eds.), *language learner strategies* (pp. 207-227). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Paribakht, T. (1985). Strategic competence and language proficiency. *Applied Linguistics, 6*, 132-146.

Rampton, B. (1997). A sociolinguistic perspective on L2 communication strategies. In G. Kasper & E. Kellerman (Eds.), *communication strategies: psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives* (pp. 279-303). New York: Longman.

Raupach, M. (1983). Analysis and evaluation of communication strategies. In C. Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in Interlanguage Communication* (pp. 199-209). London: Longman.

Skehan, P. (1998). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tarone, E. (1977). Conscious communication strategies in interlanguage: A progress report. In H. D. Brown, C. A. Yorio & R. C. Crymes (Eds.), *On TESOL 77* (pp. 194-203). Washington, DC: TESOL.

Tarone, E., Cohen, A. D., & Dumas, G. (1976). A closer look at some interlanguage terminology: a framework for communication strategies. In C.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in interlanguage communication* (pp. 4-14). London: Longman.

Tarone, E. (1983). Some thoughts on the notion of 'communication strategy.' In C. Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in interlanguage communication* (pp. 61-74). London: Longman.

Varadi, T. (1983). Strategies of target language learner communication: Message adjustment. In C. Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in interlanguage communication* (pp. 79-99). London: Longman.

Wagner, J. (1983). Dann du tagen eineeeee – weisse Platte: An analysis of interlanguage communication in instructions. In C. Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in Interlanguage Communication* (pp. 159-174). London: Longman.

Wagner, J., & Firth, A. (1997). Communication Strategies at Work. In G. Kasper & E. Kellerman (Eds.), *communication strategies: psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives* (pp. 323-344). New York: Longman.

Walsh, S. (2006). *Investigating Classroom Discourse*. Cambridge: Routledge.

Willems, G. (1987). Communication strategies and their significance in foreign language teaching. *System*, *15*(3), 351-364.

Yule, G., & Tarone, E. (1991). The other side of the page: Integrating the study of communication strategies and negotiated input in SLA. In R. Phillipson, E. Kellerman, L. Selinker, M. Sharwood Smith, & M. Swain (Eds.), *Foreign/second language pedagogy research* (pp. 142-161). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Yule, G., & Tarone, E. (1997). Investigating communication strategies in L2 reference: Pros and cons. In G. Kasper & E. Kellerman (Eds.), *communication strategies: psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives* (pp. 17-30). New York: Longman.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]