
Feature Article

Teachable Communication Strategies: Asking for Help in English Conversations

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When L2 learners with lower levels of proficiency attempt to communicate in their fledgling L2, misunderstandings are inevitable. When they occur, finding ways to overcome those misunderstandings is key. This paper discusses the communication strategy known as the “Appeal for Assistance,” or more familiarly, “Asking for Help.” The strategy was introduced and routinely practiced in several mandatory English classes of lower-proficiency EFL students at a Japanese university in spring semester of 2011. At the end of the semester, one-on-one teacher-student conversation tests were conducted. Results from a post-course survey to these students were significantly positive, suggesting they perceived the strategy as confidence-boosting and useful outside the classroom. Tentatively these results support the position that hands-on training with communication strategies in EFL classrooms, specifically with a treatment of the Ask for Help strategy, may be beneficial for boosting speaking confidence and motivation among students of lower-level English proficiency.

第二外国語を学習する初心者が、初級レベルの英語力でコミュニケーションをとろうとするときに、そのコミュニケーションに誤解が生じるのはやむを得ない。誤解が生じる場合には、それを乗り越える方法を見つけることが大切である。本研究は、学生が「助けを求める」際の、コミュニケーション方法について論じたものである。本研究は、2011年、春のセメスターに、日本の大学において導入、実践された。対象は、必修教科として英語を外国語として学ぶ、9つのクラスである。レベルは初級者である。学期末には、教員との対面で一人ずつ、英会話テストを実施した。対象クラスの授業のアンケート結果は、非常にポジティブなものであった。そのため、学生の自信を引き上げる方法として、この方法は 教室外でも利用できると考えられる。本稿は、EFLのクラスにおいて、本研究が示すコミュニケーション方法が、学生の自信を向上させること、特に「助けを求める」行為が、初級レベルの英語学習者の間でモチベーションを向上させることを示した。

An instructor asks an EFL student a question in English. The student freezes, wide-eyed, maybe smiles sheepishly. An uncomfortable silence follows. The instructor repeats the question, or rephrases it. The silence deepens. The student offers only a puzzled, bewildered look, or at best, an emphatic “Eh?” A communication breakdown has occurred. The instructor and the student both begin to think that further attempts at communication are not worth the effort.

This scenario is a familiar one to EFL teachers. In the case of Japan, some of the literature points to inherent shyness and reticence in Japanese students (Doyon, 2000; Ellis, 1997; Helgesen, 1993; Miller, 1995). Plentiful studies attest to the EFL classroom being rooted in traditional, teacher-centered designs (Gorsuch, 1998; Hino, 1988; McVeigh, 2001; Shimahara, 1984). Further, most students enter university having undergone six mandatory years of passive lectures that include copying and translating, and memorizing difficult reading passages, grammar and vocabulary in order to pass examinations (Anderson, 1993; Nozaki, 1993). Consequently, while some students gain test-taking ability, many are disappointed that their efforts have yielded very little in terms of practical communicative ability (Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Falout & Falout, 2005).

An Unwillingness to Communicate in the Japanese EFL Classroom

Over the past few decades, much research has focused on the need to improve Japanese students’ communicative ability in English. The current pre-tertiary system of copying, analyzing and memorizing serves only to prepare students to take written tests. If the goal of an English language classroom is genuinely to foster communicative competence, the challenge lies in linking oral communication practice—specifically, getting students to talk to each other using whatever manner of English they can manage—with the act of raising awareness of words and structures. However, while in-class practice can forgive imperfect English, testing does not. Most Japanese EFL classrooms focus on the teaching and testing of correct English. So, students come out of the classroom thinking that they must use correct English, and that if they do not, they will fail to communicate.

Trying to communicate and failing is an embarrassing experience.

Inherent Japanese shyness, as it is called, may somehow be a factor in Japanese students' inability or unwillingness to engage in communicative tasks in the classroom. However, a greater portion of the problem lies in the fact that most have never been shown that it is possible to use imperfect English to communicate. They are not told that, in fact, millions of people successfully communicate with imperfect English every day, nor how they can make the best of what English they already know.

Some Japanese university instructors of English, exempt from the pre-tertiary obligation to prepare students for written examinations, wish to focus on an oral element in class, including conversation activities and speaking tests. However, despite enthusiasm, patience and coaxing on the part of instructors, students are often reticent. They freeze up, get flustered or panic when faced with classroom tasks that require them to communicate in English with the teacher or with classmates. In spite of earnest efforts to remind students to try their best, in worst cases, they may simply be unresponsive.

This unwillingness to participate in communicative activities may stem from a feeling of not *wanting* to communicate in English. Among the many reasons for this feeling is, arguably, a perception on the part of students that they *cannot* communicate in English. Particularly, they may feel they have insufficient linguistic means despite their mandatory six years of exposure to English learning. However, as Dörnyei (1995) comments,

Some people can communicate effectively in an L2 with only 100 words. How do they do it? They use their hands, they imitate the sound or movement of things, they mix languages, they create new words, they describe or circumlocute something they don't know the word for—in short, they use communication strategies (p.56).

This is encouraging, because six or more years of compulsory English classes have likely afforded students a vocabulary of more than 100 words, and at least a basic understanding of language forms. Raising awareness of communication strategies in the L2 classroom shows students that communication is possible

immediately using the English they already know. This has significant potential to motivate learners, or re-motivate otherwise demotivated learners, toward English language learning.

The Appeal for Assistance (Ask for Help) strategy works well as an introduction to any number of other communication strategies, or it can be introduced singly. It complements any classroom activities that involve oral communication between students, or between students and teachers. Student feedback from a pilot survey discussed herein suggests a treatment of the Ask for Help strategy helps students feel that, even with a low proficiency level, they do not lack resources when navigating a conversation in English.

What's a Communication Strategy?

Communication strategies have their roots in the SLA field of error analysis. Corder (1967) observed how language learners systematically dealt with communication breakdowns that occurred because of an insufficient grasp of the target language. He proposed a distinction between language learner *mistakes*, or utterances that are randomly incorrect, and *errors*, or systematically incorrect utterances, the latter reflecting the learner's "knowledge of the language to date, i.e. his *transitional competence* (pp. 166-167)."

Later, Selinker (1972) dubbed this transitional competence *interlanguage*, which became a new field of SLA research. He referred to L2 communication strategies as certain kinds of errors made by learners of a second language as they attempted to express themselves in spontaneous speech using their interlanguage. These kinds of errors could include, for example, making up a word, using an approximate word, using gestures, and so on. As research into the concept of interlanguage—and the communication strategies characteristic of it—blossomed thereafter, extensive definitions were devised for the term (Faerch & Kasper, 1984; Poulisse, Bongaerts & Kellerman, 1984; Stern, 1983). Generally these definitions revolve around a core meaning of, as Chen (1990) puts it, "devices employed by L2 learners when they encounter problems in L2 communication because their communicative ends have outrun their communicative means" (p. 157). Although the definition was multifaceted,

communication strategies began to be perceived not as by-products of clumsy attempts at communication by learners with deficient L2 command, but rather as potential tools for learners to enhance their attempts at communication.

In the 1980s, study in this field widened as a number of researchers identified and created taxonomies of communication strategies. Two of the most inclusive taxonomies occur in Faerch and Kasper (1983) and in Willems (1987). These taxonomies attempt a comprehensive categorization of communication strategies that L2 learners use. In her review of several major classification systems, Bialystok (1990) posits that a basic set of core strategies persists across all taxonomies, and refers to a typology created by Tarone (1978, 1980). This list of core strategies and their descriptions is provided in Table 1.

Research into communication strategies, while comparatively a new field in SLA, is not meager. However, as Ellis commented in 1985, “Theoretical discussion of communication strategies has predominated over empirical research into their use” (p.183). Some research has more recently dealt with the potential teachability of communication strategies in the EFL classroom (Dörnyei, 1995; Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991; Maleki, 2010; Maybin & Bergschneider, 1992; Nakatani, 2010b, Scattergood, 2003; Willems, 1987).

Canale & Swain’s (1980) theory of communicative competence also helped establish a place for communication strategies in the EFL classroom. They proposed a construct of communicative competence to include three main subcomponents (Figure 1):

Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991) note that most language teaching is focused around improving students’ *grammatical competence*, and that although recently course books and language tests are being designed to develop *sociolinguistic competence*, the component of communicative competence that remains most neglected by instructors and learning materials is *strategic competence*. They observe, “The lack of fluency or conversational skills that students often complain about is, to a considerable extent, due to the underdevelopment of strategic competence” (p. 16).

Further, some research suggests strategy training may be particularly beneficial for lower-proficiency learners (Willems, 1987; Dörnyei, 1995;

Table 1

Tarone's communication strategy typology (1978, 1980)

Communication Strategy	Description	
Avoidance	Topic Avoidance	Occurs when the learner simply doesn't talk about concepts for which the vocabulary or other meaning structure is not known.
	Message Abandonment	Occurs when the learner begins to talk about a concept but is unable to continue due to lack of meaning structure, and stops in mid-utterance.
Paraphrase	Approximation	Use of a single target language vocabulary item or structure, which the learner knows is not correct, but which shares enough semantic features in common with the desired item to satisfy the speaker (e.g., "pipe" for "waterpipe")
	Word coinage	The learner makes up a new word in order to communicate a desired concept (e.g., "airball" for "balloon").
	Circumlocution	The learner describes the characteristics or elements of the object or action instead of using the appropriate target language structure ("She is, uh, smoking something. I don't know what's its name. That's, uh, Persian, and we use in Turkey, a lot of.").
Conscious Transfer	Literal Translation	The learner translates word for word from the native language (e.g. "He invites him to drink" for "They toast one another").
	Language Switch	The learner uses the native language term without bothering to translate (e.g. "balon" [Turkish for "balloon"] or "tirtil" [Turkish for "caterpillar"])
Appeal for Assistance	The learner asks for the correct term or structure (e.g. "What is this?")	
Mime	The learner uses nonverbal strategies in place of a meaning structure (e.g., clapping one's hands to illustrate applause).	

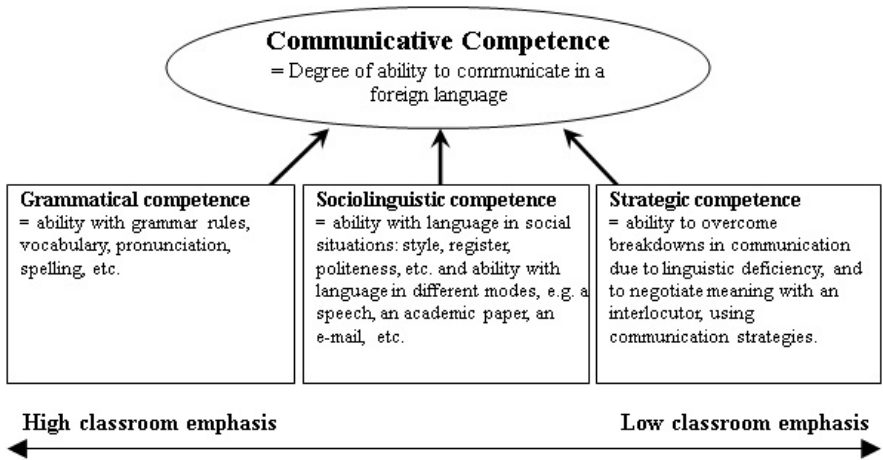


Figure 1. Canale & Swain's (1980) components of communicative competence (based on Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991, p.17).

Nakatani, 2010a, 2010b). As Rost and Ross (1991) comment,

It may be argued that if lower proficiency learners will need to use compensatory strategies in any event, then instruction should be aimed at showing students those linguistic and interactive strategies that are likely to be effective for achieving immediate understanding, and which are most likely to lead the learner toward understanding more of the target language as a system (Bialystok & Frohlich, 1978; Frohlich & Paribakht, 1984). (p.263)

Toward that end, for example, while Willems (1987) advocates training with approximation and paraphrase, Faucette (2001) suggests training in appeals for assistance may be especially useful for lower-proficiency learners, because it immediately enables them to participate in a conversation when they may have otherwise thought they were not able to. Maybin and Bergschneider (1992) treat this particular strategy in detail. A communication-strategy-based textbook published by Maybin and Maher (2007), titled *The Active Learner*, begins with the Ask for Help strategy. It was through experimenting with activities from this textbook that I learned the value of the Ask for Help strategy as a foundation to improving any spoken interaction in an EFL classroom. The activities I used to introduce the strategy, and the results of a short survey I gave to students at the

end of the semester soliciting what they thought of it, are discussed below.

Method: Introducing and Practicing the Ask for Help Strategy

Maybin and Bergschneider (1992) label the Ask for Help strategy as “Control,” referring to a language learner’s ability to manipulate or “control” a conversation (p.151) by using receptive learning strategies—principally, by interrupting the speech of an interlocutor and asking for slower delivery, repetition, or clarification of an unknown word or phrase. They outline several activities that introduce and practice this strategy. A summary of my adaptation of these activities for introducing it to university EFL classes follows.

Activity 1

The entire class stands. The instructor tells students that he or she will speak in English at natural speed, and that if they don’t understand, simply to raise their hand. The instructor then launches into a rambling monologue, without pausing, at native-speaker speed on a topic of his or her choice, replete with difficult words, jargon and turns of phrase that the learners are expected to find incomprehensible. I generally use something like this:

OK, here we are now, and I’m talking at you and you’re looking at me, and maybe some of you comprehend fragments of what I’m saying, but the likelihood is, for all intents and purposes, that most of you are looking at me like deer in headlights. Now, the only real notion I’m hoping you’ll pick up on is, that all I want you to do is raise your hand to indicate to me that you don’t really understand what I’m saying. And I realize this is certainly not something you’re used to, because most of you have encountered language learning environments that fail miserably to foster any kind of interaction at all. Follow me? What I mean is, you’ve all pretty much been trained not to interrupt the other person, least of all an instructor, and tell him or her that you really don’t understand what’s being said, and so . . .

The teacher may circulate among the students while rambling on, making eye contact and occasionally interjecting a brief “Get it?” or “Are you following

me?” Any brave student who actually raises his or her hand is allowed to sit, and the monologue continues. As I have experienced, most students in most classes will attempt to withstand more than several minutes of teacher chatter without uttering a word. When the instructor perceives that students are sufficiently baffled, the entire class is allowed to sit. It is then explained that the reason no one (or so few people) actually raised their hands to interrupt the interlocutor is because they have been trained not to do this, especially in classrooms; however, the activities in this classroom are going to go against that training.

The instructor then passes out a laminated stop sign (Figure 2). Students are instructed to hold the sign up and yell “STOP!” if they don’t understand. Several whole-class choral practices of yelling “STOP!” at the instructor usually exhilarate students.

Activity 2

The entire class stands again, and the instructor begins the monologue again. This time, braver students will try out their new power and be immediately allowed to sit. Others will follow. The instructor motions for students to sit while uninterruptedly carrying on with the monologue. Another key is not to allow students to sheepishly hold up the sign. They have to yell “Stop!” This exercise continues until most of the class is seated, at which point the remainder are allowed to sit. Leaving only one or two students standing might be jarring to

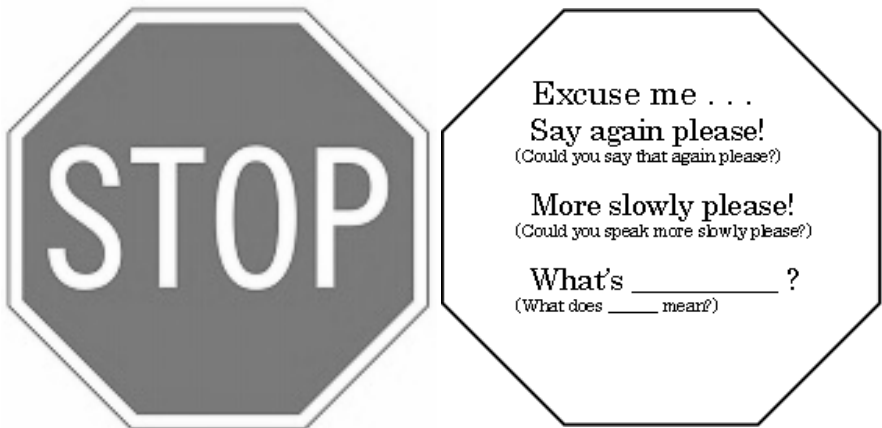


Figure 2. Stop sign (front & back) for introducing the Ask for Help strategy.

them. Praise is then offered and, depending on the instructor's tastes, explanation can be offered as to why this activity can be all at once easy and difficult: it is an easy physical action to raise a sign and yell "Stop!" However, psychologically it is very difficult—perhaps particularly in Japan—to interrupt another person's speech to indicate that you don't understand. Next, the instructor solicits polite ways to interrupt an interlocutor, such as "pardon me" or "excuse me," and jots them on the blackboard.

Activity 3

The instructor solicits from students two main reasons why they didn't understand the monologue. Sometimes students will offer pejorative statements about their own failure to acquire better English ability during six or more years of study in middle school and high school. Self-deprecation is dismissed as unnecessary, as there are only two chief reasons they cannot understand: the interlocutor (instructor) is (a) talking too fast, and/or (b) using words or phrases that are readily unfamiliar—ones the learners may have never encountered before, or may have forgotten. The instructor writes "too fast" and "don't know words" on the blackboard.

Activity 4

The instructor explains the purpose behind abruptly halting an interlocutor's speech: to "ask for help" from them, so that communication can be achieved. Often, I tell students that while interrupting an interlocutor may seem rude, it could just as well be seen as an act of thoughtfulness, an outward indication of desire to understand what the other person is saying, which might be achieved with a little help. Less thoughtful, perhaps, is to say nothing and pretend to understand, or to wait for the other person to pick up on your nonverbal cues.

Activity 5

The instructor introduces "Say again, please" and "More slowly, please" or any similar phrasings he or she prefers, as a response to the interlocutor's speaking speed. The instructor also introduces "What does _____ mean?" as a way to solicit an explanation or rephrasing from the interlocutor of an unknown word or phrase. At this point, the instructor may refer students to these phrases on the

back of the stop sign (Figure 2), and may choose to do choral practice with them.

Activity 6

The whole class stands again. This time, instead of a pauseless monologue, the teacher throws out questions. Students are encouraged to use the “Control Phrases” provided on the back of the stop sign as many times as necessary until they understand and can answer the question. Any sufficient answer to a question allows them to sit down.

An example dialogue may go as follows.

T. [to group, spoken quickly] So, like, what’s yer family like? D’you guys have any siblings?

S. [one student holds up stop sign] Pardon me! Say again please?

T. [repeats, at similar speed]. Sure. D’ya havenny siblings?

S. [another student holds up stop sign] Excuse me! More slowly please.

T. Oh, sure. [a little slower, more deliberate] Do you have any siblings?

S. (holding up stop sign) Excuse me . . . what’s sib—sibul. . .

T. (rephrases) Oh. Siblings? Means, brothers and sisters. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

S. [another student, hurriedly interjecting] One brother!

T. Oh, really? He’s older or younger than you are?

S. Say again please?

T. Older or younger?

S. [gestures with hand for ‘low height’]

T. Ah, a younger brother, eh? How old is he?

S. . . . Six.

T. Six years old. I see. So, do you get along? [includes gesture, holds two index finger together]

S. [smiling, returns ‘X’ gesture, makes punching gestures] No . . . always fight.

T. Ahh, I get it. [motions for that student to sit down, continues throwing out questions]

The routine can be continued for as long as the instructor sees fit, and can be repeated over a series of class periods. A variety of questions can be used.

Each question should offer an opportunity to use the Ask for Help strategy by deliberately employing words or phrases at fast delivery, which the listeners are not likely to understand:

So, about what time d'ja (did you) get up today?

Are you feeling fatigued?

What kinda (kind of) extracurricular stuff do you do?

What are you thinking of doing this weekend? (What's on your agenda this weekend?)

What's your favorite academic subject?

What kind of stuff do you like to do in your free time?

At listeners' requests, each question can be delivered repeatedly or more slowly, or rephrased, until one student can successfully answer. A follow-up variant of this activity is provided in Maybin and Bergschneider (1992), which involves a panel of four or five students standing at the front of the room, facing the other students, while the instructor is seated, back to the class, facing the panel. The instructor sits in order to put students in a psychologically and physically superior position, in order to make it easier for them to use the Control Phrases. Students who successfully answer a question return to the audience and are replaced by another student until all students have taken a turn on the panel up front.

Repetition of these activities reinforces the behavior of actively seeking clarification of an interlocutor's words, as opposed to remaining silent or looking askance and expecting the interlocutor to pick up on the listener's nonverbal indication that he or she cannot understand. While introduction and initial training with the Ask for Help strategy is mostly teacher-student, it can thereafter be used in any classroom activity that involves oral exchange between instructors and students or between students and other students.

Analysis: Student Responses to Strategy Training

In order to get a sense of how students would use what they learned about the Ask for Help strategy in class, at the end of spring semester 2011 I conducted a teacher-student conversation with each student in all nine English classes

I was teaching at the time. These totaled about 170 students, roughly half first years and half second years, and about half male and half female. Majors varied, but most were non-English majors, and by my estimate, most were lower proficiency—including the English majors. Each student had to navigate a 7-8 minute conversation with me on an unrehearsed topic, using no notes and no Japanese. Points were awarded primarily for use of communication strategies to adjust the speech of the interlocutor (instructor) to their level of understanding so they could continue the conversation to the end. A broader description of the testing process is given in Rian (2009).

I also administered a short questionnaire to all students in my nine mandatory (general) English classes during the last class of the semester in order to solicit a general idea of whether they thought the strategy was useful to learn and practice. A total of 165 students responded. They were allowed to write comments either in English or Japanese. Most chose Japanese. The questionnaire is shown in the Appendix.

Although conversation tests have been found to be a source of stress and fear for Japanese students with little experience in English conversation (Nakatani, 2010a), the survey results were significantly positive, with over 80% positive responses for each item. Tentatively, this suggests that communication strategy-focused instruction was well received, and supports the general idea that strategy training benefits low-proficiency students. Devoting significant class time to practicing this particular strategy may seem like time taken away from more traditional routines of introducing and practicing language forms. However, as Maybin and Bergschneider (1992) observe, “For many learners it is sufficient, and often a major personal, psychological accomplishment, to interrupt an interlocutor who is regarded as being in a socially superior position (in this case, a teacher)” (p. 153). The sense of accomplishment with having successfully navigated an unscripted, all-English conversation is something that students may retain long after the class is over. Ideally, they will take away the awareness of and experience with a communication strategy that can empower them to participate in an English conversation anywhere, with anyone (Maybin, 2007).

Limitations and Avenues for Further Study

While encouraging, student feedback on this study must be tempered by the reality of a close teacher/researcher connection. It was emphasized to students that questionnaire responses were strictly anonymous, and would not affect their grades in any way. However, a possible “halo effect” in student evaluations (Haladyna & Hess, 2000; Marsh & Hocevar, 1991; Theall & Franklin, 2001) may have skewed responses heavily toward the positive. In this case, students may have wanted to offer positive feedback to the instructor, who is significantly invested in the outcome of the classroom activities. Future investigations into students’ perceived usefulness of strategy training might better separate the researcher from the equation, perhaps through a greater number of survey items, and with more precise wording.

If conducted by other instructors in their own classes, future action-research studies would benefit from a longitudinal approach. For example, the same questionnaire could be given before and after the strategy training. Further, a contrast of student comments on how they felt about taking conversation tests, between a control group that receives strategy training and one that does not, would be enlightening in terms of exploring how strategy training affects student motivation and perceptions toward oral communication in EFL classrooms. For now, however, the data presented here offer a preliminary response to Faucette’s (2001) and Nakatani’s (2010a) call for the exploration of communication strategy training for lower proficiency students.

It should also be noted that communication strategies are not mutually exclusive. Often, they overlap and are a part of each other. For example, an appeal for assistance like “Pardon?” could be equally expressed by a gesture (putting hand to ear and leaning forward) or a facial expression (raising eyebrows or squinting to indicate not understanding). Further, it is unlikely that an interlocutor would respond mechanically to a less-proficient speaker’s request. Classroom training in the Ask for Help strategy involves not providing modified language until specifically and verbally asked to do so. During the training, I respond only to the request given: for example, “Say again please” solicits an exact repeat of the same phrase at the same speed. “More slowly please” slows it down. Words are

explained only when asked “What does _____ mean?” Outside the classroom, a listener’s request for repetition would not necessarily solicit an exact repeat of the same phrase. Interlocutors would likely be far more sensitive to listeners’ cues and more accommodating of listeners’ potential needs. They might, for example, rephrase a question slowly and with simpler words after the listener remains silent with a confused expression.

Finally, the activities and data I have reviewed here have involved only teacher-student interactions. Future study into how students use the Ask for Help strategy and/or other strategies with fellow students, as well as with other native or non-native-English interlocutors, will hopefully provide deeper insight into how learners might actually employ communication strategies to their own benefit in a real-world setting.

Are Communication Strategies Teachable?

The teachability of communication strategies is debatable, and indeed it has been debated (Dörnyei, 1995; Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991; O’Malley, 1987; Rost & Ross, 1991; Willems, 1987). Kellerman (1991), for example, stated directly, “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). Bialystok (1990) echoed this sentiment: “The more language the learner knows, the more possibilities exist for the system to be flexible and to adjust itself to meet the demands of the learner. What one must teach students of a language is not strategy, but language” (p.147). In the case of Japan, however, I would counter that the result of six or more mandatory years of “more language” has yielded too little in terms of communicative ability, and that strategies do not tend to take care of themselves. Students simply do not come away from EFL classrooms with the awareness that it is in fact acceptable—or even a praiseworthy achievement—to overtly admit linguistic deficiency by interrupting and asking an interlocutor for help with co-building a conversation.

Despite Bialystok’s (1990) and Kellerman’s (1991) criticisms on the teaching of communication strategies, both ultimately balance their statements. Bialystok (1990) acknowledges that “Indeed, any instruction that helps students to master

part of the language *or to become more comfortable using it* [my emphasis] is to be commended and not criticized” (p.141). Kellerman (1991, cited in Dörnyei, 1995) also concedes that situational classroom practice of strategies may be useful in order to help students overcome inhibitions that arise from having to speak in a second language.

Finally, communication strategies are not a panacea to cure the ills of linguistic incompetence. Gaps in linguistic knowledge will inevitably have to be bridged by learners aspiring to higher levels of fluency. However, the worthiness of communication strategies as awareness-raising and motivating devices deserves to be better recognized and more fully exploited. The addition of activities that are designed to practice specific strategies in the classroom seems more likely to influence students’ ability to use them in the classroom—and hopefully outside the classroom—than if they are simply referred to peripherally as devices that can or should be used. That is, for example, hands-on practice using the Ask for Help strategy seems a more effective means of getting students to actually use the strategy than simply indicating that the strategy exists. Dörnyei (1995) echoed this sentiment when he commented,

Providing opportunities for practice in strategy use appears to be necessary because communication strategies can only fulfill their function as immediate first aid devices if their use has reached an automatic stage. My experience in L2 teaching and communication strategy training suggests that this automatization will not always occur without specific focused practice. (p. 64)

Conclusion

When it comes to speaking ability in a foreign language, communication strategies can only compensate for a *temporary* lack of linguistic knowledge (Willems, 1987). In the end, for those looking to achieve advanced ability in a foreign language, a solid fundamental knowledge of vocabulary and grammar remains the surer bet. However, for those students whose confidence and motivation to persevere in acquiring a better linguistic base has been compromised by an overemphasis on memorizing vocabulary and mastering language structure,

as has traditionally been the case in Japan, the introduction of communication strategy training activities seems to offer a fresh and hopeful alternative. As to how or whether communication strategies can effectively improve motivation among language learners, only further research and classroom experimentation will show. For starters, however, an increased focus on the Ask for Help strategy as a foundation for improved recovery from communication breakdowns seems plausible for boosting confidence, particularly among lower-proficiency EFL learners.

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Appendix

Questionnaire about the Ask for Help ("Control") strategy, spring semester 2011

	全く思わない Strongly disagree	思わない Disagree	どちらかいいえない No opinion	思う Agree	強く思 Strongly agree
Learning about the technique of "Control" was interesting. コントロールという「会話術」を学ぶのが面白かった。					
Total responses, 1st & 2nd years, all majors. (N=165)	0	1	3	48	113
Practicing "Control" during class was difficult. 授業中、コントロールを実際に使うのが難しかった。 If yes, why? (難しかったら、なぜ?)					
Total responses, 1st & 2nd years, all majors. (N=165)	20	69	18	48	10
I think I can use "Control" outside the classroom コントロールという会話術を授業以外のところで使えそうと思う。					
Total responses, 1st & 2nd years, all majors. (N=165)	0	2	9	56	98
During the conversation test, by using "Control" I felt I could understand. 会話テスト中、コントロールしたおかげで理解できたという感じだった。					
Total responses, 1st & 2nd years, all majors. (N=165)	0	2	5	74	84
I thought the conversation test was fun. 会話テストは以外と楽しかった。 If you thought it was fun, what parts of it were fun? (楽しかったと思うなら、楽しかったところを具体的に教えて下さい。)					
Total responses, 1st & 2nd years, all majors. (N=165)	0	2	16	42	105

	全く思わない Strongly disagree	思わない Disagree	どちらかいいえない No opinion	思う Agree	強く思 Strongly agree
As a result of taking this class, my confidence toward English conversation improved. この授業を受けてから、英会話に対して自分に自信がついた。					
Total responses, 1st & 2nd years, all majors (N=165)	0	2	26	85	52
	NO			YES	
I have already used “Control” in the real world, outside the classroom. もうすでに「コントロール」を授業以外のところで使ったことがある。If yes, where? when? Did it work well? (もし使うことがあったら、どこ、いつだった? うまくいった?)					
Total responses, 1st & 2nd years, all majors (Note: many “yes” answers were English majors) . (N=165)			124		41