The Use of Communication Strategies in the Beginner EFL Classroom[1]

Carmen A. Rodríguez Cervantes and Ruth Roux Rodriguez[2*]
Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas, México

Abstract

When language learners do not know how to say a word in English, they can communicate effectively by using their hands, imitating sounds, inventing new words, or describing what they mean. These ways of communicating are communication strategies (CSs). EFL teachers are not always aware of the importance of teaching communication strategies to their students or, if they are aware, they do not explicitly train their students to use them. They do not use these strategies themselves to serve as a model to their students. Very often, what we have observed is that teachers abandon the message or switch to the first language to avoid communication problems in the classroom. This study investigated the communication strategies used by two EFL teachers and their beginner level students; and the potential factors that influence the communication strategies they use in class. Data came from three sources: (1) audio-recordings of naturally occurring classroom interactions; (2) interviews with the teachers; and (3) observation notes taken in six class sessions. Data from the interaction transcripts were examined using Faerch and Kasper's (1983) taxonomy of communication strategies. Results indicated that the communication strategy most frequently used in both groups was language switch. However, while the teacher who seemed more involved with students used clarification request, comprehension check and asking for confirmation; the teacher who appeared more distant from students used comprehension check and repetition. Class size, seating arrangements and learning activity types were also some of the factors that influenced the communication strategies used.

Key words: Communication strategies, classroom interaction, teaching English as a foreign language

Resumen

Cuando quienes aprenden ingles no saben cómo decir una palabra, pueden usar sus manos, imitar sonidos, inventar palabras o describir lo que quieren decir para

no interrumpir la comunicación. Estas formas de comunicarse son estrategias de comunicación (EC). Los docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera no siempre están consientes de la importancia de enseñarles estrategias de comunicación a sus alumnos, o bien no les dan preparación explicita para utilizarlas. A menudo lo que observamos es que los docentes abandonan el mensaje que querían comunicar o utilizan la primera lengua para evitar problemas de comunicación. Este estudio examinó las estrategias de comunicación empeladas por dos docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera con sus estudiantes de nivel básico; y los factores que influyen en las estrategias de comunicación que se utilizan. La información se recolectó de tres fuentes: (1) grabaciones de interacciones naturales en el aula; (2) entrevistas con los docentes; y (3) observaciones registradas en seis sesiones de clase. Las transcripciones de las interacciones se examinaron mediante la taxonomía de estrategias de comunicación de Faerch y Kasper (1983). Los resultados indicaron que la estrategia utilizada con mayor frecuencia en ambos grupos fue cambio a la primera lengua. Sin embargo, mientras que el docente que parecía estar más involucrado con los estudiantes utilizó también solicitud de aclaración, comprobación de comprensión y pedir confirmación; el docente que parecía estar más distante de los alumnos utilizó principalmente comprobación de comprensión y repetición. El tamaño del grupo, la disposición de los asientos y el tipo de actividades de aprendizaje son también algunos de los factores que influyeron en las estrategias de comunicación que se empelaron.

Palabras clave: Estrategias de comunicación, interacción en el aula, enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera

Resumo

Quando os que aprendem inglês não sabem como dizer uma palavra, podem usar suas mãos, imitar sons, inventar palavras ou descrever o que querem dizer para não interromper a comunicação. Estas formas de comunicar-se são estratégias de comunicação (EC). Os docentes de inglês como língua estrangeira não sempre estão conscientes da importância de ensinar-lhes estratégias de comunicação aos seus alunos, ou bem não lhes dão preparação explicita para utilizá-las. Com frequência o que observamos é que os docentes abandonam a mensagem que queriam comunicar ou utilizam a primeira língua para evitar problemas de comunicação. Este estudo examinou as estratégias de comunicação empregadas por dois docentes de inglês como língua estrangeira com seus estudantes de nível básico; e os fatores que influem nas estratégias de comunicação que se utilizam. A informação se recolheu de três fontes: (1) gravações de interações naturais na aula; (2) entrevistas com os docentes; e (3) observações registradas em seis sessões de classe. As transcrições das interações se examinaram mediante a taxonomia de estratégias de comunicação de Faerch e Kasper (1983). Os resultados indicaram que a estratégia utilizada com maior frequência em ambos grupos foi câmbio à primeira língua. Entretanto, enquanto o docente que parecia estar mais envolvido com os estudantes utilizou também solicitação de esclarecimento, comprobação de compreensão e pedir confirmação; o docente que parecia estar mais distante dos alunos utilizou principalmente comprovação

112

de compreensão e repetição. O tamanho do grupo, a disposição dos registros e o tipo de atividades de aprendizagem são também alguns dos fatores que influíram nas estratégias de comunicação que se empregaram.

Palavras chave: Estratégias de comunicação, interação na aula, ensino do inglês como língua estrangeira.

Introduction

The use of communication strategies in the foreign language classroom has been studied in the United States and Great Britain since the 1980's and more recently in some Arab countries (Rababah, 2003; 2005). Communication strategies are attempts to bridge the gap between the linguistic knowledge of the second-language learner and the linguistic knowledge of his or her interlocutor in real communication situations. Studies have found that communication strategies, unconsciously used in the first language, do not automatically transfer to the second language. Actually, communication strategies need to be explicitly taught for students to improve their accuracy and fluency (Dörnyei, 1995).

Studies on classroom interaction and in the teaching and use of communication strategies by foreign language learners are scarce in Mexico. Moreover, teachers are not always aware of the importance of teaching communication strategies to their students or, if they are aware, they do not explicitly train their students to use them. They do not use these strategies themselves to serve as a model to their students. Most often, what I have observed is that language teachers abandon the message or switch to the first language to avoid communication problems in the classroom.

To contribute to the knowledge on the use of communication strategies in the foreign language classroom and provide recommendations for language teachers and language teacher educators, this study investigated the communication strategies used by two teachers in a beginner EFL classroom. The study does not intend to bring about generalizable results, but to illustrate how communication

113

strategies are used in a specific learning context and how a taxonomy of communication strategies can help interpret teacher-student interaction.

Literature Review

This section presents the literature consulted on communication strategies, as well as the studies considered as a basis for the current study.

The Notion of Communication Strategies

The notion of communication strategies, thus, refers to a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations in which they do not share the requisite meaning structures. In other words, communication strategies are attempts to bridge the gap between the linguistic knowledge of the second-language learner and the linguistic knowledge of his or her interlocutor in real communication situations. Approximation, mime, and circumlocution may be used to bridge this gap. Message abandonment and avoidance may be used where the gap is perceived as unbridgeable.

A broader definition of CSs was proposed by Faerch and Kasper (1984), who emphasized the planning and execution of speech production. These authors affirmed that to solve communication problems, a learner does not only cooperate with his or her interlocutor, but also finds a solution without the help of others. This view led to further research concentrating on learners' internal mental activities, such as CS use for solving lexical problems (Poulisse, 1987).

Faerch and Kasper (1984) affirm that there are two types of CSs: Achievement strategies and reduction strategies. Achievement strategies allow learners to have an alternative plan to achieve reaching an original goal using the resources that are available. Reduction strategies are used by learners to avoid solving a communication problem and allow them to give up on conveying an original message. Achievement strategies consist of compensatory strategies and retrieval strategies. Compensatory strategies include codeswitching, interlingual transfer, interlanguage–based strategies, cooperative strategies, and nonlinguistic strategies. Retrieval strategies are used when learners have difficulties in retrieving specific interlanguage items. Reduction strategies consist of formal reduction strategies (using a reduced system to avoid producing non-fluent or incorrect utterances) and function reduction strategies (giving up on sending a message or avoiding a specific topic).

114

CSs allow learners to continue in the conversation, which provides them with opportunities to hear more input and produce new utterances. Consequently, the use of CSs can have a significant learning effect for EFL learners. For this reason, CSs should be considered as a subset of learning strategies, which contain both skills for learning a language and applications of them in real communication contexts.

The Teachability of Communication Strategies

Researchers agreed that the strategic competence that speakers develop in their first language could be freely transferable to their second language use (Bongaerts & Poulisse, 1989; Kellerman, Ammerlaan, Bongaerts, & Poulisse, 1990). This meant that most adult language learners already have a repertoire of communicative strategies that they use in L1, regardless of their level of L2 proficiency. Kellerman (1991), for example, affirmed that if the cognitive processes are familiar from the L1, there was no point in teaching these strategies, and concluded "there is no justification for providing' training in compensatory strategies in the classroom. Teach the learners more language and let the strategies look after themselves" (p. 158).

Hungarian researcher Dornyei (1995), at present professor of psycholinguistics at the University of Nottingham, not only suggested that communication strategies needed to be taught, but he also provided procedures for strategy straining. The six strategy training procedures that he proposed were the following:

1. Raising learner awareness about the nature and communicative potential of communication strategies by making learners conscious of strategies already in their repertoire, sensitizing them to the appropriate situations where these could be useful, and making them realize that these strategies could actually work.

2. Encouraging students to be willing to take risks and use communicative strategies or, in other words, to manipulate available language without being afraid of making errors.

3. Providing L2 models of the use of certain communication strategies through demonstrations, listening materials and videos, and getting learners to identify, categorize, and evaluate strategies used by native speakers or other L2 speakers. Conversations between the students and native speakers can be recorded on video, and after viewing their own recordings, students can analyze their own strategy use.

115

4. Highlighting cross-cultural differences in communication strategy use because in some languages particular communication strategies may be seen as indications of bad style.

5. Teaching communication strategies directly by presenting linguistic devices to verbalize them.

6. Providing opportunities for practice in strategy use is necessary because communication strategies can only fulfill their function as immediate first aid devices if their use has reached an automatic stage.

The problem is that many teacher education or teaching training programs do not include communication strategy knowledge to make teachers aware of the importance of communication strategies in language learning. Other programs do include communication strategy training contents; however, teachers do not make use of this knowledge in their everyday practice. This study sets out to investigate if two language teachers possess this knowledge and the ways in which they actually communicate with their students in their courses. Specifically, the study is guided by three research questions:

1. How do participants use communication strategies in the EFL classroom?

2. What is the perception of the participants of the use of communication strategies in the EFL classroom?

3. What factors influence communication strategies used by the participants?

Methods

Participants

The participants of this study were students and teachers from two beginner-level English classes. The composition of the classes were mixed; some were high-school students, others were university students; still others were employed adults. One of the classes had 27 students while the other class had 23 students enrolled in the course. Students' attendance had great variation throughout the data collections process. The ages of students were in the range of 18 to 60, although the majority was between 18 and 20 years old.

The two teachers participating in this research were males. The teacher of Group 1 was 52 years old and had 28 years of teaching experience. He learned English in the United States and had certifications

116

for English language and English teaching. For the purposes of this study, the pseudonym Pablo is used hereafter. Teacher of Group 2 was 28 years old and had three years of teaching experience. He learned English in his hometown and studied an undergraduate degree in engineering. He had taken the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) with a Band 2 certification. At the time of the study, he was close to obtaining the In-service Certification for English Language Teachers (ICELT) by Cambridge. In this paper the pseudonym Leo is used to refer to him.

Context

This study took place in the Language Center of a Mexican public university in the northeast of the country. The aim of the Center is providing foreign language courses and training courses for English teachers. It serves more than 5,000 students per year. The classes are given by 59 language teachers. The center offers beginner, intermediate and advanced English, French and German courses. The study was carried out in two beginning-level English classes.

Data Sources

Data for this study came from: (1) transcriptions of audio-recordings of classroom interactions of two English language teachers and their beginner-level students; (2) interviews with 2 teachers; and observation notes taken during six class sessions. Classroom interactions were recorded without previous preparation of students or teachers. The purpose was to identify and quantify the communication strategies they spontaneously used in the classroom. The interviews were held to obtain information from the two teachers about their backgrounds, their years of teaching experience, and their knowledge of communication strategies. Observation notes were taken of the students' and teachers' behaviors while communicating in six distinct classes, three per teacher.

Data Analysis

Once classroom interactions were audio-recorded and transcribed, the framework by Faerch and Kasper (1983) was adopted to code the communication strategies used. The framework was selected because the categories seemed clearly explained and appropriate for the characteristics of the language data collected (Rababah, 2002).. A frequency form was designed to classify the communication strategies that occurred during the two hours of each class. The Teacher-Student

117

and Student-Teacher interactions once coded were counted to calculate percentages.

Table 1. Communication Strategies Taxonomy (Færch & Kasper. 1983)

Code	Strategy	Description	
C1	Topic avoidance	Avoid discussions about the concept	Intra-individual Communication Strategies**
C2	Message Abandonment	stop in mid-utterance	
C3	Meaning replacement	use alternative expressions	
C4	Generalization	use a generalized IL item	
C5	Paraphrase	focus on characteristic properties of the intended referent	
C6	Word coinage	create a new IL word	
C7	Restructuring	restructure one's utterance	
C8	Approximation	use an incorrect item that shares some semantic features	
C9	Literal translation	translate literally	
C10	Language switch	insert words from native language	
C11	Foreignizing	apply TL modification to the L1 item	
C12	Mime	replace a word with nonverbal cues (kinesthetically)	
C13	Code-based confirmation check	repeat the previous utterance for confirmation	Inter-individual Communication Strategies*
C14	Positive confirmation check	ask for confirmation	
C15	Clarification request	attempt to check comprehension	
C16	Comprehension check	attempt to check comprehension	
C17	Other reformulation	model the speaker's previous utterance	
C18	Repetition	repeat utterance	

*Intra-individual communication strategies. This view locates CSs in models of speech production or cognitive organization and processing models.
**Inter-individual communication strategies. This perspective allows for an inclusion of various repair mechanisms (the negotiation of meaning between interlocutors).

The interviews and the observation notes were examined using content analysis. A qualitative content analysis is a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It is an approach of empirical analysis of texts considering their context of communication (Mayring, 2000). This analysis goes beyond counting the words; it is rather focused on the examination of meaning occurring within a particular context.

Findings

As Table 1 shows, for session 1, Pablo had a total of 15 students attending the class; while Leo had 22 students. For session 2, 12 students attended Pablo's class while 23 students attended Leo's class. On the third data collection session, 13 students came to Pablo's class in Group 1 and 19 students came to Leo's class in Group 2.

Table 2. Students attendance per session

118

Data collection sessions	Group 1 (Pablo)	Group 2 (Leo)	TOTAL
1	15 students	22 students	37 students
2	12 students	23 students	35 students
3	13 students	19 students	32 students

Group 1 had a large classroom and student attendance was scarce; of a total of 23 students registered for the class, 15 (65%) was the

highest number of students attending. Group 2, on the other hand, had a smaller classroom with more student attendance; the total number of students registered in the class was 27 and 23 (85%) was the highest number of students attending. Students in Group 1 gathered in small teams spread around the classroom. Students in Group 2 were always crowded in a small room.

According to the observation notes, Pablo sat behind the desk the whole class, staying distant from the students. He rarely went from table to table to check students' work. Leo, on the other hand, had a crowded classroom. He rarely sat behind the desk. He was always walking around the classroom, checking on the student´s work and talking to them.

Types of Communication Strategies Used

As Table 1 shows, of the total of communication strategies used by both groups, 25% were language switch; 17% clarification request; 12% comprehension check; 12% asking confirmation; 10% translation; 9% repetition; 5% paraphrase; 4% code-based confirmation check; 3% other reformulation; 2% meaning replacement; and 1% mime. Restructuring, generalization, and approximation were communication strategies never used by the participants.

Table 3. Strategies used in Group 1 and Group 1

Strategy	Group 1 (Pablo)		Group 2 (Leo)		TOTAL	
Language switch	18	21%	50	25%	68	25%
Comprehension check	14	16%	21	11%	35	12%
Repetition	12	14%	14	7%	26	9%
Asking confirmation	11	12%	24	12%	35	12%
Paraphrase	9	10%	4	2%	13	5%
Clarification request	7	8%	38	19%	45	17%
Meaning Replacement	4	5%	3	2%	7	2%
Other reformulation	4	5%	5	3%	9	3%
Translation	4	5%	24	12%	28	10%
Code-based confirmation check	3	3%	8	4%	11	4%
Restructuring	1	1%	0	0%	1	0%
Generalization	0	0%	1	0%	1	0%
Approximation	0	0%	2	1%	2	0%
Mime	0	0%	4	2%	4	1%
TOTAL	87	100%	198	100%	285	100%

119

Considering the communication strategies used by each group, Table 1 also shows that Group 1, taught by Pablo, used language switch (21%); comprehension check (16%); repetition (14%); asking confirmation (12%); paraphrase (10%); confirmation request (8%); meaning replacement (5%); other replacement (5%); translation (5%); code-based confirmation check (3%); and restructuring (1%). Generalization, approximation and mime communication strategies were not used by Group 1.

Group 2, taught by Leo, on the other hand, used language switch (25%); clarification request (19%); asking confirmation (12%); translation (12%); comprehension check (11%); repetition (7%); code-based confirmation check (4%); other reformulation (3%); paraphrase (2%); meaning replacement (2%); mime (2%); and approximation (1%). Group 2 did not use restructuring and generalization communication strategies.

The following excerpt of one of the teacher-student interactions illustrates how the participants used language switch. In this case, Pablo asked the student a punctuation related question: Where does the comma go? The following statement was generated from the question asked:

T: Perfect, la coma donde va? antes o después?

S: Antes

T: Before, o sea aquí…

S: Del nice? T:

T: Antes del but…

The above example shows how Pablo switched from English to Spanish, to ask a question, and to obtain the correct answer from the student. He first asked in Spanish to obtain an answer from the student; then he replied providing the term in English. The student replied with another question in Spanish and then the teacher provided the correct answer.

120

The second communication strategy most frequently used by both groups was clarification request. The following segment of teacher-student talk exemplifies how clarification request was used. The students had to do a workbook exercise and Pablo was going over the answers with them.

T: Cecilia, read number one…

S:this lap top is more versatile …

T: more what?

S: more versatile mine

T:yes, complete

S: versatile mine

T: than mine, hay que agregar el that después del comparativo, this laptop is more versatile than mine…ok? Now Brenda number two…

S: your furniture is more nice than you neighbor´s furniture

T: nicer

S:nice, nice than you neighbor's furniture

T: nicer than

 S:nicer

T: you say nice you say nice, nicer…nice!

S: Shopping online is easier than going to the store…

T: correct, how do you say it?

S: Easier

T: Easier!

As the extract above shows, Pablo asked the students the question: more what? A student replied with the correct answer and he made the student repeat the correct answer.

The following example of the use of clarification request was recorded in Pablo's class. This use of clarification requests was very common in simple and easy questions.

T: Many, cuando es contable

S: qué? Contable?

T: one, two three

121

The segment demonstrates how the teacher states something, and to ensure she understood, the student asks again receiving a more specific answer.

The following segment again exemplifies the use of the asking for confirmation strategy. This occurred in a context in which the teacher was asking the students something so that they would reply with the word they were going to be using in an exercise.

T: Bueno what word do you see in the three, qué palabra ven en las tres? What is the word that we are going to use in the three….

S: Should…

T:should…yes? We are going to use recommendations, recommendations... sorry with should, yes? Here we are going to use should or shouldn't…

The teacher made the questions with the purpose of making the students understand the word should which they would be working with in the lesson. A student replied "should", asking for Leo's confirmation. Leo replied affirming that the answer provided was indeed correct.

Comprehension check was a strategy mostly used by teachers to verify that students had understood. The following fragment happened in a context in which students were doing a listening exercise.

T: did you understand all the conversation? Or only one part? Did you understand all the conversation? Yes?

S: Yes!

T: it talks about clothing…yes

S: teacher, how do you say dir dirty?

T: dirty...d-i-r-t-y…dirty is that it is not clean, imagine is not eh…many black parts in a shirt…yes, that's dirty yes it's that is not clean yes? It's the contrary word for clean…

The extract above illustrates how Leo asked the students questions to check their listening comprehension.

According to the classroom interaction transcripts and the observation notes, the communication strategies were mostly employed by Group 1 and Group 2 when:

-   They needed to know how to say a word

-   They had doubts about the lesson

-   The teacher asked them questions

When students needed to know how to say a word, they would usually ask the teacher in Spanish. Very rarely did they use English for that purpose. When students had doubts about the lesson, again, they would mostly ask the teacher their questions in their L1. The teacher would usually repeat the same sentence in English and then translate it to Spanish so that the student would understand. Teachers generally encouraged students to repeat the sentences in English to give them opportunities for practice.

On the other hand, when students asked the teacher the meaning of a word, the teachers would not give the exact meaning of the word to the students. Teachers would rather give them an example of how the word was used to encourage them to figure out the meaning.

Students used communication strategies most frequently when the teacher asked questions, either personal or related to the lesson. Students immediately replied; however, in some occasions they replied in Spanish. They replied with doubts, mispronouncing the word and even with a sentence that was not structured correctly. The teacher answered with the correct pronunciation of the word and the correct structure of the sentence, to serve as a model for the student.

Perceptions of Teachers of the Use of Communication Strategies in the EFL Classroom

To examine the perceptions of the two teachers on the use of communication strategies in the classroom, an interview was held with each one of them. The teachers were also asked about the different communication strategies that they thought they could use when communicating with students. Pablo reported that the communication strategies that he used in the classroom included providing students with alternative ways of expressing in English. He said he used paraphrasing and also positive and reinforcing comments to make students confident in their use of English. Pablo reported that other strategies that he used in the classroom were: encouraging students to restructure their questions; and replying with complete sentences to the questions asked by the students. Leo, on the other hand, reported that he used paraphrasing to check the students' understanding of the meaning of words, and that he gave explanations of the meanings of words. Both Pablo and Leo seemed to have declarative knowledge of communication strategies, and they did not seem to use them in their language teaching. In other words, their procedural knowledge was needed. Also, neither of them used group-work in their classrooms so that students could use communication strategies among themselves. Interaction was mostly teacher-fronted.

123

Factors that Influence the Use of Communication Strategies

There seemed to be many factors that influenced the use of communication strategies in the classroom. Some factors appeared to have a negative influence and others, a positive influence. According to the observation notes, Group 1 used the least number of strategies. Students in Group 1 did not have a seating arrangement; they were spread out in the classroom. As a consequence, students would only talk to the same small group of classmates close to them. They did not have opportunities to move around the classroom to interact with different classmates.

Another factor that did not encourage the use of communication strategies in Group 1 was that the class did not seem to be interactive. Observation notes indicate that students did not appear to be motivated to talk. When working in groups, students talked in Spanish, using English only when Pablo got close to them. Students could have had more opportunities to practice or communicate in the classroom if Pablo had provided them with challenging activities. Students were always focused on their books in the three sessions observed.

Group 2 used more communication strategies. According to the observation notes students in this class sat closer. They had the opportunity to talk to each other and to Leo, who was frequently walking around the classroom, asking questions related to the lesson and even personal questions, to encourage communication. In this group there was hardly a silent moment. Leo was always interacting with the students. Due to this, students were not afraid to ask any type of question or information. Leo used a variety of activities that encouraged teacher-student interaction. However, student-student interaction rarely happened.

Conclusions

The current research examined the use of communication strategies in the beginner EFL classroom. To collect data, six class sessions with two different teachers were recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were coded using Faerch and Kasper's (1983) taxonomy of communication strategies. Results revealed that considering both groups, the communication strategies most frequently used were language switch, clarification request, comprehension check, and asking for confirmation.

Results by teacher, however, indicate that while in Pablo's class language switch, comprehension check and repetitions were

124

more frequently used. In Leo's class, language switch, clarification request, comprehension check, and asking for confirmation were the communication strategies most frequently used. However, both of these classes were teacher-fronted. The lack of use of other strategies was perhaps because teachers never used significant activities such as collaborative tasks or group work. Group work can encourage the use of communication strategies. Not having students interact with each other influenced the way communication strategies were used in both of the classrooms examined. The lack of interaction among students led to having only teacher-student and student-teacher interaction. Most importantly, during interactions students did not make an effort to using the foreign language as a source when facing communication problems. They switched to Spanish, which is the easiest way to keep communication flowing, but the less convenient way for language learning.

Results of the study indicate that students used their native language most of the class time. Considering that it is hardly possible that they use English in their everyday life, teachers should make all efforts to help them use English in the classroom. Other than the classroom, students do not have other places and opportunities to use the foreign language they are learning. Teachers therefore, should be knowledgeable and capable of eliciting English use from students.

Dörnyei (1995) suggests that communication strategies need to be taught and he also suggests procedures for strategy training. Dörnyei argues that teachers should raise students' awareness, encourage them to take risks, and provide them with models and opportunities to use communication strategies. Data from both, students and teachers in this study, indicate that neither the students nor the teachers were aware that they could use communication strategies to facilitate their teaching and learning. Not using these strategies in the classroom makes it even less likely that they use them in real life situations to solve communicative disruptions and enhance interaction in the foreign language (Doryei & Scott, 1997; Faerch & Kasper, 1983a; Tarone, 1980).

Recommendations

125

The academic departments of language centers should provide new teachers with teacher training programs that include communication strategy use in the classroom. This would prepare EFL teachers to help students solve communication problems even from the beginner level class and improve their fluency. Students would get used to finding ways to solve their communication problems without turning to their first

language. Academic departments should also give more attention to the composition of class groups. Mixing students with different needs and interests (high-school, university and non-traditional students), makes it very difficult for teachers to plan lessons and materials.

Language center administration departments should plan language classes to hold a manageable number of students in order to give them more opportunities for interaction. Language classes with 12 to 15 students give more chances for students to participate in pairs, small groups and whole-class interaction. Also, classroom size should be considered by language center administrations. Classrooms should be big enough for teachers and students to move around easily.

Language teachers should change seating arrangements frequently to get students to know each other better and to foster communication. By planning the seating arrangement in accordance with the activities and tasks to carry out for each language learning objective, teachers would facilitate communication among students.

Language teachers should also give variety to their classes by planning different kinds of activities for different purposes. Activities should also focus on the development of different types of abilities and not only on textbook exercises. Textbooks can be very useful for foreign language learning, but students also need other activities to be able to practice different real-life language competencies. Teachers should also design and adapt more materials to the lesson that is being taught to attract their attention and facilitate their learning.

Teachers should also be encouraged to resort less to language switch and to use other communication strategies that are more favorable to language learning. This would help students find more ways to communicate with the teachers and other students instead of using language switch as the only way to overcome their communication difficulties.

Students, on the other hand, can improve their knowledge and their practice of communication strategies attending classes regularly. Some of the classes in which data was collected for this study did not have most of the students present in the classroom. Also, English should be required from them at all times in class. These issues should be considered in the class and school regulations.

These recommendations are expected to improve language teaching and learning, and particularly to increase the use of communication strategies in the classroom, especially in the beginner levels. The active cooperation of language center departments,

126

teachers and students should contribute to a better language education that prepares learners for real-life situations. It is also expected that this study encourages other applied linguistics students to continue researching the teaching, learning and use of communication strategies in different contexts.

References

Bongaerts, T., & Poulisse, N. (1989). Communication strategies in L1 and L2: Same or different? *Applied Linguistics*, 10, 253–268.

Dörnyei, Z. (1995). On the teachability of communication strategies. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29, 55–85.

Færch, C., & Kasper, G. (1983). On identifying communication strategies in interlanguage production. In C. Færch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in interlanguage communication* (pp. 210–238). London: Longman.

Kellerman, E. (1991). Compensatory strategies in second language research: A critique, a revision, and some (non-) implications for the classroom. In R. Phillipson, E. Kellerman, L. Selinker, M. Sharwood Smith, & M. Swain (Eds.), *Foreign/second language pedagogy research*, (pp. 142-161). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Kellerman, E., Ammerlaan, T., Bongaerts, T., & Poulisse, N. (1990). System and hierarchy in L2 compensatory strategies. In R. C. Scarcella, E. S. Andersen, & S. D. Krashen (Eds.), *Developing communicative competence in a second language*, (pp. 163-178). New York: Newbury House.

Poulisse, N. (1987). Problems and solutions in the classification of compensatory strategies. *Second Language Research*, 3, 141–153.

Rababah, G. (2002). *Taxonomies, data elicitation, methodology, and teachability issues*. A review article. ERIC Document 472 698.

Rababah, G. (2003). Communication and Linguistic Problems Facing Arab Learners of English. *Indian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 29 (1), 127-42.

Rabab'ah, G. (2005). Communication problems facing Arab learners of English. *Journal of Language and Learning* 3 (1), 194.

127

Authors

* Carmen A. Rodríguez Cervantes has a B.A in Applied Linguistics from Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas, México.

* Ruth Roux holds a Ph.D in Second Language Acquisition / Instructional Technology from the University of South Florida. She teaches in the B.A in Applied Linguistics at Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas. Her research interests include language, education and culture.
Email: rrouxr@uat.edu.mx