

## Communication Strategies Used by Jordanian EFL Learners

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Received 20 March 2012; accepted 14 August 2012

### Abstract

Due to long academic experience, it was noticed when some EFL learners encounter a problem in verbal communication in TL, they tend to employ different techniques. They may abandon the message, alter the meaning they intend to convey, omit some items of information, make their ideas simpler and less precise, or say something which is slightly different from the intended meaning. When a learner is able to anticipate such a communication problem, he may overcome it by avoiding communication or modifying what he intends to say. If the problem arises while the learner is already engaged in speaking, he may try to find an alternative way of getting the meaning across. The researcher witnessed various types of communication strategies used by learners in their interaction and performing tasks via English. This actual observation motivated the researcher to investigate the communication strategies (CSs) employed by EFL learners in communicating with others, e.g. their classmates and instructors. This observation is also in line with what other researchers (e.g., Littlewood, 1984; Poulisse, 1987) have noticed that EFL learners who venture to put their knowledge into practice often run into communication problems due to deficiencies in their linguistic repertoire. The present study deals with CSs and the proficiency level of 66 Jordanian students at Zarka University.

**Key words:** Jordanian learners; Communication strategies; Strategic competence

Salah Nimer Abunawas (2012). Communication Strategies Used by Jordanian EFL Learners. *Canadian Social Science*, 8(4), 178-193. Available from <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/j.css.1923669720120804.1206>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.css.1923669720120804.1206>.

### 1. COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

It is useful to mention, here, that the field of SLA has distinguished between two types of strategies: learning strategies and communication strategies (CSs). According to Brown (1987), learning strategies relates to 'input' to processing, storage and retrieval; whereas, CSs has more to do with 'output' - or how we express meaning in the language, how we act upon what we already know or peruse to know. Linguists have distinguished various kinds of CSs. In addition, the notion of CSs has been examined from different angles.

#### 1.1 The Notion of Communication Strategies: The Problem of Characterization

Two recent approaches for the definition of CSs have been contrasted. These approaches are: "interactional" (Tarone, 1980), and "psycholinguistic" (Faerch & Kasper, 1983). According to Tarone's 'interactional' definition, the central function of CSs is the negotiation of meaning. She defines CSs as "mutual attempts of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situation where the requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared" (p.220). Thus, according to this definition, CSs are seen as tools used in a joint negotiation of meaning in situations where both interlocutors are attempting to agree as to communicative goal. On the other hand, according to Faerch and Kasper's "psycholinguistic" definition, CSs are related to individual user's experience of communicative problems and the solutions they pursue whether these solutions are cooperative or non-cooperative. In this respect, they define CSs as "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal" (p.36). According to this definition, Faerch and Kasper locate CSs within a general model of speech production. They use the word "individual" rather than "learner" meaning that it can be applied to L1 users as well as L2 learners.

Early research on CSs (Selinker, 1972; Varadi, 1973)

was rooted to a large extent in the tradition of error analysis. In early studies, CSs were analyzed in order to account for erroneous aspects of the learner's language. In this respect, CSs were studied not for their own sake, but in connection with error analysis. Gradually, however, that rather structural, descriptive approach gave way to an increasingly more functional approach, shifting the focus on discourse analysis (Tarone, 1980; 1981; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Bialystok, 1983; 1990; Fakhri, 1984, Khanji, 1993; 1996).

Corder (1983) defines CSs as "a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his meaning when faced with some difficulty" (p.16). Difficulty in this definition refers to the speaker's inadequate command of the language used in the interaction. In another place, Corder points out that CSs "have essentially to do with the relationship between ends and means" (p.17). In a native speaker it is ideally assumed that the ends and means are in balance. However, in a learner these are not in balance. According to Bialystok (1983), the definition of CSs includes "all attempts to manipulate a limited linguistic system in order to promote communication" (p.102).

Another view concerning CSs is presented by Tarone, Frauenfelder, and Selinker (1976). They use production strategies in the same sense of CSs and define them as "a systematic attempt by the learner to express meaning in the target language, in situation where the appropriate systematic target language rules have not been formed" (quoted in Tarone, Cohen & Dumas, 1983, p.4).

In discussing CSs, Littlewood (1984) asserts that "the main distinguishing characteristic of a communication strategy is that it occurs when a learner becomes aware of a problem with which his current knowledge has difficulty in coping" (p.89). This is a reference to the state of consciousness that CSs are usually associated with. In line with Littlewood's view, Ellis (1986) argues that CSs occur "when the speaker is not able to communicate his original communicative goal in the way he planned to, and so is forced to reduce the goal or locate alternative means to express it" (p.182). Ellis agrees with Faerch and Kasper's (1983) view that CSs are both "conscious" and "problem-oriented".

Another view concerning CSs is expressed by Bialystok and Frohlich (1980). They view CSs as "means by which a learner attempts to close the gap between what a learner is technically capable of expressing through the code and what the learner intends to express in terms of communicative needs" (p.3). In this definition, emphasis is placed on lexicon which according to many researchers marks the gap between what is expressed and what is to be expressed.

In her interactional definition of CSs, Tarone (1981) sees CSs as "attempts to bridge the gap between the linguistic knowledge of the second language learner and the linguistic knowledge of the target language

interlocutor in real communication situations" (p.286). For her, approximation, mine, and circumlocution may be used to bridge this gap; whereas, message abandonment and avoidance may be used where the gap is perceived as unbridgeable.

The present study takes the above definitions into account and follows a more psycholinguistic view of CSs in that the author sees CSs as a device employed by L2 learners when they encounter problems in L2 communication because their communicative ends have outrun their communicative means. Via these devices, learners are able to convey their messages and get their meaning across in spite of their limited knowledge of the TL.

## 1.2 Strategic Competence

Canale and Swain (1980) propose a model of communicative competence which consists of three components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Grammatical competence consists of knowledge of linguistic structures. It gained currency through the work of Chomsky (1965) and was then interpreted as the exclusive aim of language teaching and learning by many linguists and teachers. On the other hand, sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of what is acceptable usage within the speech community. As for the strategic competence, it is the ability to employ strategies of language use in the attempt to reach communicative goals.

Chomsky's view of the linguistic theory is primary concerned with "an ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly" (1965, p.3). However, Hymes' (1972, p.273) belief that "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" questions the relevance of Chomsky's view to real life situations. Therefore, Hymes uses the term "communicative competence" to refer to an alternative theory within which socio cultural considerations have an essential role.

Regarding Chomsky's linguistic competence and Hymes' communicative competence, the learner's use of the TL has repeatedly been studied with respect to grammatical correctness and sociolinguistic appropriateness. But according to Canale and Swain (1980), none of the theories of the communicative competence are adequate for a communicative approach to language learning because they do not take into consideration the CSs the learners employ in order to cope with communicative problems arising in the course of communication. Thus, they suggest a third component of competence called "strategic competence" to be incorporated into the linguistic theory.

According to Tarone (1980), both the grammatical competence and the sociolinguistic competence are "specific to a particular language and language group" (p.220); whereas, the strategic competence should have

“some universal aspect, in that it is used to bridge the gaps between two linguistic or sociolinguistic systems” (p.220). Wenden (1991), on the other hand, used the term “strategic knowledge”. He means by it “the stored knowledge that learners have about strategies” (p.38). Focusing on the fact that learners are developing their underlying knowledge of the second language, Corder (1967) used the term “transitional competence” to describe the system of rules that a learner has developed at a particular stage and to emphasize its temporary nature as the learner progresses.

According to Tarone and Yule (1989), strategic competence “has to do with the ability to successfully get one’s meaning across to particular listeners.” (p.103). They also point out that mastery of strategic skills in a language entails the ability to transmit information to a listener and correctly interpret information received; it also includes the mastery of CSs used to deal with problems, which may arise, in the transmission of information.

Chomsky (1980), whose views have sometimes been taken to exclude any notion of sociolinguistic knowledge, has suggested the existence of a separate “pragmatic competence” that “underlies the ability to use such knowledge [grammatical competence] along with the conceptual system to achieve certain ends” (p.59). Furthermore, Canale (1983, p.9) suggests another type of competence, i. e., “discourse competence”. It concerns mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres.

### 1.3 Taxonomies of Communication Strategies

The theoretical and empirical studies done on CSs have provided an elaborate framework for analyzing how learners manage to convey meaning and messages. They have dealt with the identifications and classifications of CSs as well as with various problems encountered by researchers in their investigation of these strategies.

Most of the literature on CSs has more or less similar conceptions of CSs and the resulting taxonomies overlap considerably. In general, most of the CSs discussed in the literature are based on a taxonomy proposed by Tarone (1977) or one that was adapted from it (e.g., taxonomies in Bialystok, 1983; Paribakht, 1985; Poulisse, 1987; Faerch and Kasper, 1983).

In Tarone’s (1977) taxonomy, CSs are classified into three major categories: paraphrase, transfer, and avoidance. Each one of these major categories is further classified into subdivisions. Under paraphrase strategy, Tarone identified approximation, word coinage, and circumlocution. Transfer involves literal translation, language switch, appeal for assistance, and mime. Avoidance combines topic avoidance and message abandonment. Tarone’s (1977) taxonomy was reproduced in Tarone (1980, p.229). Following is the taxonomy with definitions and examples taken from Tarone (1980).

**Paraphrase:** this strategy combines three other strategies which are:

*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 “water pipe”)

*Word coinage*--The learner makes up a new word in order to communicate a desired concept (e. g., “air ball” 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 (what its name is). That’s, uh, Persian and we use in Turkey, a lot of”).

**Transfer:** this strategy involves the following strategies:

*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”).

**Appeal for assistance**

The learner asks for the correct term or structure (e.g. “What’s this?”).

**Mime**

The learner uses nonverbal strategies in place of a meaning structure (e.g. clapping one’s hands to illustrate applause).

**Avoidance:** this strategy combines the following strategies:

*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. (Tarone, 1980, p.429)

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.

Another taxonomy of CSs has been suggested by Bialystok (1983). Bialystok has developed a taxonomy based mainly on that of Tarone's (1977). The basis of Bialystok's taxonomy is a consideration of the source of information on which the strategy is based. Thus, she proposes the following tracheotomy: the information incorporated into the strategic effort may be derived from (a) the learner's source language, or any language other than the TL, (b) the TL language itself, or (c) non-linguistic or contextual information given with the situation. She refers to these distinctions as L1-based strategies and L2-based strategies. But she did not conduct any systematic examination of non-linguistic strategies.

Under L1-based strategies, Bialystok has listed (a) "language switch" meaning the insertion of a word or phrase in a language other than the TL; (b) "foreignizing native language items" meaning the creation of non-existent or contextually inappropriate TL words by applying L2 morphology and/or phonology to L1 lexical items; (c) "transliteration" which reflects the use of L2 lexicon and structure to create a (usually non-existent) literal translation of an L1 item or phrase.

Under L2-based strategies, Bialystok lists (a) "semantic contiguity" (the use of a single lexical item which shares certain semantic features with the target item); (b) "description" which has three subdivisions indicating the information which has been incorporated into the description. These three subdivisions are: general physical properties, specific features, and interactional / functional characteristics; (c) "word coinage" (the creation of an L2 lexical item by selecting a conceptual feature of the target item and incorporating it into the L2 morphological system).

A third taxonomy of CSs has been suggested by Faerch and Kasper (1983, p.38-53). It is based on the ways in which learners might behave when faced with problems in communicating. It consists of two main strategies: reduction strategies (formal and functional), governed by avoidance behavior of the learner and achievement strategies, governed by achievement behavior of the learner. According to Faerch and Kasper (1983, p.36) learners can either solve problems in communication by "Adopting *avoidance behavior*, trying to do away with the problem, normally by changing the communicative goal, or by relying on *achievement behavior*, attempting to tackle the problem directly by developing an alternative plan" (italics original).

Following is Faerch and Kasper's (1983) classification:

The first one is formal reduction strategies. Following Varadi (1973; 1980), Faerch and Kasper call this type of strategies formal reduction meaning that the language user in a specific communicative situation avoids rules / items which he has at his disposal, and which in a different

communicative situation would be the most appropriate way of reaching his communicative goal (cf. Kleinmann, 1977). Faerch and Kasper (1983) have identified the following types of formal reduction: phonological, syntactic, and lexical reduction.

The second one is functional reduction strategies. This is the second main type of strategies that Faerch and Kasper (1983) have identified. This type of strategy is employed if learners experience problems in the planning phase (due to insufficient linguistic resources) or in the execution phase (retrieval problems), and if their behavior in the actual situation is one of avoidance, rather than achievement.

Functional reduction strategies involve "topic avoidance", "message abandonment" and "meaning replacement" (semantic avoidance). Topic avoidance refers to the strategy of avoiding formulating goals which include topics that are perceived as problematic from a linguistic point of view (cf. Tarone, Frauenfelder & Selinker, 1976; Tarone, 1977; Corder, 1983; Tarone, Cohen & Dumas, 1983). Topic avoidance is used exclusively in connection with problems in the planning phase, as opposed to message abandonment, which can also be used in connection with a retrieval problem in the execution phase (cf. Tarone, 1977; Tarone, Cohen & Dumas, 1983; Corder, 1983).

The third one is achievement strategies. This is the third main type of strategies that Faerch and Kasper have identified in their classification of CSs. By using this kind of strategy, the learner attempts to solve problems in communication by expanding his communicative resources, rather than reducing his communicative goal (functional reduction). According to Faerch and Kasper the problems to be solved by means of achievement strategies may occur at all linguistic levels including discourse level.

Paribakht (1985) has proposed a taxonomy based on three main approaches; linguistic approach, contextual approach, and conceptual approach. These approaches exploit the semantic features of the target items, the speakers' contextual knowledge, and the speakers' world's knowledge, respectively.

Chen (1990) has proposed another taxonomy so that it could fit his concept-identification task which is similar to Paribakht's task, i. e., identification of concrete and abstract concepts. Chen's (1990, p.162-165) taxonomy is based on the source of information identified in his data. Five types of information were identified. These are (1) the TL; (2) world knowledge; (3) repeated information; (4) gestures; and (5) no information.

Corder (1983, p.17-18) has suggested a different taxonomy of CSs by which he divides CSs into two major categories: (1) message adjustment strategies, and (2) resource expansion strategies. Among message adjustment strategies, he has identified: (a) "topic avoidance", a

refusal to enter into or continue a discourse within some field of topic because of a feeling of total linguistic inadequacy; (b) "Message abandonment" which is a less extreme form of topic avoidance; the learner tries but gives up; (c) "Semantic avoidance", saying something slightly different from what you intended but still broadly relevant to the topic of discourse; (d) "Message reduction" which is the least acute form of message adjustment by which the learner says less or less precisely than what he/she intends to say.

As for the resources expansion strategy, the situation is different in that one cannot order the techniques according to a hierarchy. We can find one or more strategies being employed simultaneously. They are all risk-taking, in that they run the danger of failure (misunderstanding or communication breakdown). Amongst resource expansion strategies, Corder has identified: (a) "Borrowing", the use of linguistic resources other than the TL, but they include guessing of a more or less informed kind. (b) "Switching" to another language which is the extreme form of borrowing and the most risky enterprise. (c) "Paraphrase or circumlocution", getting round the problem. It is considered a less risk-taking strategy -- inelegant but successful. (d) "Paralinguistic devices", such as gestures or appeal for help from the interlocutor for a word or expression; it is considered the least risk-taking strategy of all.

To sum up, we conclude that there is no agreed-upon classification of CSs. We have seen that even when researchers agree upon certain types of strategies, they use almost different terminology to refer to them. The controversies over classification of CSs support the view that the area of CSs still remains problematic and requires further research.

#### 1.4 Review of Empirical Studies on CSs

Many studies have been conducted to investigate the choice and implementation of CSs. These studies vary considerable in the methods of data collection, types of analyses, types of learners and the language involved. Most of the empirical studies of CSs have investigated the process of strategy selection, as well as the effectiveness of the CSs chosen. Only a few, limited studies have focused on the factors that influence the choice and use of CSs. Some of these studies have focused on the interactional approach; others have focused on psycholinguistic approach. In this section, a representative sample of empirical studies done on CSs will be critically reviewed and discussed.

In a study conducted on Swahili learners, Musau (1995) attempts to show how learners (both tutored and untutored) with limited TL linguistic knowledge compensate for their deficiency in communication, using Anderson's "one to one principles" of interlanguage construction. According to (Anderson, 1984), the one to one principle specifies that an interlanguage system should

be constructed in such a way that an intended underlying meaning is expressed with clear invariant surface form or construction.

Musau concludes that Swahili learner simplifies and regularizes the structure of the TL in order to reduce his/her learning burden and that the second language learner, just like the first language learner, operates with a principle that not only wants the TL rules to be exceptionless, but also to be related to clearly and unambiguously to meaning. This, according to Musau (1995) and Slobin (1979), implies that TL aspects that do not adhere to one-to-one mapping between semantic elements and surface elements, are problematic to the learners and are probably acquired late.

Another study was carried out by Tarone and Yule (1987) aimed at investigating the nature of spoken English used when non-native speakers interact with other non-native speakers, the East-West interactions. The East was represented by native speakers of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean; the West was represented by native speakers of Spanish from different South American countries. The focus of the study was on specific communication strategies. There were no socio-cultural factors involved in communication. The situations were designed to elicit transactional rather than interactional communication. Speakers were provided with a predetermined amount of information to convey to their listener who required that information while both were aware that information gap exists. The spoken data elicited under these conditions contained several CSs. "Repetition", "explication" and "over elaborations" were common. Tarone and Yule claimed that these are strategies in that they have not been mentioned in previous studies. The study also revealed that "topic avoidance" and "message abandonment" were relatively infrequent. Furthermore, the study revealed that "literal translation" was rare and the strategies of "language switch" and "appeal to authority" were not found at all. Tarone and Yule postulated that the non-native to non-native communicative situations inhibit the use of such strategies.

Kebir (1994) conducted a study to find out what her learners could and could not do when communicating among themselves concentrating on the range of strategies they use without any formal teaching. She decided on a workable taxonomy of CSs using a model adapted from Faerch and Kasper (1983). She asked students to look at a picture adapted from Jones (1985) and to describe it to their partners. She also asked them to listen to what their partners have to tell them about a different picture, and to draw their partner's pictures.

Kebir's hypothesis was that formal intervention (teaching) would accelerate the process of developing strategic competence. She discovered that her students had gained confidence as the project continued, and they could see themselves managing to overcome potential

breakdowns with ease; they could also see that sometimes the need to communicate was more important than the need to be correct, and once they overcome this inhibition, their fluency increased.

Kleinmann (1978) conducted a study in an attempt to show that second language learners resort to an avoidance strategy that cannot be attributed to a lack of knowledge of the avoided structure, but to affective factors. The subjects of the study were thirty-nine students enrolled in the intermediate ELS course offered by the English language institute of the University of Pittsburgh. Those subjects were divided into two groups. Group 1, consisting of 24 native speakers of Arabic, and group 2, consisting of 13 native speakers of Spanish and 2 native speakers of Portuguese. A third group of subjects, consisting of 15 native speakers of English enrolled in an introductory linguistic course, was used as a control for the indirect reference assessment task.

Four English structures were investigated: (a) the passive voice; (b) infinitive complements; (c) direct object pronouns in sentences containing infinitive complements; and (d) the present progressive. Kleinmann hypothesized that when presented with an indirect preference assessment task, the difficulty these subjects would have with those structures would manifest itself in avoidance behavior.

The study concluded that Arabic subjects produced significantly fewer passive constructions than did native Spanish and Portuguese subjects. Similarly, the Spanish - Portuguese group produced significantly fewer infinitive complement sentences and direct object pronouns compared to the Arabic group level. These findings suggest that on group, a positive significant correlation was obtained between comprehension and use of the present progressive, and between both confidence and facilitating anxiety level and use of the passive. This finding is consistent with Chastain's (1975) which implies a facilitating influence of anxiety based on the result that it was a significant predictor of success in learning Spanish as a foreign language.

Another study which relates the use and implementation of CSs to affective factors; namely, motivation, attitudes, anxiety and self esteem was conducted by Abu-Nawas (1999) on undergraduate Arab learners learning English. Some of the findings of that study are the following: (a) highly-affective students (Students with positive attitudes, strong motivation, high self-esteem and low anxiety) were more eager and had a stronger desire to communicate in English than were low affective state students. They were more interested in carrying on communication than were low affective state students; (b) highly-affective state students resorted more to "approximation" and "circumlocution" than did low-affective state students whereas low-affective state students employed more "topic avoidance" and "message

abandonment" than did highly-affective state students; (c) low-affective state students tended to employ more L1-based CSs than did highly-affective state students.

Another study on avoidance strategy was conducted by Schachter (1974) on Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic subjects. Schachter analyzed the frequency of relative clauses in texts of English composition written by adult learners of English as a second language. She did this in her attempt to study the avoidance strategy employed by the subjects. The learners of this study came from two different types of L1 background: the first group consisted of native speakers of Persian and Arabic, both languages which place the head of the relative clauses to the left of the clause, i.e. the same as in English. The second groups were speakers of Chinese and Japanese, which place the head noun to the right of the relative clause, i.e. different from English.

Schachter concluded that Persian and Arabic speakers used twice as many relative clauses as the Japanese and Chinese speakers. She describes this phenomenon as "structural avoidance" and argues that this type of avoidance is another manifestation of language transfer, undetectable by simply looking at errors made.

Varadi (1973) conducted a pilot study to test out a model of IL production which focuses on CSs the learner uses when he experiences a gap in his IL repertoire. The subjects of the study were two groups of learners of English at the intermediate level. The subjects were asked to perform a picture description test, based on picture story number 6 from Hill's (1960) *Picture Composition Book*, and a translation task. The first group was asked to describe a picture story in English. The second group was asked to describe it in Hungarian. Later on, both groups were asked to translate their versions into the other language. The study confirmed the hypothetical model of adjustment strategies. Varadi's main finding is that although learners produce syntactically correct language forms still they may not have produced forms that convey the intended meaning.

In another similar study based on picture description, Yarmohammadi and Seif (1992) carried out a study at Shiraz University in an attempt to observe the employment of different CSs in the written and oral performance of Persian learners of English. Three types of tasks were chosen. These are: writing compositions on a series of pictures, translation, and narration of the picture story. The device used was the picture story number 6 taken from Hill's (1960) *Picture Composition Book*. The subjects were told to describe the picture first in English and then in Persian (student's native language). The results of the study revealed that in spite of their inadequate linguistic knowledge, the learners managed to communicate their intended meanings by making use of different CSs. Results also revealed that less advanced students exploited a variety of reduction and achievement

strategies while producing their communicative plans in the TL. Furthermore, results reveal that achievement strategies were employed more frequently than reduction strategies, whether the learners were speaking or writing.

Paribakht (1985) compared native and non-native speakers' use of CSs in a task that required the subjects to describe concrete and abstract concepts. The study involved 60 subjects, 20 native speakers of English, and two groups of 20 Persian learners of English at two different proficiency levels (intermediate and advanced). Paribakht found that the advanced students relied on L2-based CSs; whereas, the intermediate students used CSs based on L1. Both groups used the same types of CSs, but the preference for one type of CSs over the other changed with increased proficiency. One limitation of Paribakht's study is that the subjects were asked to convey the items to their interlocutors without using the exact target words. This limitation could have biased the results.

In a study focusing on the selection and implementation of CSs, Bialystok (1983) asked learners of French to describe to a native speaker the placement of cardboard objects on a flannel board, and analyzed the CSs used by the subjects to communicate particular lexical items. The focus was on strategies learners' employ when faced with a gap in their vocabulary. Like Paribakht (1985), she found that the more advanced students tended to select L2-based CSs. In addition, she found that the subjects with the most extensive language and foreign travel experience were the most effective CSs users.

Chen (1990) investigated the relationship between L2 learners' TL proficiency and their strategic competence. Chen identified 220 instances of CSs used by Chinese EFL learners of both high and low proficiency in their TL communication with native speakers of English. The results indicated that the frequency, type, and effectiveness of CSs employed by the learners vary according to their proficiency level. The language distance between learners' L1 and L2 also found to affect learners' choice of CSs.

Labarca and Khanji (1986) focused on the extent of CSs use, rather than the type of strategy selected. They compared the number of CSs used by two groups of first-semester French students who had been taught by two different approaches. One group was instructed through Total Physical Response, which stresses comprehension through physical reactions to oral commands given by the teacher. The other group was taught using a Strategic Interaction approach, in which students created and performed skills to solve problem situations. The Strategic Interaction group, which was superior in overall linguistic competence, used fewer CSs than Total Physical Response group. The researchers concluded that since CS use declines as linguistic competence increases, CSs should not be taught because "communicative ability emerges precisely when students make less use of CSs, rather when they learn how to use them" (p.78) (*italics original*).

Poulisse (1987) has conducted a study on 45 subjects to investigate the effect of task and proficiency level on the use and choice of CSs. As far as the task is concerned, Poulisse conducted her study based on the following four tasks: (1) to name or describe 20 pictures of concrete objects for which the subjects did not know their English names, in such a way that a native speaker of English who would later listen to the tape would be able to identify them; (2) to describe 12 abstract figures orally both in Dutch and in English; (3) to retell in English four one-minute stories told to them in Dutch; and (4) to have a 20-minute oral interview with a native speaker of English.

Poulisse concludes that the number of CSs used is related to proficiency level; speakers of a lower proficiency level have more lexical problems. Many low-proficiency subjects encounter new lexical problems while describing the features of the first problematic concept. As a result, they have to use more subordinate strategies.

So far, we have seen that most of the empirical studies conducted on CSs have been carried out on a small scale. They are also concerned with studying the effect of proficiency level and, sometimes, the task on the use of CSs.

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## 2. THE MAIN STUDY

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### 2.1 Research Questions

The present research aims at investigating and identifying the CSs Jordanian EFL learners employ in their communication and the influence of proficiency level on the choice and number of the CSs. The study addresses the following questions:

- (1) What CSs do Jordanian EFL learners tend to use when faced with potential communication problem/breakdown?
- (2) What sorts of CSs are used by Jordanian EFL learners when they feel that their linguistic repertoire is insufficient, particularly in describing objects and pictures?
- (3) What is the relationship between the proficiency level on one hand and the choice and number of CSs used by Jordanian EFL learners on the other?

### 2.2 Subjects

A total of 66 randomly chosen students (28 males; 38 females) studying English at Zarka University participated in the present study. The sample consisted of freshman, sophomore, and junior and senior English major university students. The subjects represent various socio-economic levels of students and various geographic areas.

The subjects, who were all native speakers of Arabic, were divided into three groups according to their proficiency levels and the number of years of studying English. The subjects in the three groups may

be characterized as advanced learners, intermediate learners, and low learners of English. They had been learning English for over 11, 10, and 9 years, respectively. Nowadays English is taught in Jordan as a required subject for all students from the first grade (age 6) onwards, but in the past, i.e. before 2000, it was taught from the fifth grade (age 10) onwards. The subjects of the study were distributed as in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of Experimental Sample in Terms of Proficiency Level, Number of Years of English Study, and Sex**

Group	Proficiency level	No. of years of English study	Males	Females	Total no. of students
Group 1	Advanced	11-12	11	15	26
Group 2	Intermediate	10-11	7	11	18
Group 3	Low	9-10	10	12	22
Total			28	38	66

## 2.3 Instruments

In the present study, two major means of data collection were employed. These are picture description test and interview. The picture description test is meant to find out the type and frequency of the communication strategies the respondents employ. However, the second means of data collection, i.e. unstructured interview was used to find out other factors that could influence students' use of CSs.

### 2.3.1 Picture Description Test

This test is intended to elicit the various types of CSs used by the subjects of the study. For the purpose of the study, three pictures were used. The first picture is about the pyramids; the second is about the statue of liberty, and the third is about sky scrapers. The pictures were chosen because they include beautiful scenes, famous places and a lot of information. Thus, it is hoped that these pictures urge the students to talk, to think, and to use different types of CSs. In general, these pictures act as a stimulus for eliciting CSs. In this respect, Hendrickson (1979, p.358) points out that the stimulus for a descriptive task should meet the following criteria:

- (1) Be recognized by students as a valid tool for eliciting a sample of their oral or writing proficiency;
- (2) Allow students a certain latitude for using whatever communicative strategies they may command;
- (3) Represent a realistic communicative task that can be simulated in classroom;

This method of using pictures for eliciting CSs was used by several researchers, e.g., Ellis (1986) used pictures from Heaton's (1966) *Composition Through Pictures*; Varadi (1973) and Yarmohammadi and seif (1992) used picture story number 6 from Hill's (1960) *Picture Composition Book*.

### 2.3.2 Kernel Ideas / Key Information Bits

Hendrickson (1979) defines a kernel idea as "a message that communicates a key element of a picture's visual content" (p.359). The number and content of Kernel ideas that collectively constitute the essence of a picture serve as a standard for evaluating students' quantity of information. In the same sense, Ellis (1984) used the term "information bits". In the present study, the Kernel ideas and information bits that the native speakers of English listed will be used as an indication of the evaluation standard of the employment of CSs.

The pictures used in the present study were exposed to a group of English-speaking people (3 British teachers at the Language Centre of the British Council, and 3 American teachers at the language centre of the American Centre in Amman). Those native speakers of English were asked to describe the pictures and to comment on them. This process was necessary so that the researcher can identify the Kernel ideas and evaluate the subjects' description accordingly. This process was also necessary to ensure that the test was seen and evaluated by English native speakers.

## 2.4 Data Collection and Administration of Tests

The data used for the present study were collected during the second semester of the academic year 2010/2011. The collection of the data was obtained directly from students.

The participants were assured of the confidentiality of their answers, which will be used for research purposes only, and that they will not be revealed to anyone other than the researcher himself. Participants were also informed that this study is conducted in an effort to improve and develop the teaching and learning procedures to be used with future students.

As far as the picture description test is concerned, the subjects of the study were told to describe the pictures in any way they like since there is no specific way of describing each picture. No time limit was given since the test was not a speed test. Generally, the approximate time it took each student to describe the pictures was between 2-3 minutes. For the purpose of this oral test, the researcher used a small, portable but highly reliable tape-recorder. All the subjects' oral description of the pictures had been tape-recorded. After careful listening to the recordings, the researcher converted the audio-taped material into normal orthography for further analysis.

The researcher's presence during the tape recordings sometimes encouraged participants for direct or indirect appeal for help. His presence also helped him to write down all non-verbal behavior and match it to the context of utterance.

## 2.5 Communication Strategies

### 2.5.1 Identification of CSs

Students' oral description of pictures was tape-recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed. After listening to these

recordings, students' oral descriptions of pictures were identified, marked and labeled on the CSs. Each utterance produced by the student, whether short, long, or even silent was transcribed and identified. A total of 1101 instances of CSs were registered.

Some researchers (e. g., Haastrup & Phillipson, 1983) say that identifying CSs is exciting but messy. This is due to the difficulty encountered in the process of identification. However, the following five criteria proposed by Bhaskaran (1988) and cited by Khanji (1996, p.145-146) were used to detect and identify CSs as evident in the corpus.

1. Noticeable deviance from native speaker norm in the Interlanguage syntax, word choice or discourse pattern.
2. Apparent, obvious desire on the part of the speaker to communicate "meaning" to listeners as indicated by overt and covert discourse clues.
3. Evident and sometimes repetitive attempts to seek alternative ways, including repairs and appeals, to communicate and negotiate meaning.
4. Overt pausological, hesitational and other temporal features in the speaker's communicative behavior.
5. Presence of paralinguistic and kinetic features both in lieu of and in support of linguistic inadequacy.

**2.5.2 Analysis, Results and Discussion of Communication Strategies**

A total of 1101 instances of CSs were registered for all 66 students of three different proficiency levels. Table 2 (below) shows the frequency of occurrence of each type of CSs starting with the most frequently used strategy. Percentages and frequency ranks are also supplied.

**Table 2**  
**Frequency of Occurrence, Percentage and Frequency Rank of CSs**

Type of strategy	Freq. of occ.	%	Freq. rank
Approximation	318	29%	1
Circumlocution	140	12.7%	2
Message Abandonment	135	12.3%	3
Code switch	98	8.5%	4
Repetition	82	7.5%	5
Literal Translation	63	5.5%	6
Appeal for Assistance	61	5.5%	7
Mime	55	5%	8
Generalization	43	4%	9
Drawl	41	3.7%	10
Reconstruction	38	3.5%	11
Topic Avoidance	18	1.6%	12
Word Coinage	9	0.8%	13
Total	1101	100%	

As can be seen in Table 2, 13 types of CSs have been used by the subjects of the study. These strategies have

been arranged in a descending order beginning with the most frequent strategy and ending with the least frequent one. As is obvious from the table, the most frequently strategy is "approximation" accounting for 29 percent followed by "circumlocution" accounting for 12.7 percent of the total instance of strategy use. However, the least frequently used strategy is "word coinage" accounting for 0.8 percent preceded by "topic avoidance" accounting for 1.6 percent. Examples on the types of CSs taken from the actual subjects' utterances as evident in the data will be given in the next section.

**2.5.3 Strategy Types**

This section is an account of the Cs types elicited from subjects' utterances. Each type of CSs will be discussed as evident in the corpus and in accordance with the literature written on CSs. Examples on each type are provided. These examples were drawn from the oral extracts that comprise the data. In order to make the extracts look like as natural as possible, the researcher has neither edited the extracts nor corrected the mistakes. Instead, he has enclosed comments and clarifications between parenthesis, corrections and additions between square brackets, and relevant information on the subject's behavior between angular brackets so that the reader can distinguish them from subjects' utterances. Silent periods (pauses) have been represented by three dots (...).

**1. Approximation**

As can be seen in Table 2, "approximation" was the most widely observed strategy. It was used 318 times accounting for 29 percent of all the instances of strategies identified in the corpus. This strategy was registered when students used a single target language vocabulary item or structure which shares some semantic elements in common with the intended meaning. Following are examples taken from students' utterances on this strategy.

Example 1: Fantastic buildings. They are triangles (for pyramids).

Example 2: There is a woman who stay (for "is standing") and catching ( for "holding") something (for a" torch" ) in her hand.

Example 3: It is a long ("tall") woman made of stone.

Example 4: It is a shape (for symbol) of freedom.

Example 5: It is a woman carry (for carrying) a light (for a "torch").

Example 6: It is a picture of a woman wearing a strange hat (for a "crown").

The above examples show that students managed to communicate their ideas despite insufficient linguistic knowledge. They used words which are less specific than the intended meaning but they, at the same time, have enough semantic features in common. In example number one, the learner used "triangles" for "pyramids". In number 2, the word "stay" was used for "standing"; in number 3, "long" was used for "tall"; in number 4, "shape" was used for "symbol". Students knew that those words

were not completely correct, but they shared enough semantic features with the target words. So did words and expressions in the rest of the examples. In number 5, for instance, the learner used the word “light” for “torch”, and in number 6 “hat” was used for “crown”. Thus, despite inadequate items, students managed to get their messages across by approximating the items of the target words and structures.

## 2. Circumlocution

This strategy was the second most frequent strategy accounting for 12.7 percent of the cases observed. It was registered when students described the characteristics or elements of the object or action instead of using the appropriate TL structure. This strategy is often called “description” (cf. Liskin-Gasparro, 1996). Both approximation and circumlocution strategies are called “paraphrase” since

Example 1: It is a city ...it is New York ... very huge buildings (for “skyscrapers”).

Example 2: Very big and large buildings which try to ...catch the cloud ... may be in America (for “skyscrapers”)

Example 3: Buildings in the desert...it is stone [made of stone] (for “pyramids”).

Example 4: Building for dead people in Egypt (for “pyramids”).

Example 5: A modern city... beautiful city in America.

Example 6: It is a building for remembering [a monument]. It is in the states. (for “skyscrapers”)

Example 7: A very nice place and I want to visit it. It is famous ...it is in the USA.

(for the Statue of Liberty)

Example 8: It is a famous building. It is a building of freedom...it is in New York.

Example 9: It is very huge... very big...it is made of rock...religious (for “holy”)...it is in Egypt.

The above examples show that learners tried to get round the problem by describing the characteristic features of the objects and actions since the appropriate item is missing from their lexicon. In examples 1 and 2 the learners described the properties of the target item such as “high building”, and “large building”. The subjects of the study also used their knowledge of the world such as “it is in New York/America” in referring to the target item, skyscrapers, and “it is in Egypt/ desert” in referring to the target item, pyramids. In example 4, the learner got round the problem by describing the function of the target item, pyramids. Trying to get round the problem, the learner in example 9 described the characteristics of the target item.

## 3. Message Abandonment

This is the third most frequently used strategy, accounting for 12.3 percent of the cases observed. It was recorded when students began to talk about a concept but they were unable to continue because they ran into difficulty with a target form or rule. Following are some examples taken from the corpus.

Example 1: In this picture, I can see an old building ... and here...I don't know... <long pause>

Example 2: Let me think...Ah...Ah.....it is...I don't know <long pause>  
(describing the pyramids)

Example 3: It is in Egypt...old...old... I don't know <laugh>

Example 4: I can see the woman ... um ... ..um ...no idea. <shaking head> (describing the statue of liberty)

Example 5: It is a woman... a place... I don't know the name

Example 6: It is...it is... I know the name in Arabic not in English. Sorry.

In the above examples, students started out using CSs but they gave up and stopped talking when they faced a problem due to the lack of meaning structure. In example 1, the learner started talking about the pyramids and what he saw in the picture and then he stopped talking; he was unable to continue because of lack of linguistic knowledge. Similarly, the learner in example 3 was unable to convey the rest of his message so he gave up and laughed. In example 4, the learner was unable to describe the object. Thus, he gave up, shook his head and abandoned the rest of the message.

## 4. Code Switching

This strategy was used 98 times of all the instances observed constituting 8.5% percent. It was registered when students resorted to their NL (Arabic) by transporting an Arabic word or phrase into IL utterance in order to avoid a difficult TL form, or because the TL lexical item was not available at their linguistic repertoire. The following examples illustrate this strategy.

Example 1: I see a big city may be the United States  
تاحطان.

باحتاسلا /nætɪhæt asðhæb/ (Arabic words for “skyscrapers”).

Example 2: It is a beautiful picture...it is in America  
سبو (that is all).

Example 3: It is a picture of تاحارءال (Arabic word for «pyramids»).

Example 4: It is a picture of...of...تبحرءال لاثمت (Arabic word for «statue of liberty»).

Example 5: It is the picture of freedom statue لاثمت  
تبحرءال (Arabic word for «pyramids»).

As can be seen in the above examples, students used some words and phrases from their NL (Arabic) with no attempt to translate them or accommodate them to L2. This is done to solve their problems in conveying their oral messages. However, the student in example 5 used the Arabic word to accompany the English equivalent. This could mean that the student was uncertain of the English word he used.

## 5. Repetition

This strategy was the fifth most frequently used strategy. It occurred 82 times of the identified instances accounting for 7.5% percent of the observed cases. It was registered when the learner passed on the old information by

repeating what he had said. It has been noticed that repetition has been used for the following two aims: (1) as a time-gaining device for the planning of a subsequent speech unit, and (2) for emphasizing certain elements in the speech production. The following utterances taken from the corpus are examples on this strategy.

Example 1: It is a famous... a famous picture... it is ... it is... in ... in...New York. ("statue of liberty")

Example 2: I can see...I can see...a sta...a sta...a statue ...it is a for freedom.

Example 3: It's... It's... a holy... a holy place for dead people. ("Pyramids")

Example 4: I see... I see... .. very high buildings...they are they are very beautiful. ("Skyscrapers")

Example 5: They are very old...very old...building...they are in...in... Egypt. ("Pyramids")

Example 6: I like these buildings...they are called...called towers ("skyscrapers")

Example 7: Something related to the past...yes to the past. They are very nice....I like to visit them ("pyramids").

The above examples show that students resorted to repetition of words and expressions as time - gaining device for the selection of the next lexical items. This is obvious in examples 1,2,4,5 and 6. Other students, however, resorted to repetition for emphasizing certain elements in the speech production as is obvious in examples 3 and 7.

## 6. Literal Translation

This strategy was used 63 times accounting for 5.5% percent of the total strategy use. It was used when learners translated word-for-word from their NL. It is a kind of transfer strategies. The following examples taken from the corpus illustrate this strategy.

Example 1: These are very very..old and very.. very.. high and very... very beautiful...they are found in the desert...in Egypt. ("Pyramids")

Example 2: These are buildings high ( high buildings)

Example 3: They are buildings very old. ( very old buildings)

Example 4: They are very...very long [tall] buildings.

Example 5: This picture is about cloud building. ("Skyscrapers")

The above examples showed the influence of Arabic on forming English expressions. In number 1, for instance, the learner tends to repeat words twice and repeat the coordinator "and" several times similar to Arabic. In numbers 2 and 3 the students use the adjective after the noun as in Arabic. In number 4 the student uses "long" instead of "tall" since "long" is the only expression in Arabic for both "long" and "tall". Example number 5 is a clear example of Arabic word-for-word translation.

## 7. Appeal for Assistance

This strategy was used 61 times accounting for 5.5% percent of the cases observed. It was registered when students asked the researcher for help, either directly or indirectly. The following examples illustrate this strategy.

Example 1: Is it New York? Is it New York city?

Example 2: What "Ihrammat" (Arabic meaning for "pyramids")

Example 3: "Shu ma'na natihaat sahaab (Arabic meaning for "sky scrapers")?

Example 4: Are they mountains? (instead of "pyramids").

As can be seen from the above examples, students asked the researcher for the correct item either explicitly or implicitly. This was carried out via direct questions, which were conveyed via English or Arabic, and via rising intonation and staring at the interlocutor for help. In example 1, the learner asked the interlocutor to confirm whether picture represents New York City or not. In examples 2 and 3, the speaker asked the interlocutor directly about the words "pyramids" and "sky scrapers". The questions were conveyed in Arabic. This also occurs in example 74 when the speaker asked the interlocutor to confirm him whether picture is a mountain or not.

## 8. Mime

This strategy was used 55 times. It accounted for 8% percent of the cases observed. It was recorded when students used meaningful gestures to solve their communicative problems and to convey the intended meaning. The following examples clearly illustrate this strategy.

Example 1: This is a woman...you know...look <using gestures >... she is tall. <using gestures >.

Example 2: These are very high buildings <using gestures to refer to the height >and this is the base (basement). <using gestures >

Example 3: These are very old buildings ... < using gestures > and the shape ... the shape look...it is like triangle. < using gestures >

Example 4: These are very nice shapes...look ...look at these good shapes. < using gestures to refer to the pyramids>

As we can see from the above examples, students resorted to "mime" strategy to substitute for a linguistic output or to accompany verbal output.

## 9. Generalization

This strategy was used 43 times accounting for 4% percent of all the instances observed. It was recorded when students substituted one word for another word with the same meaning while the contexts of use of the two words were different. This is done to fill in a gap in the learner's IL. The following examples illustrate this strategy.

Example 1: These are many flats in big buildings ("sky scrapers").

Example 84: This is a woman made from (of) stone. ("Statue").

Example 85: They are the big graves (instead of pyramids").

Example 86: It is a building of freedom ("statue of liberty").

Example 87: This is a building for remembering (a monument).

The above examples show that learners filled the gaps of their plans with IL items which they would not normally be used in such contexts.

### 10. Reconstruction

This strategy was used 38 times accounting for 3.5 percent of the of the Cs instances observed. It was recorded when students realized that they couldn't complete a local plan which they have already begun and developed an alternative local plan which enabled them to communicate their intended message without reduction. This strategy is best exemplified in the following utterances.

Example 1: These are high buildings...towers I think...yes they are towers ("sky scrapers").

Example 2: These are castles...no...no, not castles...they are huge graves ("pyramids").

Example 4: This picture is for free...freedom...freedom statue...yes I'm sure; it is freedom statue.

As can be seen from the above examples, students reconstructed their plans by developing an alternative plan which enabled them to communicate their ideas.

### 11. Drawl

This strategy was used 41 times of the instances observed in the corpus. It accounted for 3.7% percent of all the cases noted. It was registered when students depended on lengthening of syllables as a time gaining device for the planning of a subsequent speech unit. The following utterances are examples on this strategy.

Example 1: These are... are... very old buildings ("pyramids").

Example 2: They are old... old... ruins. ("Pyramids").

Example 3: This is a very tall symbol ("statue").

It is clear from the above examples that students tended to lengthen syllables as a time-gaining device for the planning of subsequent speech unit so that they could keep communication going.

### 12. Topic Avoidance

This strategy was the second least frequently used strategy in the corpus. It was used 18 times accounting for 1.6 percent of the instances observed. The strategy was registered when students avoided talking about the topic altogether or when they changed the topic because of a feeling of total linguistic inadequacy. The following examples illustrate the use of this strategy.

Example 1: Picture 1 ... <no response>

Example 2: Picture 2 ... sorry...I don't know.

Example 3: No idea. I don't know.

Example 4: I don't know the exact name; I know the name in Arabic not in English.

Example 5: Picture three ... <shaking head>

Example 6: I can't remember the name, but I think um...um... um...I couldn't remember.

It is clear from the above examples that students avoided talking about certain topics that require the use

of TL rules or forms which students did not know very well. Topic avoidance took three forms: (1) non-verbal response at all as is clear in example 1; (2) the use of mime as is obvious in example 2; (3) the use of verbal response which indicated linguistic inadequacy as is clear in examples 2, 3 and 4.

### 13. Word Coinage

This strategy was the least frequently used strategy in the corpus. It was used 9 times accounting for 0.8% percent of the instances noted. It was used when students made up new words whose surface manifestation is composed of words in L2. This is done to communicate a desired concept and it shows how creative the learner can be. This is best exemplified in the following utterances.

Example 1: I can see ... a big building ... it is...um ...um... a cloud-building (for "skyscrapers").

Example 2: These are buildings of Pharos ("pyramids").

Example 3: They are Pharos tents ("pyramids").

Example 4: It is the stone building ("skyscraper").

It is clear from the above examples that students tended to create new L2 words because the exact words have not been established yet in their linguistic repertoire. This is done to keep communication going.

## 3. TAXONOMY OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the data revealed various types of CSs. These strategies were developed into a taxonomy based on previous taxonomies suggested by Tarone (1977; 1980), Tarone *et al.* (1983), Bialystok (1983), Faerch and Kasper (1983), and partially drawn from the data of the present study. Faerch and Kasper's (1983) classification which divides CSs into reduction strategies and achievement strategies, and Bialystok's (1983) taxonomy which divides CSs into L1 - based CSs and L2-based CSs serve as organizing principles because they allow for the formation of large categories of CSs, and thus facilitating the analysis.

In our present taxonomy, CSs were first divided into reduction strategies, achievement strategies, and cooperative strategies based on three different ways in which speakers might behave when they encounter problems in communication. They can solve such problems by three different types of behavior: (1) by adopting "avoidance", trying to do away with the problem, either by changing the communicative goal, evade communication, or by cutting the communication short (2) by depending upon "achievement behavior", aimed at tackling the problem directly by developing an alternative plan. (3) By relying on a "cooperative behavior," attempting to involve the interlocutor or others in overcoming the communicative problem. On the basis of these three different ways of solving the

communicative problem, we can distinguish between three types of strategies: “reduction strategies”, governed by the avoidance behavior of the speaker, “achievement strategies”, governed by the achievement behavior of the speaker, and cooperative strategies”, governed by the cooperative behavior of the speaker. The other categorization of CSs in our present taxonomy considers the source of the information on which the strategy is based, resulting in two major sources of information: (1) the speaker’s native language (Arabic), or any language other than the TL, and (2) the target language itself (English). In our taxonomy these two source-based strategies are referred to as L1-based CSs and L2-based CSs. Accordingly, our taxonomy is based on the following classifications:

- (1) Reduction Strategies: These include topic avoidance, and message abandonment.
- (2) Achievement Strategies: These include

approximation, word coinage, circumlocution, literal translation, code switch, reconstruction, repetition, generalization and drawl.

- (3) Cooperative strategies: These involve appeal for assistance and mime.
- (4) L1-based Strategies: These include code switch and literal translation.
- (5) L2-based Strategies: These combine approximation, word coinage, and circumlocution.

### 3. 1 Communication Strategies in Relation to Proficiency Level

In an attempt to find out the relationship between the type and frequency of CSs on one hand and the proficiency level of the respondents on the other hand, the frequency of occurrence and percentages have been calculated for each Cs in relation to the three proficiency levels of the students. This is presented in the following table.

**Table 3**  
**Frequency of Occurrence and Percentages of CSs for Each Proficiency Group**

Strategy	Freq. of occ. (advanced)	%	Freq. of occ. (intermediate)	%	Freq. of occ. (low)	%
Approximation	161	50.6%	111	34.9%	46	14.5%
Circumlocution	61	44.5%	47	34.3%	29	21.2%
Message Abandonment	8	14%	15	26.3%	34	59.6%
Repetition	35	42.7%	26	31.7%	21	25.6%
Code Switch	12	12.2%	18	18.4%	68	69.4%
Literal Translation	9	14.3%	15	23.8%	39	61.9%
Appeal for Assistance	11	18%	18	29.5%	32	52.5%
Mime	23	41.8%	16	29.1%	16	29.1%
Generalization	19	44.1%	13	30.2%	11	25.7%
Reconstruction	13	34.2%	15	39.5%	10	26.3%
Drawl	16	39%	17	41.5%	8	19.5%
Topic Avoidance	2	15.4%	4	30.8%	7	53.8%
Word coinage	5	55.6%	3	33.3%	1	11.1%
Total	375	36.9%	318	31.3%	322	31.7%

As can be seen from Table 3, the percentage for “approximation” strategy used by advanced level group (50.6%) was higher than the percentage of intermediate group (34.9%) and the percentage of low intermediate group (14.5%). The mean value for “circumlocution” strategy used by advanced level group (44.5%) was also higher than the percentage of intermediate level group and low intermediate level group which were recorded 34.3% and 21.2%, respectively.

This could mean that advanced level students and intermediate level students depend more than low intermediate level students on approximation and circumlocution strategies in getting their ideas across; they try their best to go on communication using similar words and phrases, and getting round the forms and items instead of using the precise words and forms rather than avoiding communication.

Another result drawn from Table 4 is that intermediate level learners (represented by sophomore students) and low level learners (represented by freshmen students) used fewer CSs than did high level learners (represented

by junior and senior students). The total strategies used by intermediate and low level students is 318 (31.3%), and 322 (31.7%) respectively; whereas the total strategies used by high level students is 375 (36.9%). This result is consistent with results of previous studies done on CSs especially those of Bialystok and Frohlich (1980), Chen (1990), Ellis (1984; 1986).

The table also showed that high intermediate level students used less “code switch” and “literal translation” strategies than did intermediate and low level students. The percentage of “code switch” used by advanced level students is 12.2% while it is 18.4% for intermediate level students and 69.4% for low level students. On the other hand, the mean value of “literal translation” used by advanced level students is 14.3% while it is 23.8% and 61.9% for intermediate level and low level students, respectively. This result could indicate that advanced level students are more proficient than intermediate level and low level students, and thus they tend to use more achievement strategies while intermediate level and low level students tend to use more reduction strategies.

### 3.2 L1-Based CSs and L2-Based CSs in Relation to Proficiency Level

In order to know the level of students who depend more on L2-based strategies and those students who depend

on L1-based strategies in communicating their ideas, the frequency of occurrence and percentages for students' responses on both L1-based and L2-based CSs were calculated. These are presented in Table 5 and Table 6.

**Table 4**  
**Frequency of Occurrence and Percentages of Students' Responses on L1-Based CSs (=Code Switch and Literal Trans)**

L1-based CSs	Freq. of occ. (advanced)	%	Freq. of occ. (intermediate)	%	Freq. of occ. (low)	%
Code Switch	12	12%	18	18.5%	68	69.5%
Literal Trans.	9	14.3%	15	23.8%	39	61.9%
Total	21	13%	33	20.4%	107	66.6%

As can be seen in Table 4, low proficiency students (represented by freshmen subjects) used more L1-based CSs than did intermediate proficiency students (represented by sophomore subjects) and high proficiency students (represented by junior and senior subjects). The low proficiency students scored 107 CSs (66.6%) while intermediate and high proficiency students scored

33 (20.4%) and 21 CSs (13%), respectively. This could mean that the higher the proficiency level is, the lower is the use of L1-based CSs. This result is consistent with Bialystok's (1983), Paribakht's (1985), and Liskin-Gasparro's (1996). As for frequency of occurrence and means of students' responses on L2-based CSs, they are shown in Table 6 below.

**Table 5**  
**Frequency of Occurrence and Means of Students' Responses on L2-Based CSs (= Approximation, Circumlocution, and Word Coinage)**

L2-Based CSs	Freq. of occ. (advanced)	Mean	Freq. of occ. (intermediate)	Mean	Freq. of occ. (low)	Mean
Approximation	161	50.6%	111	34.9%	46	14.5%
Circumlocution	61	44.5%	47	34.3%	29	21%
Word Coinage	5	55.6%	3	33.3%	1	11.1%
Total	227	48.9%	161	34.7%	76	16.4%

Table 5 above shows that advanced proficiency level students recorded more L2-based CSs than did intermediate and low level students. The advanced proficiency level students scored 227 CSs (50.6%) whereas the intermediate and low level students scored 161 CSs (34%) and 76 CSs (16.4%), respectively. This could mean that high and intermediate proficiency students tended to depend on L2-based CSs in communicating their ideas more than did low proficiency students.

### 3.3 Summary of Results

Based on the descriptive and statistical analyses of the data presented in this chapter, the following results have been found.

1. Jordanian EFL students tended to use different kinds of CSs in communicating their intended meanings. They heavily depended on "approximation" and "circumlocution". This indicates that the subjects of the study were eager to communicate in English and they didn't resort much to avoidance strategies.
2. Advanced level students depended more than intermediate and low level students on "approximation" and "circumlocution" in getting their ideas across. They tended to use similar words and phrases, and get round the forms and items more than did Intermediate and low students. This might be due to the type of the task

or to the type of teaching method the subjects accustomed to.

3. Intermediate and high level students used more CSs than did low level students. This could mean that intermediate and high level students were more enthusiastic and more interested in carrying on communication than were low level students.
4. High level students used more achievement strategies than did intermediate level and low level students. This could mean that high level students had more linguistic resources than did low and intermediate students.
5. It was found that students who tended to use more "literal translation" in their communication, tended to use less "mime" and that students who employed more "code switch" in conveying their messages, tended to employ more "appeal for assistance" and "message abandonment".
6. Students who employed more reduction strategies in their communication, tended to use more L1-based CSs.
7. Students who used more achievement strategies, were likely to use less "topic avoidance" and "message abandonment".

### 3.4 Summary of Findings

The present study has revealed that EFL Jordanian students have resorted to various plans in an attempt to convey their ideas. These plans vary from one student

to another. In getting their message across the subjects of the study used words which are less specific than the intended meaning, described the characteristics of the object or action, and started out talking about an object or action but they stopped talking when they were faced with a communication problem. They also passed on the old information and avoided using the correct structure. In addition, they resorted to NL (Arabic), and transported Arabic words and phrases into IL utterances by “falling back” on old knowledge and by translating word-for-word from their NL. Moreover, they tended to reword their message in an alternative TL construction and tended to seek help from the interlocutor or other source as well as using meaningful gestures to solve their communicative problems and to convey the intended meaning. Furthermore, they tended to substitute one word for another to fill in a linguistic gap in their IL; they also developed alternative plans to enable them communicate their intended messages without reduction. They often repeated certain items and forms, and they lengthened syllables as a time-gaining device for the planning of a subsequent speech unit. They also tended to avoid talking about the topic altogether or changed the topic, and made up new words whose surface manifestation is composed of words in L2. These plans that the subjects of the study tended to resort to were found to be influenced by the proficiency level of the subjects.

To sum up, the results of the study revealed that Jordanian EFL students managed to communicate their intended meaning by making use of different CSs in spite of their inadequate linguistic knowledge. The choice and use of CSs were found to be influenced by students’ proficiency level.

### Implications and Recommendations for Pedagogical Purposes

For pedagogical purposes, the following recommendations and implications may be offered:

- (1) In order to develop the strategic competence of the learners and in order to upgrade students’ proficiency in the TL, EFL instructors should set a good model for students by trying to speak most of the time in English and encourage students to speak and discuss issues via English. This method will increase students’ English input and decrease the opportunity of depending on L1-based CSs (i.e. code switch and literal translation) or avoiding communication. It also decreases students’ level of anxiety and helps to build up positive attitudes toward English language; it also helps in strengthening students’ motivation and self-esteem.
- (2) In order to help students learn the language (not about the language), to take it in, and to make it part of their linguistic repertoire, teachers should involve students in life-like communicative activities, actual and contrived debates. In

addition, language programs and syllabi should involve students in problem solving activities. This, in turn, helps students in overcoming their communication apprehension (i.e., type of shyness characterized by fear or anxiety when communicating with people) and helps in increasing students’ self-esteem and motivation.

- (3) It is highly advisable, therefore, that the greatest attention should be paid to the actual use of language and to getting messages across not to grammatical correctness.
- (4) To help students build up strategic competence, teaching English should focus on oral communication. Students should also be trained on genuine examples of communication strategies derived from students’ actual utterances by analyzing these examples and detecting the CSs used.
- (5) Teachers should motivate students to develop a goal of proficiency in English language rather than a goal of fulfilling a requirement because if a foreign language study were promoted as a step toward gaining proficiency in a foreign language rather than a means to acceptance in / graduation from college, positive attitudes toward the TL would be built up and more students might be engaged in learning the language.
- (6) Teaching achievement strategies and L2-based CSs are recommended since these CSs help to keep up communication and to get the message across.

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