# Chapter Two

# Literature Review

There are five sections in this chapter. The first section reviews previous literature on the differences between spoken language and written language based on which the differences of the use of communication strategies in the two modes are inferred by the author. The second section discusses two approaches to the study of communication strategies and the classification system based on these two different approaches will be reviewed in section three. The fourth section summarizes the studies of the relation between proficiency level and the use of communication strategies. A summary of the Chapter Two is made in the final section.

## 2.1 Differences between spoken and written language

Many researchers have compared the differences between spoken language and written language that are produced by the same individual (Drieman, 1962; Devito,1966; O'Donnel, 1974; Kroll, 1977). Their findings concerning the features in spoken language and written language are generally similar, with spoken samples having the features--(1) longer text, (2) simpler vocabulary, (3) less sentence-combining transformation, and written data having the features--(1) shorter text, (2) more difficult words, (3) more idea density, etc. However, what mentioned

above is all the differences on structure or on the lexicon. It is not until recently that

some researchers have begun to investigate the intrinsic differences between these two

modes and to explain the significantly different distribution of the features. Since the

aim of the present paper is to examine how these mode-related differences affect the

use of communication strategies in spoken language and written language, some

important studies regarding the conceptual and qualitative differences of the spoken

language and written language will be reviewed in the following.

### 2.1.1 Unplanned discourse and planned discourse

Ochs (1979) characterizes the differences between spoken language and written

language in terms of the notion of planning, with the former identified as unplanned

discourse and the latter planned discourse. A working definition is as follow:

1. Unplanned discourse is a kind of discourse that lacks forethought and
   organizational preparation.
2. Planned discourse is another kind of discourse that has been thought out and
   organized prior to its expression.

<div align="right">(Ochs, 1979 : 55)</div>

She presents four features that distinguish unplanned discourse from planned

discourse produced by English native speakers. First, speakers rely heavily on

'context' to express a proposition whereas writers rely heavily on 'syntax' to fulfill

communicative information. Context that is heavily drawn on by speakers to supply

the missing information includes nonlinguistic means and information shared between

speakers and listeners. She points out that speakers tend to presuppose the acquaintance of any referents by the listeners. The listeners, however, have to turn to previous discourse to locate what was actually referred to. This is the reason why deletion is frequently found in spoken language but seldom in written language. In written language, by contrast, since there is no direct interaction between writers and readers, the writers therefore tend to produce syntactically well-formed sentences in order to avoid communicative misunderstanding.

Second, different stages of child language acquisition are used to characterize the differences between spoken language and written language. Speakers rely on the structures that are acquired in the early stage of language development whereas writers make greater use of structures that are acquired in the later stages of language development. In other words, speakers adopt simpler structures to express while writers choose more complex structures in conveying a meaning.[1]

Third, speakers tend to repeat and replace lexical items in the expression of a proposition whereas writers do not show such preference. The motivation for the repetition or lexical replacement is the speaker's desire to search for a more appropriate term or expression to express an intended meaning. Ochs (1979) indicates that this is the reason why the same social act verbalized is more content-compact in

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[1] The structure that emerges earlier in the child's speech includes coordinate conjunction, active voice and present tense, which, according to Ochs, tend to appear in spoken language. Subordinate conjunction, passive voice, past tense and future tense, on the other hand, emerge relatively late in the language development and therefore tend to be found in written language.

written language than in the spoken version.

Last, the forms and the contents across the utterances in spoken language tend to

be more similar than those in written language. That is, there is more repetition in

spoken language than in written language. Ochs (1979) explains that speakers like to

use the same linguistic structures to express novel content, which helps decrease the

load of productive processing. In other words, repetition of parts of prior utterances

gives a break for speakers to think about what he is going to say subsequently.

In a word, whether there is time for individuals to plan discourse causes various

differences between spoken language and written language. We consider that this

factor might also lead to different uses of communication strategies in the two modes.

Possible patterns of the differences are inferred by the researcher as follows.

First, we consider that EFL speakers may employ greater proportion of

L1-based[2] strategies while EFL writers adopt more L2-based strategies. In learning a

target language, learners' interlanguage gradually proceeds from their native language

system to target language system. Although college students in Taiwan have learned

English for more than six years, their interlanguage system is supposed to be closer to

their L1 than to L2 as shown in the following on the next page. The x represents their

interlanguage system.

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[2] L1-based strategies means taking advantage of the structure of the native language, such as sound
system, word building system or semantic system, to express a concept and L2-based strategies refer to
making use of the system of target language to convey an idea.

L1---->x--------->L2

Therefore, under time pressure, EFL speakers may resort to more L1-based strategies that bump out in their cognitive system at the first time. EFL writers, on the other hand, have more time to think about how to correctly express the idea. They may employ greater proportion of L2-based strategies.

Second, EFL speakers may adopt more limited types of communication strategies than EFL writers for the reason as follows. Spoken language belonging to unplanned discourse allows speakers only rather short time for them to process information in expressing an idea. The time pressure may cause great anxiety to the speakers. Besides, the interlocutor for learners to employ communication strategies is a native speaker of the target language, i.e. a foreigner to the learners. The face-to-face communication with a foreigner in a foreign language may also make speakers feel uncomfortable or even stressful. To be brief, the time pressure as well as the oral communication with an English native speaker will cause higher anxiety on speakers.

According to Steinberg and Horwitz (1986), anxiety and stress result in poorer performance of language learners in terms of scores on a test. How does anxiety influence learners' performance in using communication strategies? We would suggest that anxiety and stress will decrease the flexibility of learners' thought and will reduce

the types of communication strategies for them to choose from. Compared with written language, the level of anxiety in spoken language is much higher. Therefore, it is suggested that the variety[3] of communication strategies employed in spoken language might be more restricted than that in written language.

Written language, by contrast, allows learners more time to plan the production of an idea. Moreover, learners in written language do not have a face-to-face communication with the foreigners. Thus the anxiety and stress of learners in written language is lower. Writers can have more time and are under lower anxiety to figure out how to express a concept explicitly. Therefore, it is hypothesized that more types of communication strategies will occur in written language.

In a word, unplanned discourse and planned discourse used by Ochs (1979) to characterize the differences between spoken language and written language may affect the selection of the types of communication strategies in the two modes. Higher anxiety of unplanned discourse would make the types of communication strategies more restricted in spoken language while lower anxiety of planned discourse would result in a greater variety of the types of communication strategies in written language. The hypothesis will be testified in the experiment conduced in the study.

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[3] The variety here represents types of communication strategies. No matter how many times a certain communication strategy is used; it is counted as one type. In other words, the more different communication strategies are used; the greater variety the choices of communication strategies are.

**2.1.2 Involvement and detachment**

Chafe (1982) proposes two sets of features to characterize the differences

between spoken language and written language. The first set is the dichotomy of

'fragmentation versus integration' and the second set is the dichotomy of

'involvement versus detachment.' The former refers to the difference of idea density

within a single sentence while the latter focuses on the difference of the relationship

between speakers/writers and their audience. Communication, no matter spoken or

written, is a process of the interaction between speakers/writers and their audience. It

is therefore suggested that the difference of the relationship between speakers/writers

and the audience may have influences on the choice of communication strategies in

the two modes. The focus of the review is, therefore, put on the second feature--the

dichotomy of 'involvement versus detachment.'

According to Chafe (1982), speakers, who are in face-to-face interaction with

listeners, bear the responsibility of making communication successful and then exhibit

'involvement' with the audience. To put it differently, speakers regard successful

communication as their obligation and will try all the way possible to make

themselves understood. Six linguistic devices that are employed by speakers to

achieve 'involvement' are proposed by Chafe (1982) and are shown in the following:

(a) first person reference
(b) mention of speaker's mental process

    (c) monitoring of information flow

    (d) emphatic particles

    (e) fuzziness

    (f) direct quotes.

In addition to these six devices, we suggest that there are still three other linguistic phenomena that can be regarded as sign of involvement in spoken language: (a) paralinguistic cues (b) appeal for assistance and (c) repetition. All of us may have experienced that when listeners seem unable to realize what we are conveying, we will naturally resort to gesture or mime with an aim of enhancing the comprehension of listeners. Then when these paralinguistic cues fail to achieve their goals, speakers will then try to accompany these paralinguistic cues with question like 'Do you know something like this?,' which is the strategies identified as 'appeal for assistance' in Tarone's (1981) taxonomies.

The third phenomenon is repetition. As mentioned above, speakers bear the responsibility of making communication successful. In the process of the communication, when speakers are confronted with a bottleneck in expression or when they see signs of confusion on listener's face, they tend to repeat the same communicative contents by reduplication or by paraphrase. The repetition is sometimes classified as one type of communication strategy in solving communicative problems.

How does involvement affect the use of communication strategies in spoken

language? We suggest that it will be reflected in the number of the use of communication strategies in spoken language. The number here represents the times for which a certain type of communication strategy is employed. For example, when a subject is asked to convey the concept of 'patience,' he/she may say 'a teacher in dealing with naughty children needs it to stay calm.' He/she may estimate that the mention of 'teacher' seems insufficient for listeners to get the meaning and keep on saying 'a nurse needs it to take good care of patients.' The description of the 'teacher' and the 'nurse' is recorded as using the communication strategy of 'representative' for two times.

The mention of two or more propositions that belong to the same communication strategy by learners is more frequent in spoken language. We suggest it is the involvement--the responsibility of speakers to provide listeners with sufficient information--that results in greater number of communication strategies in spoken language. Because higher anxiety of spoken language may make speakers tend to stick to a certain type of communication strategies, they turn to use such type of communication strategies for several times in order to ensure listener's comprehension of concepts. The number of communication strategies in spoken language is therefore high and is rising especially when listeners keep staying quiet or display a sign of confusion.

Detachment, on the other hand, 'suppresses the direct involvement of an agent in an action (Chafe, 1982 : 45),' which describes the relationship between writers and the readers. Chafe (1982) further claims that writers, who do not have a direct interaction with the readers, tend to focus on producing logically coherent and consistent material. Therefore, writers make far more frequent use of passive voice and nominalization etc. to distance themselves from direct involvement of the event as well as the audience. As for how much these logically coherent and consistent material can achieve communicative goals, it seems that writers do not have that kind of responsibility as speakers have. Besides, compared with speaking, writing is a more physically laborious task, which may also reduce the number of communication strategies used by writers for expressing a concept. The number of communication strategies adopted by writers, as a result, is smaller than that of communication strategies speakers adopt.

In a word, the dichotomy of 'involvement and detachment' that deals with the difference of relationship between speaker/writers and the audience is suggested to contribute to the difference of the number of communication strategies in these two modes. The involvement may make speakers use greater number of communication strategies and detachment may make the number of communication strategies smaller. The hypothesis will be tested in the study

**2.1.3 Contextualized and decontextualized**

Olson (1977) identifies spoken language as context-dependent and written language as decontextualized. 'Context-dependent' indicates that in oral communication, both speakers and listeners have shared context upon which both sides can negotiate an agreed meaning. 'Decontextualized,' by contrast, indicates the lack of such context. The context-bound characteristics of spoken language may contribute to more use of *circumlocution strategies* (Asao, 2002). The reason pointed out by Asao (2002) is that the meaning of *circumlocution* tends to be incomplete and therefore needs contextual or situational supports. Thus, in context-bound face-to-face communication, speakers can judge how much listeners have caught the points. When speakers observe that listeners are still confused about the concepts conveyed, they can carry on providing more detailed information of the concept. The provision of the relevant information about the concept without mentioning the target word is identified as '*circumlocution strategy*.' In short, according to Asao (2002), *circumlocution strategy* that takes advantage of shared environmental context and shared knowledge between speakers and listeners may show more occurrences in spoken language.

Written language, by contrast, lacks such shared context between writers and readers and is identified as 'decontextualized (Olson, 1977).' In the face of such contextual gap, writers tend to produce syntax-dependent discourse. In other words,

by making their output logically coherent and grammatically well-organized allows

writers to minimize communicative misunderstandings. The use of *circumlocution*

*strategy* may be restricted in written language because of the lacks of contextual

supports. The effect of context on the occurrence of *circumlocution strategy* is an

inference by Asao (2002) and has not yet been testified. In our study, the use of

*circumlocution strategies* in the two modes will be examined.

The aforementioned differences of the use of communication strategies in spoken

language and written language are listed in Table 2.1:

**Table2.1: The difference of C.S. in the two modes**

| Spoken language | Written language |
|---|---|
| 1. Higher anxiety may make the choices of the types of communication strategies restricted. | 1. Lower anxiety may result in greater variety of the types of communication strategies. |
| 2. Unplanned discourse may result in greater proportion of L1-based strategies. | 2. Planned discourse may lead to greater proportion of L2-based strategies. |
| 3. Involvement may result in greater number of communication strategies. | 3. Detachment may make the number of communication strategies smaller. |
| 4. Context may lead to greater number of *circumlocution* (Asao, 2002). | 4. Lack of context may decrease the occurrence of *circumlocution*. |

The previous three hypotheses are made by the researchers and the last one is

made by Asao (2002). An experiment will be conducted to elicit the use of

communication strategies and aims to examine these differences between spoken

language and written language listed in Table 2.1.

**2.2 Framework of the study of communication strategies**

Since Selinker (1972), who first proposes that errors produced by learners can be seen as strategies to make up their linguistic limitation, there have been continued interests regarding the way in which language learners resort to in attempting to communicate a meaning. Such behavior of learners' reaction to communicative need is often labeled as 'communication strategy.' What is meant by communication strategies and what is its constituent have been concerning issues for researchers in the related study. In order to cope with the aforementioned issue, we consider it as necessary to examine the framework on which the research of communication strategies has been conducted. Generally speaking, two approaches to the study of communication strategies can be identified. One is interactional perspective and the other is psycholinguistic perspective. Yule and Tarone (1997) have made a clear contrast between these two approaches by proposing three main points of distinction.

The first point is concerning the number of taxonomies. Interactional researchers think that they are prompted by the investigation to propose more taxonomies in order to precisely characterize learners' communicative behavior while psycholinguistic researchers hold a parsimonious attitude toward classification; that is, the less classifications the better. Therefore, Yule and Tarone (1997) identify the former as 'Pros' and the latter as 'Cons.' 'Pros' is the abbreviation of 'profligate' meaning liberal position toward the expansion of categories and 'Cons' comes from

'conservative' representing a restricted attitude toward the expansion.

Second, interactional researchers are devoted to describing various linguistic forms produced by language learners; that is, they emphasize variability in L2 performance. This is also the reason why the expansion of categories is considered as necessary in this school of thought. By contrast, psycholinguistic advocates regard the variability of L2 learners' output as just superficial differences; they argue that underlying cognitive processes among the variability in strategic uses are probably similar. Therefore, they claim that too many categories fail to explain the operation of language uses. In short, we can see that these two schools of thought aim to investigate the same linguistic phenomenon yet differ in the direction of investigation. The former begins from surface performance with an aim to gaining insight into the nature of language uses while the latter emphasizes the psychological processes in order to account for L2 learners' linguistic performance.

Third, researchers from the two sides differ in their opinion regarding to the pedagogical issue--the teachability of communication strategies. Those who adopt interactional approach hold the position that through teaching will learners gain more awareness of how to make use of communication strategies to solve communicative problems. The proverb of 'practice makes perfect' can best annotate the philosophy underlying interactional approach. The psycholinguistic researchers, on the other hand,

claim that the use of communication strategies belongs to cognitive mechanism,

which is developmental and transferable from learners' L1 experience. Therefore, no

significant result can be achieved from the practice or the teaching of communication

strategies. We, however, suggest that the issue of whether the teaching of

communication strategies can make a satisfactory effect should also take into account

of the personalities and learning styles of learners. Different learners may learn best

through different ways. Simply judging the applicability of communication strategies

from rationales may result in conflicts.

Aforementioned are three principal distinctions between interactional approach

and psycholinguistic one. There are still some minor differences resulting from

different rationales, which are summarized by Yule and Tarone (1997) and are shown

in the following:

**Table2.2 : Summary of the differences between Pros and Cons**

| Pros=Interactional approach | Cons=psycholinguistic approach |
|---|---|
| 1. Profligate, liberal expansion of Categories | 1. Conservative, parsimonious reduction of categories |
| 2. Taxonomic description of observed forms in output, external and interactive | 2. Description of underlying psychological process, internal and cognitive |
| 3. L2 learner performance compared to TL native speaker performance: many differences found | 3. L2 learner performance compared to their own L1 performance: many similarities found |
| 4. Elicitation prompts are real-world objects. | 4. Elicitation prompts are abstract shapes. |
| 5. Listening partner, with a purpose, present | 5. No listening partner present. |

| 6. L2 learners with different L1s | 6. L2 learners with the same L1 |
| 7. Communication strategies should be taught | 7. Communication strategies should not be taught. |

<div align="right">(Yule and Tarone, 1997 : 28)</div>

Different approaches are suggested to contribute to different definitions and different taxonomies of communication strategies. After a brief demonstration of the differences between these two schools of thought, a detailed framework of each approach will be examined in order to gain a better understanding of communication strategies.

### 2.2.1 Interactional framework and its definition

As the name suggests, Tarone (1981) emphasizes the importance of interactional function in the use of communication strategies and claims that interaction between interlocutors should be the focus in the related research. Based on such perspective, she defines communication strategies as 'a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared (Tarone, 1981 : 287).' The two interlocutors here refer to the language learner and the native speaker of target language. They have to interact in a cooperative way to negotiate meaning during communication. When compared with native speakers, language learners' interlanguage system is quite incomplete. In order to make the negotiation of an agreement on meaning successful, learners will adopt some means to

overcome their linguistic problems. Such means are often described as

'communication strategies' in second language acquisition literature.

What is communication strategy has been a confusing issue for researchers.

Tarone (1981) proposes three criteria in order to make a clear characterization.

(1) a speaker desires to communicate meaning x to a listener:
(2) the speaker believes the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure desired to
   communicate meaning x is unavailable or is not shared with the listener; thus
(3) the speaker chooses to
   (a) avoid--not attempt to communicate meaning x--or
   (b) attempt alternate means to communicate meaning x. The speaker stops
      trying alternatives when it seems clear to the speaker that there is shared
      meaning.

In a word, communication strategies are alternate means to express a concept or

an intention, the correct way of saying which does not exist in learners' interlanguage

system. Such alternate means also include avoidance--*reduction strategy*.

The three criteria need to be fulfilled for a strategy to be called communication

strategy. The absence of any criterion would result in another kind of strategy. For

example, Tarone uses the presence of (3b) to distinguish between communication

strategies and production strategies. The latter is defined as 'an attempt to use one's

linguistic system efficiently and clearly with a minimum of effort (Tarone, 1981:

289).' The use of prefabricated patterns belongs to production strategy because it

simplifies the task of speaking in a particular situation. According to Tarone,

production strategies are similar to communication strategies in that they attempt to

use one's linguistic system to solve the problems. They nevertheless differ in that

production strategies lack interactional focus on the negotiation of meaning[4]. Tarone's

separation of production strategies from communication strategies is insightful

because not all attempts to compensate for the gap of the target language involve

interactional negotiation. The focus of the present study nevertheless is put on

communication strategies. Thus the three criteria mentioned above will be taken into

consideration when an experiment is designed to elicit the use of communication

strategies.


### 2.2.2 Psycholinguistic framework and its definition

Instead of focusing on the product of communication that involves primarily

interaction of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning, psycholinguistic approach pays

attention to the underlying cognitive processes of L2 learners' communicative

behaviors. The study and the definition of communication strategies are located

within a general model of speech production. The model comprises two phases: a

planning phase and an execution phase. As the name suggests, the former indicates to

set up a plan for what learners are going to verbally act or respond to on the basis of

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[4] In some communication types such as written communication and lecture, there are no direct listeners or the addressees are not allowed to offer feedbacks. Learners in these communication types, accordingly, do not have the chances of negotiating meanings with their interlocutors. Learners in these communication types, therefore, lack the attempt of trying alternate means to communicate meaning x, i.e. criterion (3b).

their assessment of situational condition. The latter, on the other hand, refers to the

carrying out of such plan. In order to explicitly capture the notion of communication

strategies, Faerch and Kasper (1983) propose two criteria for the definition. The first

one is problem-orientedness, which indicates only when a communicative goal

presents itself as a problem for speakers, can speaker's solutions to such problems be

identified as 'communication strategies.' To put it differently, communication

strategies are often employed by speakers to solve communicative problems resulting

from incomplete L2 knowledge. The second defining criterion is consciousness. This

means that when interlocutors recognize the existence of communicative problems,

they will be aware of choosing appropriate strategies with an aim to solving such

problems. From the illustration mentioned above, we can see that the criterion

'consciousness' bases itself on the criterion 'problem-orientedness,' which is the

reason why Faerch and Kasper (1983) identify the former as secondary criterion and

the latter as primary one. Based on the two defining criteria mentioned above,

communication strategies in psycholinguistic approach is defined as 'they are

potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a

problem in reaching a particular communication goal (Faerch and Kapser, 1983 :36)'

The criteria mentioned above, however, have some problems (Faerch and Kasper,

1983; Bialystok, 1993). To begin with, the first criterion -- problem-orientedness

seems to characterize only communication strategies in interlanguage system but excludes communication strategies in native language. A language seldom causes problems to its native speakers but these native speakers still adopt some communication strategies to ensure the comprehension of the listeners (Bialystok, 1993; Tarone, 1981). Whether communication strategies are problem-oriented depends on whether they are employed by language learners or native speakers. Bialystok (1983), therefore, indicates that such occasional characteristics can not serve as a defining criterion for communication strategies. We, however, consider that the definition of a term should accord to in what kind of field such issue is studied. For example, when communication strategies are examined in the field of language acquisition, this criterion of problem-orientedness is quite appropriate for researchers to deal with communication strategies in interlanguage. Since this criterion is advanced under psycholinguistic framework, the criticism of the exclusion of communication strategies in native language seems to be inevitable.

Second, Faerch and Kasper (1983) indicate that consciousness is actually a concept of degree rather than a concept of yes-no. That is, even among the strategies that are consciously employed, some of them are more conscious and others are less conscious. Since it is hard to determine to what extent learners' behavior is conscious enough to be considered as communication strategies, using this characteristic as a

defining criterion, to be sure, causes some problems. Awareness of the problems in

communication is a consciousness-raising process. That is, when you are aware of the

problems, your consciousness toward the problems will be raised. As for the degree of

how much the consciousness is raised, it is based on individual's personal assessment

of the situational condition as well as the linguistic resources available. The more

difficult situation and the fewer resources available will raise more consciousness. By

contrast, when interlocutors feel relaxed in the process of communication and regard

the communication as less formal, there is less consciousness involved in adopting

communication strategies. Therefore, we regard consciousness as related to personal

subjectivity or proficiency level rather than a compulsory property of communication

strategies.

Third, the state of consciousness is not constant for the specific behavior (Faerch

and Kaper, 1983). For example, practice will make the originally highly conscious

strategies achieve at automation, which is potentially unconscious. To account for this

shortcoming, Faerch and Kasper use the term 'potentially conscious plan' to cover the

plans which are only sometimes consciously employed. In their opinion, once

communication strategies have been consciously selected, they fulfill one of the

defining criteria of communication strategies--consciousness. In a word, although

Faerch and Kasper include consciousness as a criterion for characterizing

communication strategies, they acknowledge indeterminacy about it. Using the

unstable state of minds as a defining criterion for communication strategies therefore

causes criticism.

From the illustration of the problems mentioned above, the criteria of the

definition based on psycholinguistic framework seem to lack objective measurements

and are therefore susceptible to criticism. This is suggested to be inevitable, since

psycholinguistic approach to communication strategies focuses on mental operations

underlying the use of communication strategies. To account for such intangible

process, the ways for characterization may tend to involve subjectivity.

In conclusion, the arguments emphasized in the two approaches to the study of

communication strategies are quite different. Interactional approach focuses on

external linguistic behavior resulting from the interaction of the two interlocutors

while psycholinguistic one centers on the internal mechanism underlying the use of

communication strategies. These two approaches seem to describe two sides of one

thing, i.e. the operation of communication strategies. In the present paper, we prefer to

adopt interactional approach and its definition, since it is more explicit. In addition,

while we study communication strategies in interlanguage system, we support the

teachability of communication strategies as claimed by the researchers in the

interactional approach.

**2.3 Taxonomies of communication strategies**

After the theoretical background to the study of communication strategies is built,

in order to further analyze and explain such interesting linguistic phenomenon, it is

necessary to have learners' behavior classified. Different approaches to the study of

communication strategies lead to difference in definition and difference in

classification as mentioned in the preceding sections. In the following section, we will

introduce the mainly taxonomic system underlying interactional approach, which is

going to be adopted in this study, as well as its advantages and disadvantages.

**2.3.1 Interactional taxonomies**

Tarone (1977) is among the first researchers who have been devoted to the study

of communication strategies. In the original study, she asks nine subjects with

different language background to describe two simple drawings and a complex

illustration in English and their native language. Based on the description of these oral

productions, she proposes a typology of communication strategies employed by

language learners. A number of researchers have progressively modified her version

of the typology (Bialystok, 1983; Faerch and Kasper, 1983; Paribakht, 1985) in order

to have a better understanding of communication strategy. Since her typology is so

influential in the subsequent classification of communication strategies and the

examples mentioned in the study are so illustrative, we will have her taxonomies

briefly reviewed in the following. Tarone's classification is shown in the Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3: Tarone's classification of C.S.**

| |
|---|
| 1 Avoidance: a. Topic Avoidance <br>                  b. Message Abandonment |
| 2. Paraphrase: a. Approximation <br>                  b. Word Coinage <br>                  c. Circumlocution |
| 3. Conscious Transfer: a. Literal Translation <br>                        b. Language Switch |
| 4. Appeal for assistance |
| 5. Mime |

    1. *Avoidance*: Avoidance is a common strategy used by second language learners

when the knowledge of L2 vocabulary or syntax is not available in the present

interlanguage system. In order to prevent the conversation from breaking down,

language learners simply avoid initiating such content that proves to be difficult for

them. Avoidance can be divided into two subcategories. One is *topic avoidance* and

the other is *message abandonment*. The former occurs when learners can predict the

extent of difficulty in advance and directly try not to talk about them. The latter is

employed when learners find that the content of ongoing conversation transcends their

present ability of comprehension and production. In this situation, the simplest

solution to the problem is to stop it and then switch to another topic.

    2. *Paraphrase*: According to Tarone (1977), paraphrase is 'the rewording of the

message in an alternately accessible target language construction, in a situation where

the appropriate forms or construction is not known or not yet stable (Tarone, 1977:

198).' In other words, learners resort to an alternately familiar way to convey an

intended meaning without consideration to situational appropriateness.

　　　There are three subcategories underlying this strategy. The first one is

*approximation*, which is defined as 'the use of a single target vocabulary item or

structure, which the learners know is not correct, but which shares enough semantic

features in common with the desired item to satisfy the speakers (Tarone, 1977: 198).'

For example, learners might refer to 'silkworm' by using an easier and more familiar

word--'worm.' The second subcategory is *word coinage*, in which learners 'make up a

new word in order to communicate a desired concept (Tarone, 1977 :198).' For

example, in the face of the need to convey the object of 'balloon' to the audience,

which has not been acquired by the learners, they may combine the two already

familiar words—'air' and 'ball' to get across an intended meaning. The third one was

*circumlocution*, the employment of which involves in 'describing the characteristics

or elements of object or action instead of using the appropriate target language item or

structure (Tarone, 1977: 198).' To put it differently, the learners lacks the necessary

target language vocabulary or structure; they therefore bypass such inadequacy by

providing the related properties or situation of the intended meaning in order to make

themselves understood. Tarone gives the example of how learners try to refer to the unlearned word--'waterpipe' by saying '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 (Tarone, 1977: 199).'

3. *Conscious Transfer*: Conscious transfer refers to learners' dependence on the linguistic knowledge of their native language to communicate an idea. Two subcategories can be found in this notion. One is *literal translation* and the other is *language switch*. The most frequently cited example of the former is the use of 'He invited him to drink' by Mandarin speakers in place of the correct expression 'They toasted one another (Tarone, 1981: 288).' In this situation, learners translate the unfamiliar target word 'toast' from their native language. The latter describes the phenomenon in which learners directly insert their L1-based utterance into target language without any translation.

4. *Appeal for Assistance*: Appeal for assistance indicates that learners directly ask for the correct term from the native speaker's by posing interrogative sentences such as 'What is this?' or 'What called? (Tarone, 1981: 289).'

5. *Mime*: Mime is identified as 'the use of nonverbal strategies in place of a lexical item.' For example, 'learner may clap their hands to illustrate applause (Tarone, 1981: 289).'

This taxonomic system offers quite a complete characterization of the connotation of the communication strategies and makes the issue of what is included in the notion explicit. Each label of class is induced from the observation of actual linguistic performance of L2 learners. Those communicative behaviors with similar features are grouped under the same label. We therefore suggest that Tarone's taxonomies analyze actual language uses in terms of bottom-up perspective.

Tarone's classification, however, has some shortcomings as pointed out by psycholinguistic advocates. The first problem is the difficulty of the assignment of the class. This includes the level of assignment and the embeddedness issue (Bialystok, 1993). The former indicates that utterances produced by learners sometimes fall in between the strategic descriptions and are hard to be put into one of the categories. The latter, on the other hand, shows that sometimes utterances contain more than one strategy. In order to solve the problem of ambiguity in assignment, Bialystok and Frohlich (1980) propose that the overall intention of the utterance should be taken into consideration. That is, when a strategy for communication is difficult for categorization, speaker's intention is used as a main criterion. The main strategy is the overall intention of the utterance and other strategies are considered as embedded in it. The solution is still not definite enough. We, therefore, have three examiners including the author to analyze the oral and written productions of learners and to

classify them into different categories of communication strategies. When the

difficulty of the assignment of the classification occurs, the three examiners have to

discuss which category should the production belong to based on the definition of the

categories.

As for those utterances that involve the combination of two or more strategies,

the solution for categorization and examples shown in the following are cited from

Schil and Poulisse (1989 :23).

> If there are uh little animals erm and you want to make them dead, you can 3 uh hit
> them with the thing.                                                    (flyswat:310t1)

Way of referring to flyswat is identified as *superordinate strategy* while way of

referring to flies is considered as *subordinate strategy*. In other words, strategy used

to express overall intention is identified as main strategies and other strategies are

regarded as embedded in it. Main strategies and embedded strategies are treated and

analyzed separately. We, however, focus on main strategies because we examine how

communication strategies are used to express a controlled concept. For example,

when the target concept is 'flyswat,' only the ways to convey such word will be

discussed.

The second problem is that interactional taxonomies focus on the description of

superficial linguistic behaviors and ignore the cognitive process underlying the use of

communication strategies. This may be the reason why interactional approach needs

liberal taxonomic system to characterize communication strategies. Kellerman et al

(1990) offers a concrete example to illustrate this point as mentioned in the following.

They indicate that when learners need to refer to 'triangle' and 'balloon,' which are

not existent in their linguistic repertoires, they may come up with 'figure with three

sides' and 'airball.' According to interactional taxonomies, the former is classified as

*paraphrase* (circumlocution) while the latter is identified as *word coinage*. However,

when the learners use 'three-angle' to refer to 'triangle' and 'ball with air in it' to

indicate 'balloon,' the reverse classification is invoked. That is, 'three-angle' belongs

to *word coinage* while 'ball with air in it' is grouped into *circumlocution*. They claim

that the two ways learners used for referring to 'triangle' and 'balloon' are identical

strategies, because the sense and the reference are the same. Psycholinguistic

researchers address that to classify communication strategies just because of their

difference in linguistic encoding fails to capture the links among linguistic realization.

To solve this problem, psycholinguistic researchers therefore argue that the

taxonomies of communication strategies should be based on the underlying

psychological mechanism.

We, however, hold quite a different standpoint toward the problem advanced by

psycholinguistic researchers. The difficulty of each communication strategy may be

different to each learner and influences the choices of learners in applying these

strategies. Accordingly, superficial difference of linguistic encodings may result from

the interaction of the difficulty of each strategy, anxiety and proficiency level of

learners. In other words, different superficial realization of one intended concept may

undergo different cognitive process. The product-orientedness of interactional

taxonomies can be regarded as an accumulation of whole psychological process. The

classification from such product-level taxonomies can help researchers predict the

difficulty of each strategy and make some pedagogical suggestions for English

teacher.

In our view, interactional taxonomies categorize learners' behaviors from a

bottom-up system while psycholinguistic taxonomies, by contrast, describe the use of

communication strategies from a top-down system. They handle the same issue from

two different perspectives. The former examines communication strategies locally

and the latter globally, following what Faerch & Kasper have pointed out that

interactional taxonomies form a subset of psycholinguistic one. In the current study,

we hold the position that teaching the use of communication strategies may make

students more aware of these strategies and know how to employ them in real

communication, which is one of the main claims made by interactional researchers.

Besides, the explicit definition and examples of the interactional approach make it

easy for English teachers and learners to follow. Thus, the interactional approach and

its taxonomic systems are adopted in the current study.

**2.4 The relation between L2 proficiency and the use of C.S.**

There have been some studies aimed at examining the relation between L2

proficiency and the selection of communication strategies such as Tarone (1977),

Bialystok (1983), Paribakht (1985), Poulisse (1990). The results, however, are quite

mixed or inconclusive. Some important studies will be reviewed in the following.

**2.4.1 Bialystok' study (1983): insignificant relation**

Bialystok (1983) uses picture reconstruction task to elicit learners' use of

communication strategies. The subjects participating in the study are a group of grade

12 students and a group of adult learners. They learn French as a second language.

Grade 12 students are further divided into two groups--regular one and advanced one.

The adult group is generally more advanced than the student group. In other words,

there are there groups in the study--regular student group, advanced student group and

adult group.

The result shows that there is no significant relation between the quantitative use

of communication strategy and proficiency level. That is, the average number of

communication strategies selected by speakers bears no relation to proficiency.

Bialostok (1983), however, indicates that the result turns out to be different when the

source of communication strategy is taken into consideration. The advanced student

group uses significantly fewer L1-based strategies than the other two groups do

(Bialystok, 1983: 108). He explains that this might have connection to the fact that

advanced student are more willing to obey the rules in the classroom, i.e. the

prohibition of the use of their native language. The advanced students therefore get

used to employing more L2-based strategies than L1-based ones in the process of

conversation. Less proficient students, who do not have adequate L2 resources, by

contrast, refer to more mother-tongue-based strategies. However, no explanation is

made in his study about why adult learners, who are even more proficient, use more

L1-based strategies than advanced student group.

Despite the group difference about the use of L1-base and L2-based strategies,

Bialystok (1983) admits that there exist some anomalies that make it difficult to reach

a theoretically consistent statement of the relation between strategic uses and

proficiency. For example, he finds that there is a negative relationship between cloze

test performance and the use of L1-based strategies. That is, the higher scores learners

get in the test; the less L1-based strategies are used. However, in the advanced student

group, it is found that learners who adopt more L1-based strategies get higher scores

in the test. In other words, it is the best students who use more L1-based strategies in

advanced student group. The pattern is quite contradictory to the general pattern

mentioned above. The anomaly makes the overall relationship difficult to interpret.

Therefore, he concludes that 'the role of proficiency is seen as an intervening variable

rather than a determining variable because there are relatively few differences

between different groups in terms of the selection of strategy type (Bialystok, 1983:

115).' Bialystok's finding concerning the few group-related differences of the strategy

type and the insignificant relation between the proficiency level and the number of

communication strategies will be re-examined in the present study.

In addition, the measurement of proficiency level used in his study is cloze test.

We, however, consider that cloze test may only measure learners' grammatical

competence, which may not have a direct correlation with subject's speaking ability.

That is the reason why some students who can get high scores on pencil-and-paper

test turn out to find it difficult to speak English in a fluent way. In order to make up

this limitation mentioned in his study and to accurately capture the relationship

between the employment of communication strategies and proficiency level, we

regard it as necessary to separately investigate oral production strategies as well as

written production strategies and their respective correlation with speaking

proficiency level and writing proficiency level.

## 2.4.2 Nijmegen project: negative relation

A larger research called Nijmegen aimed at investigating learners'

communication strategies is carried out by Bongaerts, Kellerman and Poulisse in 1987.

They have subsequently published a series of paper concerning the project (Poulisse,

1990; Kellerman, Amerlaan, Bongaerts, Poulisse, 1990). The subjects in the project

are 15 Dutch learners of L2 English with different proficiency level, which is

indicated by the number of years for learning English, school grades, teacher

judgments and cloze test scores. Four different tasks were used to elicit learners' use

of communication strategies: (1) a concrete picture description, (2) an abstract figure

description task, (3) an oral interview and (4) a story retelling task. The main results

are presented in the following.

There is a negative relation between proficiency level and the use of

communication strategies. That is, less proficient learners use more communication

strategies than more proficient learners. They indicate the reason is that less proficient

learners have more limited vocabulary, for which they have to use more

communication strategies to compensate. We, however, suggest that limited

vocabulary may hinder the correct production of communication strategies. When the

vocabulary or grammar needed to encode messages is missing in learners'

interlanguage system, they may be forced to give up the production of that strategy.

To put it differently, limited linguistic system may decrease the use of communication

strategies. The more proficient learners, on the other hand, have sufficient linguistic

knowledge for them to encode messages and may have the ability to use more

communication strategies to get the meaning across. The above view made by the

author seems to be quite contradictory to the findings of Nijmegen project. We

therefore will conduct an experiment to investigate whether more proficient learners

use more communication strategies than less proficient learners in solving lexical

problems. In addition to the discussion of the relation between proficiency level and

strategic uses in terms of number, we also aim to explore how proficiency level affects

the types of communication strategies selected. More proficient learners, having more

complete linguistic knowledge available may know to choose more types of

communication strategies to encode messages.

It is hoped that through the comparison of the types of communication strategies

employed between more proficient learners and less proficient learners can we find

out what types of communication strategies prove to be difficult for less proficient

learners so that English teachers could remind students of these communication

strategies. With awareness of more types of communication strategies, learners can

shift to another communication strategy when a certain one fails to achieve

communication goals. Their communicative competence may be therefore enhanced.

**2.4.3 Paribakht's study (1985): with relation in the proportion of C.S.**

Paribakht (1985) examines the relation between speaker's proficiency level and

the use of communication strategies in terms of types and proportions. The subjects

are divided into three groups according to proficiency level: (1) Persian ESL students

at intermediate level, (2) Persian ESL students at advanced level and (3) native

speakers of English. The main results are summarized as follows.

First, he suggests that the differences among groups in terms of the types of

communication strategies are minimal. That is, all groups use the same four

communication strategies--*linguistic approach, contextual approach, conceptual*

*approach* and *mime*[5], with subtle differences in the use of a few constituent strategies

of them. For example, *contextual strategies* are employed by the three groups but the

constituent strategy of the *contextual strategies* such as *idiomatic strategy* displays

differences: transliteration of L1 idioms and proverbs are used by intermediate group

and advanced group while the transliteration of target language idioms and proverbs

are used by advanced groups and native speakers. Namely, low proficiency group can

adopt the strategy of idiomatic transfer but fails to make use of target language idioms

in solving lexical problems. Paribakht (1985) suggest that 'for communicating in the

target language, idioms and cultural aspects of L1 are among the last to be abandoned

while similar aspects of target language are among the last be acquired (Paribakht,

1985: 140).' However, in his study, the subtle difference is only addressed upon the

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[5] The examples and the constituent strategies of these four approaches are displayed in chapter three.

use of idiomatic strategies. We suggest that other strategies may also show

proficiency-related effect, which will be examined in the present paper.

Second, there are significant differences among three groups in their proportional

use of communication strategies. Proficiency-related distribution of communication

strategies in Paribatht (1985) is shown in Table 2.4:

**Table 2.4: Proficiency-related distribution of C.S. in Paribakht's study (1985)**

| Proficiency Level / Strategies | Intermediate | Advanced | Native speakers |
|---|---|---|---|
| Linguistic | | \/ | \/ |
| Contextual | \/ | \/ | \/ |
| Conceptual | \/ | | |
| Mime | \/ | \/ | |

Linguistic strategies 'exploit the semantic features of the target item and reflect

the speaker's formal analysis of meaning (Paribakht, 1985: 135).' The constituent

strategies under such category include *synonym strategy*, *antonym strategy* and

*circumlocution strategy*. She indicates that the *linguistic strategies* draw heavily on

speaker's linguistic knowledge and are more frequently adopted by the advanced

learners and the native speakers, i.e. speakers with higher proficiency level.

*Contextual strategies* characterize the ways in which speakers provide contextual

information of the target word and indirectly ask for the native interlocutor to 'fill in

the blank.' The example cited in Paribakht's study is 'When you sweep the floor, you

gather up the dust with _____? (dust-pan) (1985: 137).' The differences of this

strategy among these groups are not significant. In other words, speaker's proficiency

level does not affect the choice of *contextual strategies* in terms of quantity. Paribakht

(1985) admits that the result is not easily interpreted and attributes the reason to lower

occurrence of this strategy.

    *Conceptual strategies* such as *demonstration strategy* and *exemplification*

*strategy* are defined as speaker's exploitation of world knowledge to demonstrate or

exemplify the target word. For example, speakers who lack the L2 target word

'courage' may try to convey the meaning by saying 'a soldier in a war definitely needs

it (Paribakht, 1985: 137).' She indicates that such world-knowledge-involved-strategy

that draws relatively little on speaker's linguistic knowledge is often chosen by

speakers with lower proficiency level to compensate for their linguistic limitation.

The final strategy--*mime* that involves nonverbal gestures or cues, shows greater

occurrences in language learners' interlanguge than in native speaker's productions. It

is quite understandable that learners need to use *mime* as an aid to convey the meaning

more frequently than native speakers do.

    We, however, call in question about the necessity of the distinction between

*contextual strategies* and *conceptual strategies*. The purpose of these two strategies is

to provide learners with a situation or a concept that helps learners activate the target

word. The difference is that the former leaves blanks for listeners to fill in while the

latter does not. Since both of them take advantage of the mention of one situation or

one concept to help learners associate the intended meaning, to classify them as

different strategies, as a result, may incur some criticism.

Therefore, in the present paper, we will not group each communication strategy

into broader categories such as *linguistic strategies* or *contextual strategies*. We aim

to further discuss how language proficiency affects the use of each communication

strategy and aim to make generalizations on the patterns of communication strategies

that are used in different groups.

In sum, Paribakht (1985) finds that speakers with different proficiency levels

may use similar resources to solve lexical problems but the proportions of each

communication strategy vary as they progress in target language. The present paper

adaptively reduplicates Paribatht's (1985) experimental design to examine whether

there is a similar result among Taiwan EFL college learners.

## 2.5 Summary of Chapter Two

In this chapter, we have reviewed the previous literature on the differences

between spoken language and written language and then make inferences about the

differences of communication strategies in the two modes. Besides, the approaches,

the definitions and the taxonomic systems of communication strategies are reviewed

in order to have a complete picture of the operation of communication strategies.

Finally, the mixed results of the studies of the relation between language proficiency and the use of communication strategies are summarized. It is hoped that the adaptive design of the experiment can reach a better explanation regarding the relation between language proficiency and the use of communication strategies.