

Factors Affecting the Choice of Oral Communication Strategies

Dr. Yaseen Abdualgader Hmaid¹

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English

Faculty of Arts, Misurata University

Dr. Mustafa Fuzi Elshawish²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English

Faculty of Arts, Misurata University

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Abstract

Target language proficiency, gender, motivation, learners' attitude and communication contexts are among the variables influencing choice of Communication Strategies (CSs) which have been presented thus far. Discussing the correlation between these variables and choice of CSs can elucidate for teachers the particularities of Libyan language learners in the contexts of certain communication tasks. Hence, the current study investigated the impact of teaching oral communication strategies and the factors influencing their use in Libya. A semi-structured interview was conducted to obtain the data needed. The findings revealed that not only learners had gained general confidence by their instruction in the use of CSs, but also the teaching of these strategies was feasible and effective.

Keywords: Oral communication strategies, gender, learners' proficiency and attitude.

Introduction

A great number of learners in Libya are neither fluent nor confident English speakers even though they have been studying English language for years. This deficiency might be attributed to the limited time for oral practice and the lack of

conversational opportunities inside and outside the classrooms. In line with this (Abdulhamid, 2011, as cited in Almanafi & Alghatani 2020, p. 38) stated that, “Libyan learners have a limited opportunity to express their views analytically or critically”. Nevertheless, it may arise from the mistaken believe that learners embrace with reference to communication in the target language, such as the necessary possession of excellent pronunciation, a huge vocabulary proportions, and an in-depth knowledge of grammar.

Furthermore, teacher-learner and peer interactions are often restricted to basic patterns and topics in the classrooms. Language learners are often impotent to comprehend the instructions, to use an idiomatic expression, or to grasp a topic in authentic communicative contexts; therefore, interaction breaks down (Willems, 1987). As a result, to compensate for their language deficiencies, leaners essentially need to improve specific communication strategies which enable them not only to interact in the target language, but also eventually develop their communicative competence (Bialystok, 1990; Dörnyei, 1995; Faerch & Kasper, 1983).

Consequently, communication strategies play an integral role in language acquisition. Willems (1987) argued that introducing communication strategies allows weaker learners to “develop a feeling of being able to do *something* with the language” (p.352), and thus derive language learning motivation. To date, a review of the relevant literature revealed that studies with regard to the use of communication strategies and the factors that affect the selection of these strategies by Libyan language learners are quite few (Almanafi & Alghatani 2020). The present study therefore, examined the effects of some factors such as language proficiency, gender, personality, motivation and attitude on the use of communication strategies.

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Literature Review

Some variables are influencing the choice of CSs have been presented in this section. Among these, target language proficiency, gender and communicating contexts.

English Proficiency and the Use of CSs

Proficiency level is probably one of the factors which affect the choice of CSs, but Cohen and Macaro (2007) argue that it is hard to predict the relationship between the use of CSs and TL proficiency level for a number of reasons. Previous researchers such as Ellis (1984), Labarca and Khanji (1986), Poullisse and Schils (1989), Cohen et al. (1998), and Nakatani (2006) differ markedly over the levels of learners who might benefit more from using CSs. There are also differences in the way these researchers evaluate levels of speaking proficiency. The use of CSs is dependent on context, and different researchers may have used different speaking contexts to arrive at their measures of proficiency. For instance, Labarca and Khanji (1986), and Khanji (1996) examined CS use in different contexts. Cohen and Macaro (2007: 215) suggest that differing opinions might also be attributed to the different ways that some researchers evaluated the usage of CSs.

Tarone (1977) proposed that the level of L2 learners' proficiency might be related to their CS choices. She compared speakers' performances in story-telling tasks in their L1 and L2. The researcher found that the proficiency levels of the speakers influenced their choices of CSs; low level students preferred avoidance strategies, while high level learners used more L2-based strategies. Bialystok (1983), who supported Tarone's findings, focused on the use of specific lexical items in a picture story reconstruction task. She asked two groups of Anglo-Canadian learners of French to describe a picture to a French native speaker, so that they could reconstruct it on a nonsense

board. Her study showed that the choice of certain strategies entails a minimum level of proficiency.

This observation explains why advanced speakers used more L2-based strategies and fewer L1-based strategies than less advanced speakers. L2-based strategies are those related to target language rules or knowledge, such as approximation and circumlocution, whereas L1-based strategies are primarily related to the mother tongue e.g. language transfer and code switching.

Phan and Ting (2008) also examined the influence of English proficiency level on the use of CSs. In their study, the interactional data of twenty Malaysian undergraduate English learners was analysed to identify choices of CSs. The results revealed that the overall number of strategies used was not influenced by proficiency. However, Phan and Ting found that less proficient learners used L1-based strategies, particularly language switch to compensate for communication difficulties, whereas high proficient learners used ‘tonicity’ to enhance the negotiation of meaning.

These researchers found that the use of CSs enhanced the negotiation of meaning between learners. In this process, the proficient group supported the less-proficient group to construct meanings in the TL “...learners with better knowledge and control of the language, to scaffold the less proficient learners in constructing meanings in the target language” (Phan & Ting, p.38). Although pair discussion is a useful evaluation method, it was the only method used in Phan and Ting’s (2008) study. The researchers should have used additional methods (e.g. questionnaires, and interviews) in order to get more accurate and conclusive results.

In a similar vein, Nakatani (2006) investigated the relationship between proficiency level and the use of CSs for negotiation of meaning. The participants in this study were 400

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Japanese students. The researcher used a self-report method to evaluate female EFL learners' use of CSs in interaction tasks. Eight variables of strategies used to cope with oral production problems and another seven for coping with receptive problems were analyzed (see Table 2 in Appendix B). An Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI) was used to count frequency of use.

The researcher concluded that the higher proficiency group used negotiation-for-meaning, social-affective, and fluency-maintaining strategies more than the lower proficiency groups. In fact, the high proficiency students successfully used oral CSs to maintain the interaction and the flow of conversation (Jidong, 2011). It was also found that learners used strategies such as clarification requests when they encountered listening problems. However, in his attempt to examine the differences between high proficiency and low proficiency groups, Nakatani (2006) relied heavily on the usage frequency of CSs. It should be noted that frequency is not always a consistent indicator of successful strategy use, as other variables (e.g. gender and learning context) can affect frequency.

In contrast to the findings of the above studies, some researchers such as Bialystok (1983), and Paribakht (1985), Labarca and Khanji (1986), Chen (1990), and Khanji (1996, reported an inverse relationship between proficiency level and CSs use.

Poulisse and Schils (1989) found that the proficiency level had no significant impact on the use of compensatory strategies, although less proficient learners generally used more compensatory strategies than high proficiency learners. This is possibly because proficient learners already have enough linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge of the TL whereas less proficient learners' linguistic knowledge compels them to rely

more on CS (e.g. strategies based on L1 and compensation strategies). In their analysis, Poullisse and Schils, used impressive quantitative data, but neglected qualitative analysis.

Chen (1990) (as cited in Maleki 2007) divided her students into two groups according to language proficiency and asked them to perform a concept-identification task in an interview with native speaker (NS). Overall, Chens less proficient learners used the most CSs, and more of these were knowledge based and repetition strategies, compared with the more proficient learners, who used more linguistically based strategies. She observed that proficiency has a significant effect on the use of CS, and concluded that “learners’ strategic, and accordingly, communicative competence might be increased through recommended CS training” (Maleki, 2007, p. 585).

In summary, language proficiency level is believed to be an influential factor in the choice of CSs (Nakatani, 2006). However, there are contradictory conclusions in existing studies on the relationship between language proficiency level and the use of CSs. Some of the studies presented above suggest that high proficiency learners are more capable of selecting appropriate and effective strategies CSs for interaction. In contrast, less proficient learners resort to abandonment strategies and rely heavily on knowledge-based strategies including CS. The present researchers agrees with Cohen et al. (1998) that the effectiveness of SL/FL oral strategy instruction might be greatly influenced by learners’ proficiency level.

Gender Differences and CSs Use

Chen et al. (2005) explored the gender differences in self-repair and repair markers. Data was obtained from a spoken English corpus produced by 42 non-English major learners in China (21 of each gender). The researchers found that male learners relied on a more restricted range of repairs than the female ones. They also used repairs less frequently. Researchers

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in this study attributed this to differences in the learners' English proficiency levels and their willingness to try CSs. The reason for this difference might have been the female learners' greater motivation towards language learning.

Lai (2010) employed oral and written concept-identification tasks to investigate the effect of gender on the use of CSs. In a study of 36 Chinese male and female EFL students, no significant gender differences were found in the effective use of CSs. However, female learners were more efficient than male learners in their execution of CSs.

Kaivanpanah et al. (2012) investigated gender influence in the use of CSs, along with other variables, such as proficiency level, task types and frequency. 227 learners (89 male and 138 female learners of differing levels) studying English for at least one year at several Language Institutes in Tehran participated in the study. Researchers adopted only a five-point Likert scale questionnaire as an evaluation tool, because of the speed and objectivity of this method. Three types of tasks, namely picture description, telling a story, and telling a joke were used. The findings showed that no significant gender correlation existed in the use of CSs apart from circumlocution, asking for clarification, omission, comprehension check, and fillers. They explained these differences with the argument that female learners are more interested in social activity than the male learners (Kaivanpanah et al., 2012).

The above studies, as well as previous ones such as Kaivanpanah et al. (2012), suggest that gender might affect the usage of CSs in frequency and type. Since the influence of gender is a potentially contentious subject, the researchers in the current study decided to investigate this phenomenon before making or accepting generalisations. Learners of both sexes

participated in the current study to enable it to possibly contribute to this area of research.

Relation of Communication, Cultural, and Learning Contexts With CSs

Early researchers such as Ellis (1983) argued that the students' use of CSs is, to some extent, affected by the context. Bialystok and Frohlich (1980) conducted a study on the conditions affecting CS choice, such as the learners' inferencing ability, their proficiency level, and the communicative context. The researchers used three groups of French learners consisting of one group of 14 adults and two groups of 17 years old; one of them studying advanced French and the other studying French as a main subject. Participants were given a cloze test, a sentence translation task in Danish, a picture reconstruction and a description task. The results suggested that CS choice was highly influenced by the communicative context.

The effect of learning context on CSs was also explored in Lafford's (2004) study using two groups of L2 Spanish learners, with 20 students studying at home and 26 studying abroad. The 46 learners were pre and post-tested to determine their choices of CSs, and each also completed a questionnaire. The results showed a significant effect of context. Learners studying abroad employed fewer CSs than at home learners.

Shih and Yang (2008) examined how learners perceive their experience in virtual spaces and measured CSs usage in them. Using IT, quantitative data was collected from learners' interactions in virtual contexts and qualitative data from learners' questionnaires. The results showed that learner' motivation, sense of belonging, and their use of CSs increased significantly when presented with simulations of authentic communicative contexts.

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Personality and CSs

A number of studies have suggested that there is an association between learners' personality and achievement in SL/FL learning. Differences in learners' methods of telling a story were observed by Tarone (1977), who suggested that there might be a close relationship between CSs use and the learners' personality characteristics.

Subsequently, Wang (2005) investigated the use of CSs and the effect of learners' L2 personality traits and formal proficiency. The researcher selected 40 second-year non-English majors with regard to their personality traits and L2 formal proficiency. The researcher used questionnaire surveys and interviews for collecting the data. The results suggested that both personality traits and L2 formal proficiency influenced the choice of CSs. Also, effective L2-based strategies were employed more by the higher proficiency learners, especially extroverts, whereas L1-based strategies and reduction strategies were used more by introverts with a lower-proficiency level.

The effect of learners' personalities and proficiency levels were also examined by Lin and Li (2009). They found that cooperative strategies and imitation strategies were used more by extroverted learners, while reduction strategies were employed more by introverted ones. These researchers explained the difference by suggesting that while extroverts exchanged their views eagerly and willingly, introverts were excessively reluctant to ask for assistance. Rather than using expressions which they were not sure about, introverts resorted to reduction strategies and avoidance strategies.

Motivation/ Attitude

Dörnyei (2005) considers motivation as the driving force which not only initiates learning, but also sustains language learning until the intended goals are fulfilled. He observes that

researchers in L2 acquisition such as Lalonde and Gardner (1984), Gardner (1985) and Dörnyei (2003) have paid great attention to motivation. The work of Lalonde and Gardner (1984) emphasised the role of culture, motivation, and attitude on L2 acquisition. Since then, a new period of cognitive studies, motivational studies and self-determination and attribution theories has emerged. These theories have used the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Dörnyei, 2005). The former refers to a willingness to engage because an activity is found to be enjoyable and fulfilling, whereas the latter refers to the desire to do an activity because of an external reason or incentive (Ryan et al. 1999).

To date, no study has been conducted on the relationship between motivation/attitude and CSs use. This deficiency suggests this area for further research, which questions 1 and 2 will examine. However, more general research has been conducted on the relation between motivation and learning achievement. For example, motivation was measured by Gardner (1985) to find out if there was a significant relationship between motivation and achievement. It was also examined by McIntyre and Noels (1996) in relation to second language learning strategies (SLLs). Brown (2000) investigated motivation in terms of the intrinsic and extrinsic motives of the learners. Later, Lopez-Wagner (2008) studied a further possible connection between personality and motivation.

Noursi (2013) conducted a study to investigate how the teacher's mother tongue affects learners' attitudes. 196 Arab students, including Libyans studying at the Applied Technology High School in UAE participated in this study, taught by native and non-native English teachers. The results revealed that all the students had a strong desire to learn English and were not influenced by the mother tongue of the teachers. The researcher claimed that student attitudes were affected by the teaching

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methods used and the encouragement received, rather than the teacher's mother tongue. However, before conducting the study, the researcher observed a negative attitude in the school towards learning English. This might be related to the social distance created by the excessively high status of the teacher, common in Arabic culture in general and among Libyans in particular (Abubaker, 2013). This cultural factor may have influenced the outcomes of this study. This context also suggested further examination of the relation of motivation and attitude to the use of CSs as an objective of this study.

Summary

Recently researchers have shown increasing interest in the relationship between the use of CSs and factors such as personality, gender, tasks, proficiency level and motivation. They suggest that the acquisition process might be aided and language teaching practice improved through better understanding of these influences (cf. Jidong, 2011). For the best knowledge of the researchers, no study has been conducted in Libya to investigate the factors influencing the oral communication strategies and learners' attitude about teaching them. Studies used only statistical analysis of data.

Method

Research Questions

The literature review suggested two major research questions to investigate the impact of teaching CSs to English language learners in Libya. These questions are as follows:

1. What are the learners' attitudes to being taught CSs?
2. What are the factors that affect the use of CSs?

Interview

In the current study, a semi-structured interview was used to investigate learners' perceptions of their communicative strategy use over the intervention period and their attitudes to the

training. The rationale for using a semi-structured interview format lies in its flexibility and the opportunity it provides for the analysis of certain research aspects in depth (Cohen et al. 2011). The semi-structured interview started by first asking some questions, then giving students space to react. This format allowed for greater flexibility than a structured interview, which is more like an oral questionnaire, and enabled the researcher to probe appropriately when it was necessary to get details (Cohen et al.) (see Appendix A). Even though some questions might be prepared by the researcher before conducting the semi-structured interview, it still encourages two-way communication, and is intrusive to the interviewees than more structured ones. Denscombe (2010) also claims that the information of semi-structured interviews can provide depth and sufficient insights of the topic to the researcher.

Table 1

A description of the interview data collection schème

Interview	Phase 1, week 12	Phase 2, March (2013) by email	Phase 3, June (2013)	Phase 4 April (2014) by email	Total
Experiment Group	2 (Male)	3 (male)	3 (Male)	2 (Male)	20
	5 (Female)		4 (Female)	1 (Female)	
International S	x	x	5 (Male)		5
Sub-total	7	3	12		25

Data analysis

The interviews were used to research questions mentioned above, which were about the impact of CSs usage on learners' confidence, and learners' attitudes to the way that CS

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are taught, as well as exploring whether the teacher-student relationship, culture and gender might affect the teaching of CSs and their uptake. The purpose was to obtain an overall qualitative view of learners' use of CSs and their perception of the teaching programme, which implied identifying patterns in responses. The aim was to analyse learners' strategic thinking and behaviour, rather than the types of CSs they used.

In the present study, interviews were conducted in English in four phases. In the first phase, seven (2 male and 5 female) from the experimental group participated and were asked about their attitude towards the teaching of CSs. Three male students participated in the second phase, giving responses to questions about aspects of gender and its effect on the use of CSs. In the third phase, the researchers conducted interviews with 12 students (7 Libyan and 5 international students) to make comparisons and define issues related to gender and cultural differences. In the fourth phase the researchers in the current study contacted their previous Libyan students by email to obtain more information to understand the effect of the teaching of CSs in terms of a longitudinal impact on students (see Appendix A).

Results and Discussion

This section focuses on the following issues:

- Learners' attitude to the training programme, their use of CSs and communicative tasks.
- Participants' preferences in their usage of CSs.
- Learners' perceptions about improvement in their speaking proficiency and confidence.
- Factors that affected the choice of CSs, such as gender, age, personality, culture and teacher/learners' relationship.

Learners' Attitude Towards the Teaching of CSs

Question 1: *How do you feel about the teaching of CSs?*

Seven interviewees were asked this question at this first stage, to provide an opportunity to express and elaborate their feelings about the instruction of CSs. The results showed that all the participants felt that the instruction of CSs was beneficial and useful. In relation to this, interviewees such as Selma, Abdurrahman, and Salem observed that the teaching of CSs had enabled them to employ the strategies in everyday life, which makes them appear to be good English communicators. Abdurrahman, for example, said *'I think CSs are very useful in our life, daily life I mean. We can use it a lot in speaking with people...it is useful and important to use strategies to make them feel that you already know everything about English'*. Salem also commented that *'They are so useful because we always use them in our daily life 'reality', because if you meet someone that you do not know you know how to treat him'*.

In addition, some participants talked about their experience during the training programme. For example, Alla said *'Yeah, they are very useful actually, it helps me a lot, .These strategies I do not have any idea about it before, sometimes I use some 'Fillers', but I do not know that it name is fillers, but when I learned about the strategy it really helped me a lot especially in speaking'*. Similarly, Fatima stated *'Of course they are useful, I mean since high school we do conversations and we make them and we always talk in daily life we talk, but it is more beneficial to know what the strategies you are using and in what cases that you need and in what cases that you need them. Sometimes um for example, we use 'Circumlocution' where there is no need to use circumlocution, the one you need may be 'Repetition'*. The above comments do suggest that the instruction had increased learners' awareness of using CSs in their conversation.

In addition, 80% of the participants said that after the intervention they used more varied techniques when they communicate in the target language. For instance, one participant

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said ‘..I have added more techniques which affects my way of speaking as a matter of fact they were very useful strategies’. Another participant asserted that ‘..I learned different kinds of conversations and how to keep your conversation. For example, when you start a conversation or someone asked you a question...these exceptions give the chance to the speaker/listener, the chance to hear you and not to end the conversation and to make it interesting’. When learners did not specifically say which strategy they used, they were asked to elaborate, giving responses such as ‘‘Um, if you do not want to talk about one topic you can use ‘Topic avoidance strategy’ and that of course to change the topic’’ (see Appendix I). When asked ‘‘do you think it is possible to break off the conversation and use specific strategies?’’ the student replied ‘‘I maybe do and use interruption strategy for example if I don’t like the topic yes!’’. Thus, it appears that participants in this group now recognised the importance of using CSs in conversation and that the training programme had impacted significantly on their actual use of these strategies. Their responses suggest that the instruction of CSs provides a new methodology in learning which is appreciated by Libyan students. This is an encouragement for Libyan educators to continue their move from traditional to more modern methods of instruction.

Learners’ Attitude Towards Their Own Use of CSs

Question 2: *What is your perception of your own use of CSs?*

As previously mentioned, a semi-structured interview format was used, which allowed for flexibility in responses and supplementary questions as required. Five of the seven students were asked to respond to the question. In their responses, some interviewees acknowledged that learning CSs had been a good opportunity for them and that they had not expected to practice these strategies in the classroom during first semester.

Salem for example, responded to the question by saying *'Actually, that makes me somehow proud because I have done something in my first semester in this college and that is important thing cause I can use these strategies in reality all the time'*. Also, Aziza and Fatima respectively said *'It is the first semester for me and um it was a golden opportunity I felt that it may be not happened another time'* and *'I couldn't have done better. I have learned that there are some tasks which I have done better than others'*. The responses suggest that practicing these strategies in their English speaking had enhanced their confidence.

In addition, Nesreen asserted that her communication skills had improved after instruction in CSs. When the interviewers asked her *'in what way?'*, and she said *'When we got training on using CSs, I had a variety of skills or strategies like avoiding the topic or to paraphrase it. Before I had a problem with using the appropriate words and sometimes I turn to Arabic words instead of English'*. Furthermore, Abdurrahman declared that *'I feel very good because I make the listener understand what I was saying and make me feel comfortable and the strategy makes the conversation very interesting I mean that is very important about the use of CSs'*. This was a typical expression of how the learners perceived that the use of CSs facilitates their skill and ability in communicating in the L2/FL.

Learners' Attitude Towards the Communicative Tasks

Question 3: *How do you feel about the communicative tasks which you participated in during the training programme?*

Six interviewees were asked to talk about the communicative tasks that they had participated in and anything else related to these tasks. All the participants evaluated these tasks positively. For example, Salem said *'Actually, they were very interesting and they were very practical tasks from my point of view and helped us to use special strategies e.g. fillers or give*

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assistance or paraphrasing or asking for clarification strategies in different situations'. Abdurrahman also believed them to be worthwhile, saying, *'I think they are very useful and they test our understanding and comprehension of the strategies and helped us to change the topics and ah now I like to use CSs a lot'*. These comments suggest that learners valued the communicative tasks, because they had challenged their linguistic knowledge in the SL/FL, and helped them to monitor their conversational manoeuvres (cf. Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991). The conversational manoeuvres now used by the students suggests that training students to use CSs had increased their knowledge and helped them to become confident and effective learners (Dörnyei & Thurrell). Thus, if teachers teach CSs and include communicative tasks requiring CSs in their lesson plans, they can enrich students' knowledge of the target language and help them to be effective communicators (cf. Tenf 2012).

It is significant that 50% of interviewees reported that their attitude towards the communicative tasks changed from negative to positive after the training programme. Alla, for example, said *'Yes, before I did not have any idea about it um when I speak with other people sometimes I cut the conversation, but when I used these strategies my conversation continued I can finish whenever I want...I feel now I can take control of my conversation'*. It is not known if she was aware that here she was using turn-taking strategy. However, an increased unconscious use of CSs is also an effect of instruction. This student also observed *'The first tasks were a bit hard, but as we went through them ah started to be easy for me'*. Another student commented that doing a series of tasks was useful: *'I think time after time it was better than the first time... I understand the idea and I understand the purpose of these activities so it was nice experience'*. These comments strongly suggest that instruction in

CSs and the subsequent use of these strategies in the speaking tasks assisted learners to be more confident in controlling and keeping the flow of the conversations. In addition, such reflections on communicative tasks show that the tasks can be used to raise learners' awareness of their learning, and recognition of their progress.

Participants' Preferences of CSS

Question 4: Do you think that the use of CSs helps you to be a good English speaker?

The researchers asked this question to seven Libyan learners in the first phase and to five other international learners in the third phase. The data revealed that five of the seven Libyan participants preferred to use 'Fillers' strategy when they communicate in the target language, whereas four international interviewees said they preferred 'Body language'. The Libyan learners also reported that they liked to use other strategies in conjunction with fillers e.g. 'Repetition', 'seeking opinion' and 'Paraphrasing strategy'.

For instance, Salem confirmed that he favoured fillers strategy, replying, *'Fillers of course, because this strategy helps me get a few time to think of what I am going to say. Also, the way I answer will be affected by the listener that I am talking with'*. Also, Aziza asserted *'I think fillers; ah I use them always, ah to take much time to think and to organise myself' I use fillers most often'*. Besides, Fatima said *'There is no particular strategy..., but I know that the one I use a lot is fillers, when I talk I use fillers and I do not know why'*. When the interviewers prompted her to clarify that answer, she replied, using fillers: *'I use them ah probably because these strategies give me some time to think and prepare myself'*.

However, two among these five participants reported that they preferred using repetition and paraphrasing respectively, along with pause fillers strategies. Alla, for

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example, said *'I prefer fillers and asking for repetition these I always use. Sometimes when I do not understand well I use asks for repetition and with regard to fillers I use them immediately'*. This reply which was echoed by Abdurrahman: *'I think fillers because we make the other person interested; we make him feel that we are interested in what he is saying. Also, paraphrasing I like to do it a lot'*. The above comments showed that students were conscious of their use of filler strategies. The popularity of this strategy in interview responses correlates with the results of the data from the questionnaires and speaking tasks in this study, as well as earlier studies (e.g., Dörnyei, 1995; Nakatani, 2005).

The responses of the international students were different from those of the Libyan students'. It is likely that the international students employed some CSs unconsciously. Nevertheless, all the international students cited body language, when asked about the strategies that they used most. For example, Soheab said *'When you communicate with people you use strategies or skills. We do sometimes use body language as you know'*. Shomrky echoed this response: *'...when I meet strangers, then um I use less body language, but ah when I am with people I am comfortable with then I use more body language'*. Mohammed similarly said, *'I am a teacher from origin so, I can say yeah I am using a lot of body languages this kind of stuff because when you communicate with students generally you need to have ah a kind of body language that you use'*. A possible explanation of this difference is that they were unfamiliar with the use of CSs in conversation.

At these stages, the results showed that the most used strategy was 'filler strategy'. They also suggested that learners' awareness of CSs tends to improve their fluency in the target language and their use of these strategies (Nakatani, 2005, Maleki, 2007 and Jamshidnejad 2011).

Improving Their Speaking Proficiency

Question 5: *Do you think that the use of CSs helps you to be a good English speaker?*

All the interviewees responded positively when asked about the impact of teaching CSs on their speaking ability. For instance, Fatima said *'Yes, of course, when you know what to say ah for example if I am speaking to a foreigner and he wants more details or if you speak to me and you cannot understand me I can paraphrase my ideas to you I can ah use circumlocution if I need it of course it is very helpful'*. Also, Selma said *'Yes, of course, like ah especially in communication ah I did not use some strategies before and ah now ah I know about them'*. In addition, Salem asserted *'Yes, definitely because I learned different strategies and how to speak with other people'*.

Furthermore, the teaching programme seems to have encouraged some students to use CSs in different situations e.g. in the classroom and in real-life (cf. Dörnyei, 1995). In his answer, for instance, Abdurrahman said, *'Yes, it helped me a lot I am ah I've started using these strategies in my exams, when I am answering the teachers and I use it when I talk to ah foreigners outside the university I am using it a lot so I am grateful for that'*. According to Aziza, the teaching programme had increased her confidence in speaking SL/FL and provided her the opportunity to practice expressions while communicating in English. In this, she said: *'Yes, a good English speaker and um I felt that I am better speaker than before because now I know some expressions'*. Nesreen also, believed that the teaching programme helped her to solve communication difficulties: *'Of course, these strategies helped me to ask other students about different things'*.

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Gender

Question 6: *Do men and women use different CSs?*

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Various answers were obtained from the participants to the above question. The results showed that 75% of the home and international students (9 out of 12) were not sure about a connection between gender and the choice of CSs. However, two participants not only answered yes to the question, but also claimed that women generally talk more than men, without mentioning which particular strategy they use. For example, Imhemmed said, *'Yes, of course, there is a big difference between men and women because girls 'sorry for that' are talking a lot and they talk non-sense and they prefer to talk about themselves e.g. she is good at this and that'*.

Another student, Soheab, also asserted that *'What can I say, yes, they use different strategies in daily life. Girls talk a lot, but men they like to speak less, few words, but with the same meaning'*. Interestingly, even though Aziza agreed or admitted that women like to talk, she accused men of being discourteous when they speak or communicate. In this she commented that *'I think men always use strong words or language and they do not talk about or seek details in their conversation they prefer to talk straight and directly to their subject. But, for women they use a lot of strategies because they like to speak and maybe they try to be nice with others and understood. It is probably something to do with their personality trying to be sociable and nice'*. It has to be said that these comments mirror only their personal opinion, and cannot be generalised, because not all men and women think in such a way.

Moreover, one Libyan and one international interviewees reported that they feel more relaxed and communicate more effectively when they are in a gender comfort zone. In that, Alla said *'What I shall I say; as I said when I am with boys I have to know what I will say, but with girls because we know each other so I feel more comfortable*

with them'. In addition, Shomrky believed that *'Of course there is much different [sic] when man you are more comfortable and hide nothing inside you, but when you speak with woman especially a stranger you would be more shy or talking to her and you look down*'. Moreover, another two interviewees agreed that the choice of CSs was contingent on the setting in which the interaction happened. Fatima for example, said *'I do not think so; in my opinion different situations acquire different strategies.., it depends on the situation and not gender*', while Maroaf believed that *'Man and woman say ah I really have no idea. It could depend on ah their position like where they are sitting or the situation, if they maybe unmarried or if they married they could use different strategies*'.

It is possible that the influence of traditions and religion significantly affects the response to the question. The interviewees all came from a cultural background where contact between men and women is limited and constrained, especially in public work places. This might have had some effect on the learners' responses. One student confirmed this influence of culture and religion in his response: *'No, because we were not given the chance to have a conversation with them. Even in real life, we are not really given a lot of opportunity to deal with ladies*'. The results suggest that further investigation is needed to explore the influence of culture and gender on CS usage.

Personality

Question 7: *Does the personality of the learner have any effect on his/her choices of CSs?*

Various responses were given by the participants on the subject of the personality, ranging from 'Yes, definitely', to 'do not know' and 'not sure'. For example, Fatima said, *'Yes, some of the questions for me are something personal and I don't want to talk about so I avoid them. Sometimes some of the questions are not that clear to me so I have little knowledge about them.*

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So, I ask for clarification sometimes I use repetitions and so'. Another student stated *'Um studying with boys um somehow affects me because I am a little bit shy and I am always afraid of making mistakes in front of them ah in such situations I think I use topic avoidance, but I do not have a problem with studying with girls'.* Similarly, Selma responded, *'Yes, I am very shy and sometime nervous especially in the classroom. Also when I meet strange people I got very shy at first then I got relax. So, maybe I use fillers and repetition strategies'.*

On the other hand, the international interviewees commented on the influence of personality on the use of CSs, without referring to any particular choice of CS. Here, Soheab, for example agreed that there was association between personality and CSs, saying *'Yes, definitely I think so because you know it depends on your background and your ah life like ah how you grow up and the things you have been taught definitely affects your personality and your choices of the CSs'.* Another student, Mohammed believed that social position was more important than personality: *'Yeah, sometimes people tend to look at the personality, me normally I think that yeah look at your doctor or professor or the person you are talk to, you talk to them in a really formal way polite way'.*

Others saw a definite relationship between personality and the use of CSs: *'Personality has influence on the way I communicate. I try to like ah keep myself for myself and I'm also a shy person and I'm also quiet person so that ah might have an influence on how I communicate'.* Overall 75 % of the learners believed that there was a correlation between the personality of the learner and the use of CSs in conversation. Significantly, the results also revealed that the Libyan interviewees were aware of the use of CSs and as seen above in their responses, they referred explicitly to their choices of CSs.

Age

Question 8: *Do you think that age has any kind of effect on the choice of CSs?*

Three out of four Libyan participants who were asked this question responded that they believed that there was no relationship between the use of CSs and age. Abdurrahman, Imhemmed respectively said, *'No'*, *'Um, I don't think so'* and *'No, I do not think age has anything to do with that'*. Only Salem supported the view that age influenced the learner's choice and stated *'Age has another effect on me, if they [other speakers] older than me I'll try to be as in their age in mind by thinking as they think'*. Then, the interviewer asked him if he considers the age of the speakers in L2/FL conversation, he asserted *'Yes, I take age into consideration. I consider using fillers or repetition with young and old people'*.

In contrast to the Libyan learners, the four international interviewees who were asked this question commented that there was a correlation between age and learners' choices of CSs. For instance, Soheab responded, *'Definitely yeah, if you speak with elderly person, we have to speak slowly, raise your voice and clearly so he can understand your talk. Similarly, if you talk with a child you have to speak in easy way so that you could be fully understood'*. Another student said, *'Yeah, probably, when you get older you use ah more of the repetition and ah because I speak with elderly I speak more loudly. Where, when you are with people of the same age of you, you understand each other more easily'*.

Two students, Mohammed and Maroaf, acknowledged the influence of age, and correlated age with education and respect. The former said, *'Yeah, the age as well it is part of the education impeded in our system in our body in our brains. When you talk to someone older than you or younger you don't address them in the same way, but you tend to be polite to*

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people. I think the way you talk to people reflected your education and background'. The latter said, 'Yes, I think so. In my country for example Bangladesh education is not well established as in here. So, they may not know the fundamentals how to talk to a person. So if you come cross they might not like ah speak in a correct manner, but if they were educated they might know how to communicate probably'.

Although international students responded that there was a link between age and learners' choices of CSs, they did not mention which strategies young and old people employ. On the other hand, one Libyan participant identified explicitly two strategies he uses when he deals with other speakers.

Culture

Question 9: Does culture have any effect on learner's choice of CSs?

In connection with culture, the participants were asked a question which gave them the opportunity to respond to anything related to the choice of CSs and culture, which broadly included traditions, the atmosphere in the classroom and politics. Most interviewees agreed that there was a relationship between the choice of CSs and culture. For instance, Maroaf said, 'Culture could do, ah certain religions like ah in Bangladesh Islam is the main religion and ah teaches us kindness and being friendly and treating your neighbour in a friendly manner correct manner'. Others, such as Selma and Imhemmed referred to the relationship of using CSs with some traditions. Selma observed 'Some traditions make me change my behaviour and in other times get on with it and I feel relaxed'. Aziza also agreed that culture and traditions affected her choice of Cs and added 'They have an effect on me, but not all of them, I do not know, but I think it is not about culture or traditions it is about my personality'.

Similarly, a Libyan and an international interviewees both cited the effect of culture on personality and said, respectively *'Of course culture has its effect on me and on my personality'*, *'Yeah, I think to me it is part of my personality because when I talk to people I look at ah umm normally I don't make discrimination between I can say man and woman it is not my thing like that, but you are trying to be really respectful when you are talking to someone else especially if someone you don't know, you are talking to him for the first time'*.

Two Libyan interviewees interpreted the question in terms of wider cultural effect on relations in the classroom. In this vein, Salem reported that *'Some teachers in some subjects make me feel that they try to dominate the classes, but I always try to break that by chatting and speaking e.g. asking questions. If I do not know what to say I ask for clarification and I use some examples to make the teacher understand my idea'*. Another student, Abdurrahman commented, *'In the classroom it depends on the subjects, for example in our last training programme I mean language skills which is my favourite subject, I got to talk and to do what I want which makes it my favourite subject, but in Grammar it is boring because you cannot even talk'*. With reference to the political aspect of culture and its relation to learners' choice of CSs, a Libyan and an international interviewees both showed their unwillingness to discuss the subject. As Fatima said *'I did care much about politician because politics is something boring and full of lies so I prefer to stay out of it'*. Overall, 55% of the participants believed that culture might affect their choices of CSs, with no significant differences between Libyan and international students. All participants were from a Muslim culture, which might have influenced the result. Further research is therefore needed to investigate the connection between the use of CSs and cultural backgrounds.

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Teacher / Learner Relation

Question 10: *Do you think that your relationship with your teacher has some effect on your choice of CSs?*

Ten interviewees (half Libyan and half international), answered this question. All of them had a positive attitude towards their teachers. However, the Libyan participants talked explicitly about the association between their choice of CSs and their relationship with teachers. Selma indicated that she had enjoyed the instruction and said *‘Yes, some teachers do not explain their lessons very well, but regarding the training programme which we had it was wonderful and the teacher was very good. He used very good methods to explain his lessons [use of CSs] and he made the lesson very clear to us’*. Another student observed that the training programme had enhanced his knowledge, saying, *‘Since the start of studying here in this college I have no problem with the teachers. But the training programme helped me to get much information’*. Abdurrahman acknowledged that he liked the cooperating teacher and commented *‘‘Yes, ‘Mr. Edgard’ for example was very good and he taught us some CSs and how to use them probably such as fillers and topic avoidance and that is precisely what the subject is about’*.

As seen from their comments, learners highlighted the significance of not only instruction, but also the impact of a positive teacher-learner relationship on their use of these strategies. This was because the instruction provided them with the opportunity to put what they had learned into practice (cf. Huang 2010). There is also indication that the instruction of CSs impacted positively on the learners’ engagement and helped the teacher to develop useful materials. For example, Fatima said *‘Yes, I might be somehow bias because I really like both the training programme and the teacher. Everything was fine, we*

learned to talk in different situations without being afraid of making mistakes ah and 'Mr. Edgard'[the cooperative teacher] presented his lessons in an interesting way'. In addition, Salem said 'Yes, what I like about this programme is the discussion at the end of every lesson and the exchange of information with the other students and the teacher. Mr. Edgard listens to us and that is really good'. It can be said that the training programme strengthened the learners' TL knowledge and the learner-teacher relationship. Their exchange in the planned discussion at the end of each lesson possibly fostered this. Interestingly, the cooperating teacher acknowledged that he now usually uses CSs in his regular classes. This can be considered as evidence that the teaching of CSs was considered beneficial and helpful by the teacher approaching the topics used in the training programme. It appears that the instruction in the teaching of CSs helped the teacher to encourage his students to take risks and engage in the TL.

The international interviewees were very conscious of the social aspects of teacher-learner interaction, when they used CSs to show respect and politeness. One student, Shomrky, for instance, said, *'Yes, absolutely with my supervisors I treat them with respect, I show respect always listen to what they say and ah whatever instructions they give me'*. Another student, Soheab also stated *'... we have to show respect to elderly people or people who have knowledge'*. Mohammed additionally said *'As far as I am concerned the CSs I use to interact with my lecturers and friends depend on different factors... I talk to them politely, with respect generally to their position'*. Finally, a third student, Maroaf replied, *'I noticed that with my teachers I speak in a soft voice always in a good manner'*. Thus, these responses suggest that training language learners in the use of CSs affected their choices of these strategies, and increased their awareness of the importance of using such strategies in conversation. It also made

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the classes more enjoyable and improved the feedback on the courses and teacher.

Conclusion

With respect to the first research question: ‘What are the learners’ attitudes to being taught CSs?’, participants evidently supported the teaching of CSs. The data analysis of the interviews indicated that 100% of the learners had a positive attitude to the training programme, and they reported that the instruction was instrumental in increasing their awareness of CSs and employment of these strategies in speaking the target language.

In relation to their attitude towards their own use of CSs and the tasks in which they participated, 100% of the interviewees indicated that they were happy in relation to learning CSs. In addition, they acknowledged that these tasks were very useful for them in different ways, and that they had become more confident English speakers. Some even said that they felt lucky to have had this opportunity, and most anticipated that they would use these strategies in their daily life. When learners were asked if the training programme had helped them to be good English speakers and improve their English proficiency, 100% believed that their use of CSs had strengthened their speaking ability, given them new speaking techniques, made them more self-reliant learners, and increased their knowledge of the target language.

As for the second research question: ‘What are the factors that affect the use of CSs?’, which dealt with exploring the extent of the effect of some factors i.e., gender, personality, culture and student teacher’s relationship on learners’ strategy use, various responses were obtained and analysed. To date, previous researchers (Dörnyei, 1995; Rababa’h 2005; Nakatani, 2005 and 2010) did not focus on these factors. The present study

sought to examine the external factors which influenced CS usage. The opinions of Libyan and international students were used to examine the possible influences of gender, personality, age, culture, and the student-teacher relationship, on the usage of CSs. The results revealed mixed opinions, which reflected individual perspectives and experiences. 75% believed that the personality of the learner had an important role. This could be because engagement in successful conversations is associated with sociability and a willingness to communicate with other interlocutors, regardless of gender. Wannaruk (2003) also suggested that the choice of CSs were affected by factors such as personality.

Interviewed students were uncertain about the relationship between gender and the choice of CSs. They made no significant association between gender differences and the choices of CSs. The influence of gender is likely to be affected by cultural context. Since all the participants in this study were Muslim, the effects of different cultures were not evident in responses. A more culturally heterogeneous study might have provided more concrete results. In a Chinese context, Lai (2010) found that no direct effect of gender on the choice of CSs.

In an Iranian context, Kaivanpanah et al. (2011) found that female students used more of what they called social strategies ('Circumlocution', 'Asking for Clarification', 'Omission', 'Comprehension Check' and 'Use of Fillers'), than male students. They speculated that 'since these strategies were social in nature, this might be a reflection of the fact that females generally 'display greater social orientation than males'. Further multicultural research is needed to evaluate the impact of gender on CS usage.

55% of the participants in the current study participants believed that culture (here broadly defined as traditions, political culture and classroom culture), influenced their choice of CSs.

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No significant differences were found in the responses of Libyan and international learners. Most believed there was a relationship between these variables and the use of CSs.

Libyan and international students provided different opinions on the possible influence of age. Libyans said there was no relationship between the choice of CSs and the age of the learner, whereas international students believed that there was a connection between them. Overall, the views of the Libyan students were interpreted to be more significant to this issue as they had been taught to use CSs. Furthermore, all participants had a positive attitude towards their teacher and believed that this fostered language learning. The instruction in using CSs had promoted learners' motivation, which in turn had increased their effective engagement and target language interaction. In this, Rubin (1975) (as cited in Huang 2010: 98), states that "good language learning is said to depend on at least three variables: aptitude, motivation and opportunity. On the whole, the data showed that the Libyan learners were aware of using CSs and they were more precise in their answers to the questions than the international students, particularly in exemplifying the types of CSs they employed. This is likely to be an impact of training programme.

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Appendix A**Interview Questions**

- 1: *How do you feel about the teaching of CSs?*
- 2: *What is your perception of your own use of CSs?*
- 3: *How do you feel about the communicative tasks which you participated in during the training programme?*
- 4: *Do you think that the use of CSs helps you to be a good English speaker?*
- 5: *Which strategy you prefer to use? Way?*
- 6: *Do men and women use different CSs because of their gender?*
- 7: *Does the personality of the learner have any effect on his/her choices of CSs?*
- 8: *Do you think that age has any kind of effect on the choice of CSs?*
- 9: *Does culture have any effect on learner's choice of CSs?*
- 10: *Do you think that your relationship with your teacher has some effect on your choice of CSs?*

Appendix B**Table 2**

Nakatani's (2006) speaking and listening strategies

speaking	Listening
Social affective strategies	Negotiation for meaning
Fluency-oriented strategies	while listening strategies
Negotiation for meaning while speaking strategies	Fluency-maintaining strategies
Accuracy-oriented strategies	Scanning strategies,
Message reduction and alteration strategies	getting the gist strategies
Nonverbal strategies while speaking	Getting the gist
Message abandonment strategies	Nonverbal strategies while listening

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Attempt to think in English strategies	Less active listener strategies Word-oriented strategies.
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