

# Chinese Learners' Communication Strategies Research:

a Case Study at Shandong Jiaotong University

## RECHERCHES SUR LES STRATEGIES DE COMMUNICATION DES ETUDIANTS CHINOIS:

UNE ETUDE DE CAS A L'UNIVERSITE JIAOTONG DE SHANDONG

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**Abstract:** To some extent, what Chinese learners need is communication strategies, which can help them solve problems they may encounter in actual communication. The paper sets out to investigate 89 Chinese learners' communication strategies at Shandong Jiaotong University and the roles it plays in second language acquisition. After a review of current literature on communication strategies, the author conducts investigation on communication strategies of Chinese learners of English, analyzes the results of the investigation and summarizes major points of communication strategies and proposes suggestions for language learning and teaching.

**Key words:** Chinese Learners; Communication Strategies

**Résumé:** Dans une certaine mesure, ce dont les étudiants chinois ont besoin sont des stratégies de communication, qui peuvent les aider à résoudre des problèmes qu'ils rencontreraient dans une communication réelle. L'article vise à étudier les stratégies de communication de 89 étudiants chinois à l'Université Jiaotong de Shandong et le rôle qu'elles jouent dans l'acquisition d'une deuxième langue.

Après une revue des documents actuels sur les stratégies de communication, l'auteur mène une enquête sur les stratégies de communication des étudiants chinois de l'anglais, analyse les résultats de l'enquête, résume les points principaux des stratégies de communication et propose des suggestions pour l'apprentissage et l'enseignement des langues.

**Mots-Clés:** étudiants chinois; stratégies de communication

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\* Received 2 January 2010; accepted 26 January 2010.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Due to the limits of college English teaching such as inadequacy of the teaching time, large class size, pressures of College English Test Band Four & Six (for non-English majors) and Band Four & Eight (for English majors), out-of-date teaching materials and approaches, current English teaching and learning in China are facing unavoidable problems and challenges. As a college English teacher, I often encounter with the fact that some students, even those who can perform well in class, find themselves quite at a loss about what to say when they actually meet with native speakers. These students are quite skillful in writing, reading and translating. However, their listening and speaking abilities are rather weak. To some extent, what they need are communication strategies, which can help them solve problems they may encounter in actual communication. Therefore this paper sets out to investigate Chinese learners' communication strategies and the roles it plays in second language acquisition.

The study of communication strategies has been an exciting area of research for about three decades. On the basis of the study of language learners' interlanguage, Selinker (1972) first proposed the concept of communication strategies. Later on, a number of applied linguists devoted their attention to the analysis of communication strategies' conceptualizations and classifications.

According to Faerch & Kasper, communication strategies are: "the potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal." Communication strategies contribute not only to communication but also to second language acquisition. Firstly of all, communication strategies help to keep communication channels open, and increase a learner's language input. Secondly, they generally encourage hypothesis formation and automation. Finally, strategic competence is one of the important constituents of communicative competence. Combined with learning strategies, communication strategies are an important prerequisite for a learner's autonomy.

In China, Chinese English teachers have consistently set the cultivation of communicative competence as their main teaching goal, and more recently, more and more Chinese researchers and English teachers have realized the significance of strategic competence. However, the study on communication strategies is still rather weak. Therefore, the paper conducts research on this.

## **1. A REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

### **1.1 Definitions and Classifications of Communication Strategies**

#### **1.1.1 Different Definitions of Communication Strategies**

To understand communication strategies, people need to go back to the basic term "strategy". A strategy may be defined conventionally in the military mode or more generally as "a plan or policy of this kind (military planning) to achieve something" (Oxford Study Dictionary, 1991:644). In nonmilitary settings, the concept is applied to situations where it means a plan, a step or a conscious action toward achievement of an objective. All learners work with a strategy, consciously or unconsciously planning how to organize new information and perform tasks.

Communication strategies can be defined both in a broad sense and in a narrow sense. In a narrow sense, communication strategies can be defined as the techniques one uses when facing problems in the process of achieving a communicative goal. In a broad sense, however, communication strategies

refer not only to the problem-oriented techniques but also to those general techniques one employs to attain a special communicative goal (a problem-free one). For example, the strategies a politician utilizes to make his or her speech more eloquent. In a broad sense, communication strategies include affinity-seeking strategies, anxiety reducing strategies and countless other general strategies. This paper limits our discussion of communication strategies to the narrow sense.

It seems evident that no individual's linguistic repertoire or control of language is perfect. Both non-native and native speakers of a given language sometimes struggle to find the appropriate expression or grammatical construction when attempting to communicate their meaning. The ways in which an individual speaker manages to compensate for the gap between what he/she wishes to communicate and his/her immediately available linguistic resources are known as communication strategies. The term communication strategies was first coined by Selinker in 1972 in a theory to explain processes involved in interlanguage. He lists five factors that directly affect the output of the interlanguage system: language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication and overgeneralization of target language rules.

Though Selinker has realized that learner's communication can exercise influence on interlanguage's formation, he fails to draw a clear boundary line between the connotation and denotation of communication strategies.

Corder defines communication strategy as "a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his meaning when faced with some difficulty".

The interactive trait of communication strategies' is observed by Tarone, who regards "interaction" as one of the important parameters in defining communication strategies. Although this is somewhat controversial, it adds a fresh perspective to the study on communication strategies. Tarone holds that communication strategies are utilized to compensate for the blank between learners' native language and the target language. Its main characteristic is "negotiation of an agreement on meaning"(Tarone, 1981). She considers communication strategies to be interactional phenomena: "a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures are not shared".

Faerch & Kasper 1983 have adopted a psycholinguistic approach and recognize communication strategies as being a part of the planning process. The strategies are used when the learner has problems with the original plan and cannot execute it: "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal".

According to Bialystok (1990), communication strategies may be used equally well in situations where no problems have arisen, as is the case when a native speaker gives a road description to a stranger using a long definition of a word instead of the actual word. Bialystok has also questioned "consciousness" as a criterion in defining communication strategies.

Ellis believes that "Communication strategies are psycholinguistic plans, which exist as part of the language users communicative competence. They are potentially conscious and serve as substitutes for production plans which the learner is unable to implement." (Ellis 1985:182)

Viewing from different perspectives, different scholars approach the definition of communication strategies with different emphasis.

### **1.1.2 Different Classifications of Communication Strategies**

Perhaps because of the problems of the definition, there is no generally agreed typology of communication strategies. Various typologies have been proposed by Tarone (1980), Faerch & Kasper (1984), and Bialystok (1990), etc. However, almost all the classification systems divide communication strategies into the following groups: (a) communication strategies related to successful language learners (Rubin, 1975; O'Malley, 1990); (b) communication strategies based on language functions (Tarone, 1980;1983); (c) communication strategies based on native language and L2 language (Bialystok, 1990); (d) communication strategies related to communication goals and means (Pariakht, 1985); and (e) Faerch & Kasper's classification from the perspective of psycholinguistics. The existence of these

distinct strategic typologies indicates a major problem in the research area of communication strategies: a lack of a coherent, well-accepted system for describing these strategies. For reasons of space, the following passages will only focus on two representative taxonomies—Tarone’s and Faerch & Kasper’s classifications.

### **1.1.2.1 Tarone’s Classification-an interactional approach**

Regarding “interaction” as one of her principle in defining communication strategies in functional terms, Tarone provides us a typology as set forth in Table 1

**Table1 Tarone’s typology of communication strategies**

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

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**(Tarone, 1980:429)**

The merits of Tarone’s classification lie in its clarity in dividing communication strategies. Her typology provides a good foundation for later researchers. In her definition and classification, communication strategies are seen as “tools used in a joint negotiation of meaning, in situations where both interlocutors are attempting to agree as to communicative goal”(1980:420)

However, Tarone’s typology has overlapping areas and ambiguities. The first problem with her

approach is that the boundaries established to identify the strategy types, and the distinctions between different strategies seem ambiguous. Another problem with Tarone's classification is that it lacks the flexibility needed to account for what is probably a more realistic relationship between strategies and outcomes. That is, it fails to provide an explanation for how the strategy might have operated to achieve its goal. Finally, Tarone's "interaction" principle is inapplicable to monologue, and her division seems to be just a list of various communicative means, which fails to reflect the role communication strategies play in the communicative procedure.

### **1.1.2.2 Faerch & Kasper's Classification-psycholinguistic perspectives**

Faerch and Kasper adopt the criteria of process or plan, conscious or unconscious and problem-oriented or problem-free to define communication strategies. They define communication strategies as "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal" (Faerch & Kasper 1983:81). They tend to believe that communication strategies are the solution to the individual's problems of processing rather than the speakers' and listeners' mutual problems. Based on this understanding, their approach categorizes the communication strategies into two general possible strategies for solving a communication problem: avoidance strategies in which they avoid the problem, and achievement strategies through which they find an alternative solution. Faerch and Kasper's typology is inclusive and systematic and may reflect the nature of communication strategies better.

#### **Avoidance Strategies**

If a speaker uses the avoidance strategies, it means that he/she tries to do away with or reduce the scope of communication problems, usually by reducing his/her message or abandoning the message to go on with something he/she can manage. In other words, a speaker would choose to employ avoidance strategies usually out of the reason that he/she wants to evade a problem or avoid producing incorrect, non-fluent utterances (Faerch and Kasper, 1983). Avoidance strategies are not only used by L2 learners but also used by native speakers.

However, avoidance strategies can affect the content of the communicative goal: we are all familiar with the essential strategy of avoiding a topic we do not feel confident to talk about. Sometimes, for instance, when I am abroad and have the alternative between buying ticket at a ticket office or from an automatic vending machine, I often choose the latter, I avoid taking the risk of not understanding figures, times or names of places. Also, I think we have all had the experience of abandoning our message, or rounding it off quickly, because we felt it was going to involve us in all sorts of problems with grammar or vocabulary. And the reason why a non-native speaker can sometimes sound vague is possibly the fact that he or she is replacing the original meaning, the original goal, with a simpler message. Suppose I wished to say that I've been laid off, I get dole money, but that's barely enough to carry on, let alone going on holiday. I may find this too difficult to explain and therefore may come up with something like *I can't go on holiday because I haven't got enough money*. I still manage to get some meaning across, but a lot of my original plan is lost and I may sound vague.

Avoidance strategies can also affect modality (for example I may miss out markers of politeness and fail to observe the rules of social distance) or whole speech acts, for instance, if I cannot use pre-topics in opening a telephone conversation, I may do without such starters as *Are you busy?* Or *Am I ringing at a wrong time?* which are sometimes useful and necessary. Such failures are not always serious, but they may lead to false perceptions on the listener's part.

#### **Achievement Strategies**

Achievement strategies refer to the techniques a speaker will employ when he/she attempts to directly tackle the communication problems due to the language gap. With these strategies, a speaker is likely to develop an alternative plan and to improvise a substitute. Thus, this type of strategies usually involves risk-taking, quick thinking and initiative. Achievement strategies have some features such as asking speakers to repair, soliciting feedback on one's own hypotheses, processing subsequent input to confirm, disconfirm or modify the hypotheses, and lastly consulting after the speech event. By means of

achievement strategies, learners try to solve problems in communication by expanding their communicative resources.

### ***Compensatory strategies***

Compensatory strategies mean achievement strategies that are aimed at solving problems in the planning phase due to insufficient linguistic resources. The compensatory strategies are subcategorized by Faerch and Kasper (1983) according to what resources the learner turns to in trying to solve his/her planning problem: a different code (“code switching” and “interlingual transfer”), a different code and the interlanguage code simultaneously (“inter-/intra-lingual transfer”), the interlanguage code exclusively (“generalization”, “paraphrase”, etc.), discourse phenomena (e.g. “appeals”), and non-linguistic devices (“mime”, etc.).

#### **a. Code switching**

When appeal, avoidance, transfer, and other strategies are all incapable of producing a meaningful utterance, learners may resort to language switch. That is, they may simply use their native language whether the hearer knows that native language or not. Sometimes the learner slips in just a word or two, in the hope that the hearer will get the gist of what is being communicated. But at other times relatively long stretches of native language discourse emerge from learners. Surprisingly, the context of communication coupled with some of the universals of nonverbal expression sometimes enables learners to communicate an idea in their own language to someone unfamiliar with that language. Such marvels of communication are a tribute to the universality of human experience and a balm for those who feel the utter despair of attempting to communicate in a foreign tongue.

#### **b. Inter-lingual transfer**

By code switching strategy we mean the case in which learners ignore the interlanguage code. Strategies of inter-lingual transfer result in a combination of linguistic feature from the IL and the L1 (or other languages different from the L2 in question). Inter-lingual transfer may not only occur on the phonological level, morphological, syntactic or lexical level of the interlanguage, but also at the pragmatic level and discourse level.

#### **c. Inter-/intra-lingual transfer**

Strategies of inter-/intra-lingual transfer may be used when the learner considers the L2 to be formally similar to his L1. The strategies lead to a generalization of an IL rule, but the generalization is affected by the properties of the corresponding L1 structure.

#### **d. Interlanguage based strategies**

Achievement strategies become much more interesting when they are based on the learner’s actual interlanguage, that is, when learners try to use their present knowledge and skills and stretch them, so to say, to their limits. It is this active use of one’s limited resources that I think we should be particularly concerned with. The learners may have several ways of dealing with communicative problems by using his interlanguage system: he may generalize, paraphrase, coin new words or restructure.

### **Generalization**

Generalization means that learners solve problems in the planning phase by filling in “gaps” in their plans with interlanguage items which they would not normally use in such context. Generalization is different from the functional reduction strategy of meaning replacement. The reason is that the learner does not change his communicative goal by generalizing interlanguage item. If we don’t know a word, we can fall back on general words, like thing or stuff; we can use superordinates, like flower instead of daffodil; we can use synonyms and antonyms, like *not deep* to mean *shallow*. Tarone (1976) notes that lexical substitution, approximation and the use of super-ordinate terms do not exactly communicate the concept which the learner desires, but share enough semantic elements in common with the desired concept to satisfy the learner. However, generalizing implies a disregard for restrictions on word meaning and word usage, and can be dangerous.

### **Paraphrase**

Instead of inventing a new word, the learner can also use a synonym or a phrase to name an object or

even explain his or her concept. As a matter of fact, paraphrase is not only used by learners of a target language but also by native speakers of that language.

Paraphrase can have the form of description or circumlocutions, the learners focusing on the following seven characteristic properties or function of the intended referent:

1. Appearance Description  
e.g. This fruit has a shape like the earth. (pomegranate)
2. Characteristics Description  
e.g. Someone who dies for a cause. (martyrdom)
3. Space & Time Description  
e.g. It was probably used in Arab countries. (palanquin)
4. Function Description  
e.g. The servants especially do, for example, to their masters. (flattery)
5. Meta-language Description  
e.g. It's actually a noun with a suffix. (martyrdom)
6. Contextual Clues  
e.g. If a wife fools around with somebody else, she lacks this in regard to her husband. (faithfulness)
7. Superordinate  
e.g. It's a piece of furniture. (bedside table)

#### *Word coinage*

When speaking in English, learners are bound to face the "lack-of-“suitable”-vocabulary" problem. Very often, a learner has to make do with the language he or she has available to try to carry on with the speech. In other words, he or she needs to coin words or expressions so as to maintain smooth conversations. This strategy actually exploits and extends his or her “communicative competence”.

#### *Restructuring*

The strategy of restructuring is applied when the learner realizes that he cannot finish a local plan which has already started, and develops an alternative local plan which enables him/her to communicate without reduction of his/her intended message.

##### e. Cooperative strategies

Faerch and Kasper (1983:50-51) explain: “although problems in interaction are necessarily shared problems and can be solved by joint efforts, they originate in either of the interactants, and it is up to him to decide whether to attempt a solution himself or to signal his problem to his interlocutor and attempt to get the problem solved on a cooperative basis”.

If the individual decides to try to solve his problem himself and he succeeds in communicating his intended meaning to his interlocutor, the interactants clearly do not reach a state of “mutually attempting... to agree on a meaning”. If, however, the individual does not succeed in communicating his intended meaning by using a non-cooperative strategy, this may function as a “problem indication”, leading to a cooperative solution.

If the learner decides to signal to his interlocutor that he is experiencing a communicative problem and that he needs assistance, he makes use of the cooperative communication strategy of “appealing”. Appeals can be characterized as “self-initiated other-repair” and can be direct, or indirect. A common strategy of communication is a direct appeal to authority. Learners may, if “stuck” for a particular word or phrase, directly ask a native speaker (the authority) for the form (“how do you say \_\_\_?”). Or they might venture a possible guess and then ask for verification from the native speaker of the correctness of the attempt. They might also choose to look a word or structure up in a bilingual dictionary. The latter case can also produce some rather amusing situations. Once a foreign student of English as a second language, when asked to introduce himself to the class and the teacher, said, “Allow me to introduce myself and tell you some of the...”. At this point he quickly got out his pocket dictionary and, finding the word he wanted, continued, “... some of the *headlights* of my past.”

##### f. Non-linguistic strategies

Different scholars have made different efforts to define non-linguistic strategies. Non-linguistic strategies are also referred to as nonverbal strategies which learners use to replace lexical item or action. According to Knapp (1997: 5) the phrase non-verbal communication refers to communication effect by means other than words (assuming words are the verbal element). When defining nonverbal communication, Samovar and Porter propose that “nonverbal communication involves all those nonverbal stimuli in a communication setting that are generated by both the source and his or her use of the environment and that have potential message value for the source or receiver” (Bi, Jie Wan: 1995). Here, the role of the environment, the message value of nonverbal stimuli and the communication setting are emphasized as the three important factors in nonverbal communication. We are communicating not only when we speak, but also when we do not speak. In face-to-face communication, individuals often turn to nonverbal strategies such as mime, gesture and sound-imitation. Whether we realize or not, we all communicate nonverbally. There is reason to believe that nonverbal communication is a very important factor in interpersonal communication. Some socio-psychologists even speculate that the information conveyed through nonverbal means accounts for more than 65% of the whole conveyed information, while information conveyed through verbal means account for less than 35%. While these figures should be treated with caution, they do suggest the importance of nonverbal part of communication.

### **Retrieval Strategies**

In the phase of executing a plan, learners may encounter difficulties in recalling specific IL items and may adopt achievement strategies to get at the problematic item. Faerch and Kasper (1983:52) identify the following six retrieval strategies through experiment: “waiting for the term to appear; appealing to formal similarity; retrieval via semantic fields; searching via other languages; retrieval from learning situations; sensory procedures”.

## **2. A STUDY ON CHINESE LEARNER’S COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

Based on Faerch and Kasper’s framework, this paper conducts a survey of Chinese learner’s communication strategies. The questionnaire on communication strategies for Chinese learners of English was administered to 89 English majors at the English department of Shandong Jiaotong University to gather information and examine the learner’s attitude towards communication strategies, frequency of using communication strategies in the context of Chinese-speaking students learning English.

### **2.1 Research Objectives**

It is undoubtedly necessary to conduct research on a learner’s communication strategies, for communication strategies can help achieve more successful communication and facilitate language acquisition. Especially in China, the research on communication strategies is both quite new and relatively weak.

Schmidt (1990) points out that consciousness plays a very important role in human’s cognitive activities. As far as communication strategies are concerned, learner’s metacommunicative consciousness can help learners realize the nature, significance and functions of communication strategies correctly and stimulate their active and appropriate use of communication strategies (Faerch & Kasper 1986). Therefore, the author conducted a detailed research on Chinese learners’ attitude towards communication strategies. This study also investigates the frequency of using communication strategies in actual communication. The objectives of the present study are further stated as follows: (I) to survey Chinese learners’ differences in attitudes towards communication strategies, (II) to investigate the frequency of using communication strategies. These objectives have seldom been investigated by



researchers. The few studies were carried out in narrowly defined learning contexts and used non-English majors as their subjects. The author believes that the findings of the study may have important implications for teaching and learning.

## 2.2 Hypothesis

Moreover, this study will test the hypothesis in the Chinese learning context that learners with higher language proficiency prefer L2-based strategies and the learners with lower language proficiency prefer L1-based strategies.

## 2.3 Participant Composition

The subjects participated in this study are freshmen, junior and senior students from the English department at Shandong Jiaotong University. All students are English majors. They have been studying English since Grade One in their Junior Middle Schools. That is to say, they have learnt English for 8-10 years. Altogether 89 subjects were selected. Of these, 35 are in Grade One, 37 are in Grade Three, and 17 are in Grade Four. Some students have passed TEM4 (Test for English Majors Band Four), others TEM8 (Test for English Majors Band Eight), and still others neither of the two. Of the 89 students investigated, 26 are males and 63 females. All the participants are in their 20s. The details of subjects for this study are shown in Table 2 below:

**Table 2. Description of subjects**

Proficiency level	Subjects for investigation (89)		
	Not passed TEM4	Passed TEM4	Passed TEM8
Grade	1	3	4
Sex	Male 10 (11%) Female 25 (28%)	Male 11(12%) Female 26(29%)	Male 5(6%) Female 12(14%)
Average age	20	22	23

Note: Percentages equal the proportion of students out of the total number of participants

## 2.4 Instruments

Two instruments were used to gather data for this study. These include: a questionnaire on communication strategies for Chinese learners of English, and an in-depth interview. Brief descriptions of each instrument are as follows:

### 2.4.1 Questionnaire

Questionnaire on communication strategies for Chinese learners of English is used as a main instrument for this study. The development of the questionnaire is based on Oxford's SILL (Strategy Inventory of Language Learning) and the description by Faerch and Kasper on communication strategies. The purpose of the questionnaire is to assess learners' attitude towards communication strategies and the frequency at which learners use different communication strategies for communication. The questionnaire uses a five-point scale, ranging from the category "Never Use" to "Always Use" (1=never, 2=Not usually, 3=Sometimes, 4=Usually, and 5=Always). See appendix for a copy of the questionnaire. Each category is assigned to the value of one to five respectively. A higher score indicates high frequency of using of a particular strategy. This instrument is advantageous in that it facilitated the conduction of research on large groups. Meanwhile, it makes scoring relatively easier. The most important part of the questionnaire is twenty statements describing some strategies. Each statement stands for a specific strategy. Below is a brief introduction to the five groups of strategies included in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire has five parts. Part A of the questionnaire stands for L2-based communication

strategies. It has five statements, sub-divided into six minor groups: substituting, generalizing, exemplifying, word coining, restructuring and describing. Five statements form Part B, cooperative strategies. These include appealing for assistance from interactants and other authorities. Part C has three statements, representing stalling strategies. Part D includes four statements, representing nonverbal communication strategies, such as communication with the help of gestures, facial expressions, posture, touch and eye contact. Part E of the questionnaire represents reduction strategies, including three statements, consisting of two kinds of reduction strategies: formal reduction and functional reduction strategies. These categories are chosen to facilitate responses to the questionnaire items.

The statements in the questionnaire are taken from three sources: related reference books (such as Oxford's inventory, Faerch and Kasper's descriptions of communication strategies, and Brown's description about communication strategies), teaching experience and oral communicative experience of the author.

Attitude testing is also a part of this questionnaire. The test covers Chinese learners' attitude towards communication strategies: reduction strategy, L2-based strategy, nonverbal strategy, stalling Strategy and cooperative strategy. The description of the five communication strategies and ten variables are presented in the table below:

**Table 3. Description of four communication strategies and ten variables**

Communication strategies	Descriptions	Variables(number of statements)	Alpha value
L2-based strategy	Using explanation, synonym or exemplification etc. to refer to the target term	Attitude (1)	.4123
		F Frequency (5)	.3877
Cooperative strategy	Directly or indirectly asking for particular correct expression	Attitude (1)	.5836
		Frequency (5)	.6209
Stalling Strategy	Using filling words or gambits to fill pauses and to gain time to think	Attitude (1)	.5954
		F Frequency (3)	.5569
Nonverbal strategy	Using gesture, facial expression, etc. to help verbal communication	Attitude (1)	.5897
		F Frequency (4)	.6256
Reduction Strategy	Abandoning a particular topic or avoiding a particular term/rule	Attitude (1)	.5788
		F Frequency (3)	.5115

### 2.4.2 An in-depth Interview

Besides the questionnaire, an interview was also employed to gather data. Ten students were chosen as interviewees. They differed in their linguistic level, in their attitude towards the use of communication strategies and in their frequency of using the communication strategies. The interview focused on the following two aspects:

- (1) the reasons of positive attitude towards the use of communication strategies;
- (2) the reasons of high/low frequency of using a particular communication strategies.

In this way, the subjects' attitude towards the use of communication strategies and their frequency of using the communication strategies were summarized and analyzed.

### 2.5 Procedures

First, students were given instructions on what communication strategies are, on why and how they had to complete the questionnaire, i.e. the purpose and the methods of finishing the questionnaire in order to minimize confusion. Then, students were informed that their participation was not mandatory and that their responses would not affect their grades. Next the questionnaire was distributed and carefully

explained by their English teachers. No students refused to respond to the questionnaire. Most of the students finished within 15 minutes.

The questionnaire responses were then scanned into the computer, crosschecked for accuracy and applied to SPSS (Statistic Package for Social Science) for Windows, version 5.11, and subjected to a variety of analyses to obtain frequencies, means, standard deviations.

## **2.6 Reliability of the Questionnaire & Criterion**

As mentioned previously, the questionnaire of communication strategies for Chinese learners of English was used in this study. The questionnaire was based on Oxford's SILL (Strategy Inventory of Language Learning). This questionnaire was also created with the help of the description by Faerch and Kasper about communication strategies.

The result of TEM4 and TEM8 are used as a criterion of language proficiency in this study. It is intended to check English-majors in college to see whether they have achieved Band Four and Band Eight in English according to the teaching syllabus. They are reliable because TEM4 and TEM8 are national proficiency tests for English majors. They are organized every year to check students' proficiency of English after two years' and four-years' language education.

Since its start, TEM4 and TEM8 have enjoyed popularity. Now not only students that are learning language in college but also employees outside campus are keen on taking these tests. Employers, especially those who run joint ventures or foreign enterprises consider a certificate of having passed TEM4 and TEM8 as basic prerequisite of employment.

People cheering for these tests have their own reasons. Firstly, for society, the certificates provide an objective norm of a person's English proficiency. A certificate of passing TEM4 or TEM8 provides a direct and easy way to make the employers informed of the applicants' English level. Secondly, for second language teaching in colleges, it also brings great benefits. Since the test can bring positive impact to their future life, students are greatly motivated for learning English to make sure that they can get these certificates. Thirdly, for teachers, this is also a way to give them a standard of English level that they should make their students meet. It is also a way to evaluate the effect of teaching.

TEM4 and TEM8 have gradually become an influential test for English majors because they are designed to meet the needs of national syllabus. Test experts design TEM4 and TEM8 to check if the students have reached the goal set in the syllabus. Multiple choices are used in most of the test items, which makes the test more scientific, objective and reliable. Besides, the subjective parts of the test, such as writing and dictation, offer students opportunities to show their authentic-language-use ability. Therefore, it also has high validity.

Through numerous experimental results and data, we can draw the following conclusions:

- (1) TEM4 and TEM8 are tests with very high reliability, both of their intra-reliability are all over 0.9.
- (2) TEM4 and TEM8 are tests with very high validity. The majority of the college English instructors in China tend to believe that these tests can reflect the students' actual English level.
- (3) The design of the tests content is reasonable, most of the teachers believe that every part of the tests is in proper proportion to each other.
- (4) A complete system has been established concerning TEM4 and TEM8. From test design, to the database construction, strict quality-control measures have been taken to guarantee the stability of the academic level of the two tests.

Scores obtained from the TEM4 and TEM8 do not cover a learner's oral proficiency, so the oral proficiency in this study is the mean score of a student's several tests.

## 2.7 Statistical Analysis

There are twenty items in the questionnaire. Each item's score ranges from one to five. These data are analyzed by using the SPSS (Statistic Package for Social Science), including analysis of variance and factor analysis.

Analysis of variance is usually used to check and compare many mean scores. Using it, researchers can investigate if the relationship between different variables is of any significance by checking the P-value. Usually if  $p < 0.05$ , there is significant relationship between the variables.

This paper also applies one way ANOVA to analyze the differences in the attitude and frequency of students with different level of linguistic proficiency.

Factor analysis is used to analyze the factors affecting a learner's attitude towards communication strategies and those affecting the frequency of using them.

## 3. FINDINGS

This part presents the major findings of the study on Chinese learners' attitude towards communication strategies and frequency of using communication strategies. These results are obtained via analysis of variance, or factor analysis. The discussion generated by the results is also included.

### 3.1 Results for Objectives

#### 3.1.1 Result for Objective I

After calculation of mean and standard deviation, we found that there was difference between the degree to which Chinese learners admit achievement strategies and the degree to which learners admit reduction strategies. In other words, most Chinese learners have positive attitude towards achievement strategies and negative attitude towards reduction strategies. From the table 4, we can see the mean for achievement strategies range from 3.61 to 3.83, whereas the mean for reduction strategies is 2.94, which is much lower than achievement strategies. Such discrepancy show that most Chinese learners tend to admit the part which achievement strategies plays in oral communication, and that Chinese learners do not entirely admit reduction strategies.

**Table 4. Mean and standard deviation for the attitudes towards communication strategies**

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
L2-based Strategy	3.83	.52
Cooperative Strategy	3.78	.57
Stalling Strategy	3.77	.62
Nonverbal Strategy	3.61	.63
Reduction Strategy	2.94	.59

The author used One-way ANOVA to analyze and found that excluding reduction strategies, all the other strategies attitudes have little difference.

**Table 5. One-way ANOVA analysis of variance of the attitudes towards the use of reduction strategies among the learners with different language proficiency**

Language proficiency	Mean	Standard Deviation	Passed TEM4	Passed TEM8
Not passed TEM4	3.1427	.48		*
Passed TEM4	3.0054	.47		*
Passed TEM8	2.6128	.66		

F: 4.9597 P: .0025

Table 5. found that the learners' attitude towards reduction strategies does not change greatly with learners language proficiency level. From Table 5.2, we can see that the low proficiency group (not passed or passed TEM4) the mean is a little over 3.00, and thus learners have no clear admittance of reduction strategies. For advanced English majors, mean is remarkably low. Therefore, both the learners of higher level of language proficiency and the learners of lower level of language proficiency tend to hold negative attitudes towards reduction strategies.

During the interviews, the author found that on one hand, the English majors set high requirements concerning their oral communicative competence. They thought that they should try their best to overcome communication difficulties, and reach their communicative goals for the purpose of practice and improvement, therefore they didn't agree with the practice of avoiding difficulties. Therefore, they do not hold a positive attitude towards reduction strategies.

On the other hand, the low proficiency students, restricted by their language competence, had no other alternatives but to avoid communication difficulties. Through using reduction strategies, they were able to overcome nervousness and stress, reducing errors to reach the goal of communication. However, frequent use of reduction strategies made them conscious of their low oral English level, which hinders the development of their interlanguage. As a result, they were rather confused as to whether to admit reduction strategies or not.

Different from reduction strategies, the attitudes towards achievement strategies of all groups are rather unified, and show clear tendency. Based on the interview, next we will analyze the main factors affecting students' attitudes towards achievement strategies:

(1) First of all, the degree to which learners understand the significance of achievement strategies in language learning, affects a learner's attitude towards achievement strategies. Most of the interviewees could not realize the main roles communication strategies play in language learning. But through using achievement strategies, they formed their own understanding of their role in SLA, thus enhancing their attitudes towards achievement strategies. Through using achievement strategies, students can clearly realize their weak points in their own language system which will definitely promote effective acquisition. Ellis (1985) however, points out that the over-successful use of communication strategies can inhibit acquisition. By over-skillfully using communication strategies, some learners may think that it is not necessary to form and test hypothesis on the target language. And this has a negative effect on target language acquisition. We should therefore encourage students to actively apply communication strategies and consciously learn new language knowledge at the same time. To train learners' communication strategies is a factor that cannot be overlooked.

(2) Secondly, the degree to which learners understand the significance of achievement strategies in language communication, affects a learner's attitude towards achievement strategies. Achievement strategies help convey meaning more clearly, fluently and naturally. The students who can fully

recognize achievement strategies' communicative potential, have a positive attitude towards strategies, while the students with negative attitude either never realize the role achievement strategies play or they have already formed the wrong concept.

(3) The attitude towards language learning also affects the attitude to achievement strategies. Some students consciously pay much attention to the expression of meaning, the fluency of language in communication, and the context of language learning. Most of these students recognize achievement strategies and use them boldly in communication. Other students pay more attention to language forms and accuracy and cannot consciously avoid the interference of L1. Most of these students do not admit achievement strategies.

It is necessary to point out that language content, degree of fluency, language form and accuracy have the same importance in language learning. But in the process of developing oral communicative competence, we should pay more attention to the degree of fluency. If it does not affect the expression of meaning, the error on forms could be temporarily put aside. We should then wait till the students have overcome the fear of making mistakes before requiring accuracy from them.

(4) Cultural Difference

Most Chinese learners believe that it is not polite to use body languages such as gestures. This, to a great extent, influences the students' attitudes towards cooperative strategies. Many students feel indecent, uncomfortable, embarrassed to apply body language to express meaning.

**3.1.2 Result for Objective II**

From Table 6., we can see that the frequency of using achievement strategies is about 3.00, belonging to the "sometimes used" category. The frequency of using reduction strategies is rather high, due to the following two reasons: (1) Chinese students mainly learn their English in class. Compared with learning in natural context, class learning lacks information gap. When the students encounter a meaning that cannot be expressed, they will not actively use all kinds of achievement strategies to express it, they will rather give up or simplify it. (2) English teaching in China consistently pays more attention to the accuracy of language. To avoid making mistakes, students are often not willing to take risks in trying words or sentences that are not fully under their control.

**Table 6. Mean and standard deviation of frequency of using communication strategies**

Variables	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
L2-based Strategy	3.05	.68
Cooperative Strategy	3.14	.67
Stalling Strategy	3.17	.66
Nonverbal Strategy	2.97	.77
Reduction Strategy	3.48	.65

We use the One-way ANOVA to analyze the differences in the frequency of using communication strategies among different groups with different language levels. The finding was that the students with low language proficiency use reduction strategies more often. (see details in Table 7.).

**Table 7. One-way ANOVA analysis of variance of frequency of using reduction strategies among the learners with different language proficiency**

Language proficiency	Mean	Standard deviation	Passed TEM4	Passed TEM8
Not passed TEM4	3.7776	.58		*
Passed TEM4	3.6374	.51		*
Passed TEM8	3.0483	.64		

F:14.1149 P: .0037

This result is in accordance with the results from many foreign researchers. (Bialystok 1983, Ellis 1983, Tarone 1977). The difference is that the foreign researchers also found out that the students with high language proficiency tend to use L2-based achievement strategies more often, but this study shows no difference. The frequency of using achievement strategies is around 3.00 and belongs to the “sometimes used” category. Why do Chinese students no matter what their language levels seldom use achievement strategies? The following may serve as an explanation:

(1) The English learning environment in China restricts the use of achievement strategies. Ellis (1985) believes that compared with natural settings communication in the class language learning context, uses less communication strategies, especially when the emphasis of the class learning is on the accurate use of the target language, not fluent communication. As mentioned before, students in class communication use reduction strategies more often and achievement strategies less often, and the interviews further confirm this hypothesis. Moreover, at present in China, English teaching is mainly focused on reading and listening, emphasizes accuracy, and lacks an excellent English communicative context outside the classroom. To some extent, Chinese students study grammatical rules and vocabulary mechanically, whereas they can not appropriately apply what they learned to the real communicative situations. And most of the vocabulary they learned in classroom has no way of using in practice. In order to avoid any mistake, the students, when encountering meanings that are too difficult for them to express, normally abandon them or stop in mid-utterance. Thus they don't actively use achievement strategies. Many students feel that the chances for oral practice are so slim that the use of achievement strategies is unnecessary.

(2) The underdevelopment of strategic competence restricts the students to use achievement strategies more often. The inability to use L2-based strategies effectively may have negative effect on the use of cooperative strategies. Many students, when talking with foreigners, seldom use cooperative strategies. The time they do use it is when they have a conversation with their Chinese English teachers and classmates and have to use the structure “What's the English for...?”. The stalling strategies are also affected by strategic competence. Most students can use a very simple phrase like “Well”, but with the more complicated structures such as “to be quite frank”, etc, they have to think about them first and use them later.

### (3) Psychological Barriers

There are two main psychological barriers that affect the use of communication strategies. The first one is that due to the lack of an excellent English communicative environment outside of the class, Chinese students have little chance to practice their English, and thus their oral English competence is normally low. Due to this, there is wide spread self-abasement. The second one is that Chinese students are introversive. In addition, there is the effect of dialects, the lack of systematic training, and the mispronunciation of words. Thus, for fear of losing face, the students are reluctant to open their mouths to speak English.

### (4) Mode of Thinking

The differences between Chinese and Western cultures lead to the differences in the mode of thinking. During English communication, Chinese students always adopt the Chinese mode of thinking. Especially in the context of Chinese culture, the students can easily encounter obstacles in expressing good English. Therefore, when conducting communication in the target language, if students cannot find the English corresponding words or expressions, they tend to give up or avoid talking, which hinders the development of communicative competence.

In the interviews, the author found that a very small portion of English majors did not need to use communication strategies, thanks to their strong oral communication ability. However, the majority of subjects still need to use communication strategies to overcome expression difficulties, they are not able to skillfully use all kinds of strategies to reach their communicative goal.

Further studies are necessary to ascertain the generalizability of results, but the findings add empirical foundation to the growing literature on communication strategies and help identify specific areas where weak learners might be trained for more effective language acquisition.

## **3.2 Factors Affecting the Choice of Communication Strategies**

Experiments and studies on the use of communication strategies by language learners and native speakers show that the choice of communication strategies has close correlations with various factors, of which, the most important ones are as follows: learning situation, communication context, learners' attitude, learners' level of L2 proficiency, learners' personality, nature of the problems.

### **3.2.1 Learners' Attitude**

First of all, the learners' attitude towards a particular strategy affects the use of that strategy. Generally speaking, a positive attitude towards the strategy leads to a high frequency of using it. Learners' positive attitude towards cooperative strategy, stalling strategy and nonverbal strategy, for example, leads to a learner's active use of these strategies. As far as Chinese learners of English are concerned, however, a positive attitude towards L2-based strategies does not necessarily lead to active use of them. Similarly, a negative attitude to reduction strategies does not result in low frequency of using of them. This "abnormality" may result from the learning situation, traditional teaching methods, and the inadequacy of strategic competence (as analyzed in the previous chapter). Therefore, we may speculate that the learners' attitude has a greater influence on the use of strategy in the natural learning context. In the formal classroom-learning context, normality (positive attitude leading to high frequency of use, and negative attitude leading to low frequency of use) may be realized by increasing communicative activities and developing learners' communicative competence.

### **3.2.2 Learners' Level of L2 Proficiency**

The proficiency level of an individual may influence his/her choice of communication strategies. Tarone notes (1977) that the regular students whom she investigated preferred reduction to achievement strategies. Ellis (1983) also found that one of the learners in his longitudinal study chose reduction strategies in the earlier stages, but increasingly resorted to achievement strategies as he progressed. Bialystok (1983) found that advanced students used more L2-based strategies, and regular students relied significantly more on the L1-based strategies. Generally speaking, learners of high proficiency level tend to use achievement or L2-based strategies such as paraphrase, whereas the learners of limited proficiency prefer reduction or L1-based strategies.

### **3.2.3 Learners' Personality**

The learner's personality may also affect the choice of communication strategies. Based on the approach of storytelling, Tarone (1977) suggests that personality has a very close relation with the choice of communication strategies. Corder (1978) also suggests that learners with risk-avoiding personalities prefer reduction strategies and learners with risk-taking personalities prefer achievement strategies.

### **3.2.4 Learning Situation**

Of the factors affecting the use of strategies, learning situation, in which the learner has learned his/her interlanguage, seems to be particularly powerful. For instance, learners may use less strategies in a formal classroom context than in daily actual communication, especially when the teaching focus is on accuracy of L2 use rather than on fluent communication. The learning situation may also affect the type of strategy used. Piranian (1979) found that American university students learning Russian relied more on avoidance, whereas learners with natural exposure used paraphrases as well.

### **3.2.5 Communication Context**

Communication context also influences a learner's preference for particular communication strategies. The learner's communicative experience and his/her assessment of the context will determine his/her



choice of communication strategies. For instance, communication with a teacher in a language classroom will result in one use of the language, and communication with a friend in social settings will result in another use of the language. Experienced communicators may use the strategies differently from less experienced communicators in interlanguage, because they know which strategies are more successful and which strategies are less.

### **3.2.6 Nature of the Problems**

The nature of problems also relates to the choice of communication strategies. Faerch and Kasper (1983) claim that problems which relate to fluency and correctness are special factors in that they often lead to the language user's non-use of the most apparent parts of his interlanguage system, for he/she knows that there will be problems in realizing them. In this situation, learners would prefer reduction strategies to avoid using potentially problematic parts of their linguistic sources. The source of problem is likely to have effect on the choice of communication strategies. Tarone (1977) notes that code-switching is more possible if L1 and L2 have a close relationship. Hamayan (1980) found that the extent to which L2 child learners displayed avoidance depended on the grammatical structures involved.

The major significance in researching communication strategies is their effectiveness in improving L2 communication. Ellis (1985) and others hold that the best strategy users are the ones with sufficient formal proficiency and with the strategy to fit the specific meaning to be conveyed. They argue that L1-based strategies are less effective than L2-based strategies. They found that L1-based strategies nearly always lead to misunderstanding and non-linguistic strategies are often ambiguous. They imply that paraphrase is the most likely successful strategy. Nonetheless, it may not be appropriate to argue about the relative merit of alternative strategies, as learners often use several communication strategies, first trying one (e.g. an L1-based strategy) and then resorting to another (e.g. an L2-based strategy) to supplement the first choice or to try again if it failed.

The factors affecting the choice of communication strategies are multi-sided and multi-layered. Ellis (1985:403) states: "there is only speculation". We tend to believe that each of the factors discussed above does not determine independently the choice of communication strategies and that it is the interaction of the factors that determines the choice of communication strategies.

## **4. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION**

A study on Chinese learner's communication strategies has been conducted and the factors affecting the attitudes towards communication strategies and the use of communication strategies have been discussed. Communication strategies have a direct impact on communication and an indirect impact on second language acquisition. After the discussion and analysis of the roles of communication strategies play in second language acquisition, this chapter will give a summary of the whole thesis and offer some suggestion in second language learning and teaching. Limitations of the study and problems for further study are also presented.

### **4.1 The role of communication strategies in second language acquisition**

The questions worth noting are that to what extent communication strategies contribute to second language acquisition and what implications they convey to spoken English instruction. Faerch and Kasper propose that a number of strategies such as generalization, word coinage could directly contribute to second language acquisition because they help learners to develop their interlanguage system by establishing hypothetical rules (i.e. hypothesis formation). Some other strategies, such as reduction, paraphrase, restructuring, in Faerch and Kasper's opinion, do not contribute to second language acquisition because they merely provide learners with opportunities to practice what they already have in interlanguage system. However, in the author's opinion, since those strategies deemed not beneficial for second language acquisition supply students with opportunities to practice, they are

supposed to promote learners' performance. When learners could feel their performance has been enhanced, most of time, their self-confidence in communication would also be strengthened, their anxiety would be overcome and they would have a strong motivation to learn more actively. Thus, those strategies such as reduction, paraphrase, restructuring, in the author's opinion, might "indirectly" contribute to second language acquisition. Tarone (1980) suggests that the conversational effect of communication strategies in general is to enable the native speaker (or the speaker with high language proficiency) to help the L2 learner (or the speaker with low language proficiency) use the right form to say what he wants. Another argument to reinforce this point of view is that the main contribution of communication strategies is to keep the channel open and thus secure more input for the learners. Communication strategies would serve as an excellent means for less proficient learners to have the tools to maintain the conversation, resulting in the opportunity to receive more language input and improve their language ability. As Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991: 126) put it: ...a non-native speaker (NNS)'s ability to keep a conversation going is a very valuable skill because by maintaining the conversation, the NNS can presumably benefit from receiving additional modified input. Indeed, conversational maintenance is a major objective for language learners who regularly invoke communication strategies.

Corder (1983: 17) makes a distinction between communication strategies and learning strategies, but suggests that learning can potentially occur when L2 learners use "risk-running" (or "resource expansion") strategies which are "success-oriented". Corder's example (1983: 16) is as follows: if a learner "borrows" a grammatical structure or vocabulary item from another language he/she knows "for immediate purposes" of communication, the learner would be taking the risk that this item or feature was incorrect. "If it is 'accepted' by the interlocutor as 'well formed' in the target language, [this] may lead to that item being incorporated into the speaker's interlanguage repertoire. This could be regarded as 'learning'." However, Corder seems to infer that "risk avoidance" strategies (such as "message abandonment" and "topic avoidance") are not "success-oriented" and do not therefore lead to learning.

Brown (1987) believes communication strategies are one of the sources of errors. The modern view about error is that error is no longer considered as "unwanted forms" but as an evidence of the learner's active contribution on SLA (Ellis 1985:54). Therefore, communication strategies have some indirect contributions to SLA and play a constitutive role in second language learning. By allowing learners to remain in conversation, communication strategies help them, on the productive side, to get some useful feedback on their own performance, and on the receptive side, to exercise some kind of control over their intake, for example, by enabling them to prompt their interlocutor to modify his or her utterances. In other words, strategic competence promotes learners' self-monitoring function or executive control.

Communication strategies train learners in the flexibility they need to cope with the unexpected and the unpredictable. At the same time, they help students get used to non-exact communication, which is perhaps the real nature of all communication. In this way, they help to bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside reality, between formal and informal learning. Furthermore communication strategies encourage risk-taking and individual initiative and this is certainly a step towards linguistic and cognitive autonomy.

Some researchers even go further. They worry about the overuse of communication strategies. Though this capability is necessary in communication, it involves a certain danger: the loss of motivation for further learning and further linguistic development. Many learners may often feel disinclined to invest more efforts in further learning when they know that, after all, they can already cope with the most urgent communication problems. Ellis (1985: 87) also notes that successful use of communication strategies may restrain L2 acquisition. Some learners use the communication strategies so successfully that they do not think it is necessary to form a hypothesis about a particular new target language term and test the hypothesis. More seriously, the language term the learners have used repeatedly to replace the target language term in communication may be "fossilized" and difficult to develop the term into a target language term. On the other hand, if the learner makes efforts to pursue and learn the target language term after successful communication thanks to the use of substitution, paraphrase, restructuring and other achievement strategies, he/she will expand the interlanguage system. Therefore, the role of communication strategies in interlanguage development seems to depend on whether a learner continues his/her efforts to pursue the target term and increase his/her interlanguage repertoire or not after his or her successful communication.

We should therefore, encourage learners to use communication strategies in communication, and also make them aware that successful communication through communication strategies is a temporary solution to a problem and that the permanent solution to the problem needs further effort to expand language resources. Therefore, we think the combination of these two aspects is the best way to develop learners' communicative competence.

Besides the contribution they might make to the L2 learning, communication strategies also bring some insightful implications to language teaching. For example, it is claimed that, during the process of teaching learners how to compensate for insufficient linguistic competence by employing their own communicative resources properly and creatively, teachers could get a better understanding of students' learning process and then follow students' progress more closely (Tarone, 1983).

## **4.2 Conclusion**

Communication strategies have a direct influence on communication and play a constitutive role in second language acquisition. Communication strategies in general keep the channel open and help to secure more input for learners. Achievement strategies in the planning phase encourage hypothesis formation, and achievement strategies in the execution phase are essential for automatization.

Communication strategies are defined as potentially conscious plans for solving communicative problem in reaching a particular communicative goal. No definitions are thoroughly satisfactory, so characteristics for communication strategies have been proposed. The important characteristics are that communication strategies are chiefly problem-oriented and potentially conscious. From the psychological point of view, communication strategies can be classified into achievement strategy and reduction strategy. The former includes cooperative and non-cooperative strategy, the latter formal reduction strategy and functional reduction strategy. The use of these strategies is limited by several communicative variables such as learners, learning situation and communicative context etc.

Through the examination of the attitude towards communication strategies and the frequency of using them in actual communication, two tentative conclusions have been drawn.

(1) Among different strategies, the Chinese students use reduction strategies more often than others. Students with low language proficiency, compared with students with high language proficiency tend to use reduction strategy more often. However students with low language proficiency have no definite answer on whether to approve the role reduction strategies play in improving oral communicative competence, while students with high language proficiency tend to hold a negative attitude.

(2) Affected by language learning context and strategic competence, Chinese students seldom use achievement strategies. However, they tend to approve the positive role it plays in improving oral communicative competence. The factors affecting Chinese students' achievement strategies attitude include: firstly, the degree to which learners understand the significance of achievement strategy in language learning, secondly, the degree to which learners understand the significance of achievement strategy in language communication, thirdly, the attitude towards language learning and lastly, the cultural differences.

There are many factors affecting the use of communication strategies, such as: a learner's level of language proficiency, a learner's personality and communicative experience, and his/her attitude towards a particular strategy; nature of task; problem source; communication situations. These factors interactively affect the use of communication strategies.

## **4.3 Implication**

### **4.3.1 Raising the Learner's Metacommunicative Awareness of Communication Strategies**

A learner's attitude towards communication strategies doubtlessly has impact on his/her use of communication strategies, and eventually affects his/her communication and language learning. In order

to cultivate a learner's strategic competence, therefore, we tend to believe that it is necessary and essential to raise a learner's metacommunicative awareness of communication strategies. Dornyei, Z. (1995) points out that we should make learners conscious of strategies already in their repertoire, sensitize them to the appropriate situations where these could be useful, and help them realize that these strategies could actually work. The importance of conscious attention in the learner's internalization process in general is highlighted by Schmidt (1990) in his review of what cognitive psychology tells us about learning and memory. From a cognitive perspective, the main role of instruction is to orient the learners and focus their attention on a given topic. Faerch and Kasper (1986) also emphasize the need to increase learners' "metacommunicative awareness" (p.187) with respect to strategy use. In fact, most definitions of communication strategies include (potential) consciousness as a major feature and, as they also point out, this implies that these strategies "can be influenced by teaching" (Faerch & Kasper, 1984, p. 47). The author supports the idea of raising the learners' awareness of the nature and communicative potential of communication strategies by making them conscious of the communication strategies existing in their repertoire, and sensitizing them to the appropriate situations. The teacher's role is then to orient the learners and focus their attention on these strategies. This can be done by explaining the nature and types of communication strategies to the learners and illustrating them with examples. They might be asked to record their voice in performing a certain task, then to play it back in order to assess their use of communication strategies. This consciousness-raising of some strategies is important for the following reasons: First, communication strategies can lead to learning by eliciting unknown language items from the interlocutor, especially in the appeal for help strategy. Second, communication strategies are part of language use. Even native speakers use communication strategies in their speech and use time-gaining devices in order to keep the conversation going, such as "you know", "what do you call it?", and other strategies. Finally, the use of a communication strategy is not an indication of communication failure; on the contrary, it can be very successful in compensating for the lack of linguistic knowledge. The use of communication strategies helped the students solve their communication problems and achieve their communicative goals.

#### **4.3.2 Encouraging the Use of Communication Strategies**

We tend to believe that it is vital to encourage students to be willing to take risks and use communication strategies, that is, to argue that very often we need to make it clear to learners that for some strategies, "their innate tendency to use them in free speech activities is quite a natural urge and nothing to be frowned upon" (Willems, 1987: 356). Learners should use all their available resources to communicate language resources without being afraid of making errors (Yule and Tarone, 1990). Not all communication strategies should be encouraged, however. For example, topic avoidance, mumbling, language switch, repetition, L2-ignorance acknowledgement and message abandonment should not be encouraged. Other strategies, such as circumlocution, appeal of help, self-correction, word coinage, literal translation, approximation and all-purpose words may be encouraged. It must be noted that Bialystok and Kellerman (1987) agree that the use of communication strategies should be encouraged, but they do not consider this part of teaching them: "It is one thing to encourage their use (and create the conditions in which they can be used) and quite another to actively teach communication strategies in the classroom" (p. 172). This is a good example of the fact that some of the teachability controversy stems from the different interpretations of what teaching involves. According to the study, Chinese learners of English do not use achievement strategies frequently in actual communication even though they have understood the significant roles achievement strategies play in communication and second language acquisition. The problem is Chinese learners' insufficient grammatical competence and the lack of strategic competence. Therefore, Chinese learners should pay both attentions to the development of the two above-mentioned competence.

On one hand, learners should pay much of their attention to the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary, since grammatical competence is vital to communication and a precondition for the development of strategic competence. Moreover, learners need to understand that successful language learning is not only a matter of developing grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence, but also the strategic competence which involves the use of communication strategies and their role in sending and comprehending messages successfully. On the other hand,

learners should also bear in mind the nature and the important roles of achievement strategies. Furthermore, learners should be exposed to communication opportunities in order to use the achievement strategies as frequently as possible and build their strategic competence. In one word, it seems beneficial to communication and second language acquisition by combining the two aspects together.

#### **4.3.3 Providing L2 Model of the Use of Certain Communication Strategies**

It is also possible to provide learners with L2 models of the use of certain communication strategies by means of listening materials and videos which contain communication strategy use, and then to ask learner to identify, categorize and evaluate communication strategies use by native speakers or other L2 speakers. Another approach suggested by Faerch and Kasper (1986) is to record conversations between native and non-native speakers on video, and then the students view their own recording and analyze their own strategy use. To be good speakers, it is necessary for learners to be good listeners. Careful listening also helps improve pronunciation and reveals how conversational language expresses meaning. Listening to real-life situations is an excellent way to expose students to the different ways in which things can be said, which will help them in their attempts to express themselves. The more the student is exposed to the target language, the faster and easier it will be to assimilate the language.

#### **4.4 Limitations**

Several limitations in the present study need to be recognized in the interpretation of the results.

The type of strategies used in the questionnaire provides only a partial list of the possible communication strategies a learner could employ. As this study make no claim at providing a comprehensive list of strategies, future research might be conducted to investigate a greater variety of communication strategies.

Conclusions drawn from the results of the study were limited by the nature of samples used. The present research examined 89 English majors at Shandong Jiaotong University, thus the application of the results to non-English majors at other universities may be limited.

3) Although the employment of self-reported instrument has created consistency, "it leaves us unaware of how that problem manifest itself in an individual" (Cohen, 1987). The self-report methods for eliciting information on learners' mental processes need to be validated. Further research is needed for validating the results of the current study employing different methodology.

#### **4.5 Problems for Further Research**

In recent years, researches on communication strategies has witnessed great achievements, however, these are concentrated almost exclusively on lexical problems. There is still the lack of investigation on issues like, the learners solve grammatical, pragmatic problems other than lexical ones by using communication strategies and the existing research results cannot solve the grammatical problems. In addition, there are few researches that touch the issue of developmental nature of communication strategies in second language production. Do learners simply use similar strategic competence they have developed from L1 production, or do they have to re-learn it for L2 use? Furthermore, researchers have made no attempt to investigate the relationship between the use of communication strategies and acquisition. Finally, few studies have touched upon the communication strategies in writing.

## APPENDIX

### Questionnaire on Communication Strategies for Chinese Learners of English

Personal Particulars:

Name:            Class:            Age:            Sex:

Language Proficiency: TEM ( ),    Score ( )    Oral achievement: ( )

Dear Student,

Shandong Jiaotong University is conducting a survey in an effort to improve English education instruction. Please kindly help us by answering the following questions as truthfully as possible. Your answers will be strictly confidential and only used for the purpose of statistical analyses. The survey should only take about 15 minutes to complete. If any items are difficult to understand, please turn to your teacher for clarification and explanation. Thank you for your co-operation.

Attitudes towards communication strategies

Directions: please write 1,2,3,4 or 5 in the ( )

\* 1=I do not agree at all to the use of this communication strategy

2=I tend to oppose to the use of this communication strategy

3=I have neutral attitude to the use of communication strategy

4=I almost agree to the use of this communication strategy

5=I agree entirely to the use of this communication strategy

L2-based strategies: 運用釋義、近義詞、舉例說明、描述等方法。 ( )

Cooperative strategies: 直接或間接向對方詢問某一正確表達法。 ( )

Stalling strategies: 運用套語、重複等手段贏得思考時間。 ( )

Nonverbal strategies: 運用手勢、面部表情、聲音模仿等非語言交際手段。 ( )

Reduction strategies: 放棄、簡化某一話題和回避某一語言形式。 ( )

Frequency of using communication strategies

Directions: please write 1,2,3,4 or 5 in the ( )

\* 1=I never use this strategy.

2=I hardly ever use this strategy.

3=I sometimes use this strategy.

4=I often use this strategy.

5=I always use this strategy.

Part A

- (1) I use general English words to replace some specific words which are unfamiliar to me. ( )
- (2) I like paraphrase in communication. ( )
- (3) I describe a concept in a roundabout way when I can not find an appropriate target language item to talk about it. ( )
- (4) I make up new words in order to express a desired concept. ( )
- (5) I give an example of something for which I do not know the word. ( )

Part B

If I don't understand something in English, I ask the speaker to slow down or say it again. ( )

I consult some authorities—a native speaker or the teacher. ( )

I ask the speaker to clarify what is he or she talking about. ( )

I ask the speaker for correct term or structure. ( )

I provide a response for an anticipated question by guessing from

communicative context. ( )

Part C

I use filling words to fill pauses and to gain time to think.

( )

I use gambits to gain time to think. ( )

(13) I repeat what I say to gain time to think. ( )

Part D

(14) I use gesture to help my communication. ( )

(15) I use facial expression to help my communication. ( )

(16) I use eye contact to aid my communication. ( )

(17) I use paralanguage to express my emotion in communication. ( )

Part E

(18) I try not talk about concept for which the target language item or structure is not known to me. ( )

(19) I have begun to touch a concept but can not continue, therefore stop in mid-utterance. ( )

(20) I avoid using L2 rules of which I am not certain. ( )

Thank you for your time and co-operation. We greatly appreciate your assistance in this project. If you have questions about this study, we should be happy to answer them. Also if you would like to receive a copy of the results when they are completed, please kindly let us know, and we will send them to you.

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