Exploring the Use of Oral Communication Strategies by (Non)Fluent L2 Speakers

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This study explored, first, the use of oral communication strategies (OCSs) by fluent and nonfluent Iranian L2 speakers and, second, the association between gender and the use of different types of OCSs. To this end, 50 undergraduate EFL students (20 males and 30 females) at Shahrekord University (Iran) were randomly selected as the participants, and their recorded speech samples were rated by two raters. Furthermore, the OCS inventory used which included eight categories of strategies for coping while speaking and seven categories of strategies for coping while listening. The MANOVA results of the data analysis revealed that fluent L2 speakers employed more OCSs than their nonfluent counterparts. Specifically, the fluent speakers more frequently used social-affective, fluency-oriented, and meaning-negotiation strategies for coping with speaking problems and employed scanning and getting-the-gist strategies for coping with listening problems. However, nonfluent participants significantly utilized more nonverbal and word-oriented strategies for coping with listening difficulties. The findings suggest that nonfluent L2 speakers should be familiarized and made aware of the importance of effective OCSs.

Key words: L2 fluency, oral communication strategies while speaking, oral communication strategies while listening

INTRODUCTION

Speaking a language fluently is one of the fundamental goals of most L2 learners, and it often amounts to knowing that language (Burns & Seidlhofer, 2002; Lazaraton, 2001; Nunan, 2003). Fluency is an asset to any L2 learner and is defined as "an ability in the second language to produce or comprehend utterances smoothly, rapidly, and accurately" (Segalowitz, 2003, p. 384). Fluency facilitates communication, and it can be considered as an invaluable goal in itself. By improving fluency, L2 learners can strengthen their motivation to use language, hence profiting from L2 contact (Segalowitz, 2003). However, fluency is such a complicated construct that there has been no agreement over its definition and measurement (Chambers, 1997; Lennon, 1990, 2000). This study approaches fluency as an automatic procedural ability and a temporal phenomenon (Schmidt, 1992).

An L2 learner's development of fluency, besides the learner's level of L2 knowledge and practice, depends upon his or her ability to use a variety of CSs that are assumed to compensate for unexpected communication impasses (Nakatani, 2006). According to Færch and Kasper (1983), CSs are potentially conscious plans which are used to solve problems encountered in achieving a particular goal. In fact, CSs are beneficial means skilled L2 learners employ to attain a degree of communicative effectiveness beyond their current linguistic knowledge (Thornbury, 2005). A close scrutiny of the cognitive and socio-affective CSs that differentially fluent speakers use to circumvent communication breakdowns and keep the communication channel open helps L2 practitioners to better understand the psycholinguistic processes and interactive mechanisms associated with L2 fluency and utilize this important knowledge in their future instruction or assessment of the notion or their conception of effective oral communication.

Because fluency is related to communicative effectiveness, it has received considerable attention in L2 research (Bygate, 2009). The ability of less proficient L2 learners to maintain the conversation flow is a worthwhile capacity because they have the chance to receive more language input by keeping a conversation going and thus to improve their L2 proficiency (Faucette, 2001; Larsen-Freeman & Long,

1991). Willems (1987) states that familiarizing weaker L2 learners with CSs helps them to "develop a feeling of being able to do something with the language" (p. 352). Interestingly, Vann and Abraham (1990) found that the difference between successful and less successful L2 learners (as measured by the relative speed with which they moved through an intensive English program) was their ability to use strategies in learning situations.

The issue of strategy use and its relation to L2 fluency and communicative effectiveness thus deserves further in-depth investigations. Recent years have witnessed L2 researchers' growing interest in different aspects of fluency, for instance, the acquisition of fluency in different learning contexts (Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004), measures and perceptions of oral fluency among foreign L2 learners (Kormos & Dénes, 2004), development of fluency and accent through voluntary contact among L2 learners (Derwing, Thomson, & Munro, 2006), emergence of fluency in oral and written production (Larsen-Freeman, 2006), and the relevance of risk-taking to fluency and accuracy among Iranian L2 learners (Ghoorchaei & Kassaian, 2009). Nonetheless, fluency has been under-explored in connection with L2 speakers' use of OCSs. This study, encouraged by the paucity of research into the strategy facets of fluency, attempted to probe the use of OCSs by fluent and nonfluent L2 speakers in Iran.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fluency is a problematic notion in assessing speaking, and this is partially due to the fact that the word *fluency* has both a general and a technical meaning used in applied linguistics to specify a learner's speech (Luoma, 2004). Lennon (1990, 2000) also mentions that fluency is usually used in two senses in L2 context: In the broad sense, it equals global speaking proficiency which means that the fluent speaker displays a high mastery of L2. In its narrower sense, however, fluency is regarded as one component of oral proficiency, often found in procedures for grading oral examinations (Lennon, 1990, 2000). This narrower sense includes pausing, hesitations, and speech rates (Luoma, 2004). Nevertheless, Lennon (1990)

argues that the two senses of fluency are related and that the narrow sense can be extended to contain other components of oral proficiency. Therefore, to understand what a speaker or a writer means by fluency, the term should be defined explicitly (Fulcher, 1996). Pawley and Syder (1983) define native-like fluency as "the native speaker's ability to produce fluent stretches of discourse," (p. 191) and this definition, according to Kormos and Dénes (2004), is related to the narrow sense. On the other hand, Sajavaara (1987, p. 62) defines fluency as "the communicative acceptability of the speech act, or 'communicative fit'" which is related to the broad sense. Temporal aspects of speech such as speaking rate, mean length of pauses, and frequency of dysfluency markers like repetitions, self-corrections, and filled pauses constitute a principal part of fluency (Chamber, 1997; Kormos & Dénes, 2004; Lennon, 1990).

Having criticized the summary descriptions of fluency in existing rating scales, Fulcher (1996) sought to find a more concrete description of it and suggested a data-based approach to the development of rating scale. He examined some speech samples, summarized rater interpretations of them, and outlined a new scale of fluency. Although his descriptions for each rating scale are long, more than 200 words for each level, Fulcher (1996) maintains that the descriptions are instructive and informative for raters. Using this data-based scale, the raters tend to rate a new set of performances consistently. Thus, Fulcher's (1996) scale was adapted for the purpose of this study.

Bialystok (1990) and Dörnyei (1995) believe that L2 learners can improve fluency and communicative proficiency by developing CSs that enable them to compensate for their L2 deficiency. The bulk of research on learning strategies has also demonstrated that learning strategies are valuable assets to ultimate language performance (Ellis, 1997; Oxford, 1990, 1994; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Oxford, Park-Oh, Ito, & Sumrall, 1993; Rubin, 1975; Sewell, 2003; Simsek & Balbalu, 2010).

Learning strategies are behaviors and thoughts used by learners to improve the learning process and to influence the decoding process (Weinstein & Mayer, 1983). L2 learners can also greatly enhance their communicative ability and become independent learners of the L2 by evolving learning strategies (Labarca & Khanji,

1986). This is because of the fact that CSs can help L2 speakers to handle communication breakdowns and thereby communicate more successfully (Dörnyei, 1995; Dörnyei & Scott, 1997).

The term *strategies of communication* was first appeared in Selinker's (1972) paper entitled "Interlanguage" to expound certain classes of errors made by L2 learners (Corder, 1983). The most working definition of a CS is provided by Corder (1983, p. 103): "a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his meaning when faced with some difficulty." In addition, Dörnyei (1995) classifies CSs broadly into two types: avoidance strategies and compensation strategies. First, avoidance strategies can be subdivided into message abandonment and topic avoidance. Using this type of strategy, L2 learners avoid conveying their messages, and these strategies affect negotiation negatively (Nakatani, 2006). Second, compensatory strategies can be subdivided into 10 categories: circumlocution, approximation, use of all-purpose words, word coinage, prefabricated patterns, nonlinguistic signals, literal translation, foreignizing, code-switching, appeal for help, and stalling and time-consuming strategies (Dörnyei, 1995). L2 learners employ this type of strategy to compensate for missing knowledge and to resort to an alternative plan to convey their message (Nakatani, 2006).

As to the classification of CSs, the three types of psycholinguistic, cross-cultural, and interactional perspectives have prevailed in the L2 communication strategy literature. The psycholinguistic view has shown interest in the problem-solving mechanisms that L2 learners use to compensate for their deficient lexical knowledge (Dörnyei & Kormos, 1998). The cross-cultural perspective, however, has acknowledged the influence of L1 on L2, and L1-based strategies such as language switching, foreignizing, and translation have formed a major part of the several taxonomies of CSs (e.g., Bialystok, 1990; Tarone, 1981). This line of inquiry into the use of CSs has found that less-proficient L2 learners often tend to resort to L1-based strategies (Bialystok 1983; Haastrup & Phillipson 1983; Paribakht 1985). On the other hand, the interactional perspective, besides considering CSs as problem-solving devices to bridge the communication gaps, views CSs as pragmatic discourse functions that emphasize part of the intended message (Dörnyei & Scott, 1995a, 1995b; Tarone, 1980). Meanwhile, unlike earlier

studies which tried to identify, define, and classify CSs, later studies were more empirical in nature and have focused on the relationship between CSs and pedagogical issues (Kasper & Kellerman, 1997; Maleki, 2007).

By developing an Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI), Nakatani (2006) used the term oral communication strategy (OCS) instead of communication strategy (CS) "in order to avoid terms that might exacerbate the confusion regarding taxonomies, the term *oral communication strategy* (OCS) is used instead of *communication strategy*" (p. 152). The OCSI has 58 items and is divided into two parts. The first eight categories are related to *strategies for coping with speaking problems,* and the second seven categories are related to *strategies for coping with listening problems*. The following is a brief description of these strategies (Nakatani, 2006, pp. 155-157):

I. Strategies for Coping with Speaking Problems
- Social-affective strategies involve learners' affective factors in social contexts.
- Fluency-oriented strategies are related to fluency of communication.
- Negotiation for meaning while speaking strategies are relevant to the participants' attempts to negotiate with their interlocutors.
- Accuracy-oriented strategies are concerned with a desire to speak English accurately.
- Message reduction and alteration strategies involve avoiding a communication breakdown by reducing an original message, simplifying utterances, or using similar expressions that can be confidently used.
- Nonverbal strategies while speaking require using eye contact, gestures, or facial expressions to give hints and to help the listener guess the intended meaning.
- Message abandonment strategies are associated with message abandonment by learners in communication.
- Attempt to think in English strategies involve thinking as much as possible in the foreign language during actual communication. The importance of these strategies is that oral communication usually requires a quick response to interlocutors.

II. Strategies for Coping with Listening Problems
- Meaning-negotiation strategies while listening are clearly characterized by negotiating behavior while listening.
- Fluency-maintaining strategies involve paying attention to the fluency of conversational flow.
- Scanning strategies include focusing on specific points of speech, such as subject and verb, the interrogative, and the first part of the speaker's utterance, in which important information is usually contained.
- Getting-the-gist strategies require paying attention to general information contained in speech rather than to specific utterances and considering the context and the speaker's previous sentences to guess overall meaning.
- Nonverbal strategies while listening are related to making use of nonverbal information, such as speaker's eye contact, facial expression, and gestures.
- Less active listener strategies represent negative attitudes towards using active listening strategies for interaction. Students who utilize this strategy translate the message into their native language little by little and depend heavily on familiar words.
- Word-oriented strategies reflect a learner's tendency to capture the meaning of speech by paying attention to individual words.

Although a multitude of research has been done on CSs (e.g., Huang & Van Naerssen, 1987; Maleki, 2007; Nakatani, 2005), there is still an oblique picture of the use of CSs among different L2 learners and the relevant field has witnessed conflicting findings. Huang and Van Naerssen (1987) found that successful L2 learners employ more CSs than less successful ones. In contrast, some studies found that less proficient students use more CSs (Labarca & Khanji, 1986; Liskin-Gasparro, 1996; Poulisse & Schils, 1989) and also rely on reduction strategies (Ellis, 1985). Low proficiency L2 learners were found to fail to restructure messages as they struggle to find words to express their intended messages (Ting & Lau, 2008). L2 learners were also found to use negotiation or interaction strategies in the form of explicit clarification requests and comprehension checks (Ting & Lau, 2008). Moreover, Nakatani's (2010) study indicated that L2 learners' use of *response for*

maintenance and *signals for negotiation* strategies is significantly related to their oral performance. The results further revealed that high proficiency L2 learners are aware of their using strategies to fill communication gaps and meaning-negotiation to enhance mutual understanding.

Chen (2009) investigated the OCSs used by high and low speaking proficiency Taiwanese L2 learners. He found that whereas fluent speakers commonly used social-affective, fluency-oriented, negotiation for meaning while speaking, and accuracy-oriented strategies, less fluent speakers used message reduction and alteration, and message abandonment strategies.

Concerning the effect of strategy instruction, the related literature revealed contradictory results. Some researchers discovered that strategy instruction yielded a significant improvement in the quality and quantity of strategy use (Dörnyei, 1995; Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991; Maleki, 2007; Nakatani, 2005; Tarone, 1984); however, Labarca and Khanji (1986) reported that L2 learners receiving strategy instruction use fewer CSs. Moreover, Bialystok (1990) and Kellerman (1991) argue that there is no link between communication strategies and pedagogical issues.

Generally speaking, a review of the studies on L2 learners' strategy use reveals that despite the considerable number of research attempts, the field can still be motivating enough for further research. Researchers have reported conflicting results regarding both the effect of strategy instruction (see e.g., Kellerman, 1991; Labarca & Khanji, 1986; Nakatani, 2005) and the amount of strategy use by low and high proficiency L2 learners (see e.g., Chen, 2009; Huang & van Naerssen, 1987; Liskin-Gasparro, 1996). Therefore, it can be illuminating to further research in this very field. As such, the aim of this study was to determine the OCSs that fluent and nonfluent Iranian L2 speakers use.

The Study

Fluent L2 speakers use effective oral communication strategies (Bygate, 2009); therefore, fluency and communicative effectiveness might be explored through discovering fluent L2 speakers' use of OCSs. This study intended to explore the use of OCSs by Iranian fluent and nonfluent L2 speakers. It was also important to examine whether there is any association between the learners' gender and their use of different types of OCSs. In plain terms, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What types of oral communication strategies do Iranian fluent and nonfluent EFL speakers and listeners employ most frequently?
2. What types of oral communication strategies do Iranian male and female EFL speakers and listeners employ most frequently?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants of this study were 50 junior and senior Iranian EFL undergraduates at Shahrekord University majoring in English Translation. They were 20 males and 30 females, aged 20-25, who were randomly selected as participants. Based on Fulcher's (1996) data-based fluency scale and their oral outputs, they were divided into fluent and nonfluent L2 speakers: 12 males and 10 females as fluent speakers, and 8 males and 20 females as nonfluent speakers.

Instrumentation

Speech samples were collected on two tasks using a digital audio recorder: a question and a picture description task, which were respectively two-three minutes and four-five minutes long on average. The picture description task consisted of six pictures in a logical order adopted from Heaton (1966). The advantage of using

picture description tasks, according to Segalowitz (2010), is that they "allow the researcher to constrain what the speakers will talk about while not putting specific words or sentence constructions into their mouths, and without making demands on memory for story events encountered before" (p. 43). The OCSI (Nakatani, 2006) was also employed to determine the use of oral strategies by the participants. The OCSI, consisting of 58 items, is divided into two parts: 8 categories of *strategies for coping with speaking problems* and 7 categories of *strategies for coping with listening problems*. The items are assessed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'never or almost never true of me' (1) to 'always or almost always true of me' (5). Utilizing Cronbach's alpha, the reliability estimate of the OCSI was calculated to be $r = .86$ for the first part and $r = .85$ for the second part.

Procedure

At first, the participants were asked to answer the following question in two or three minutes: "What will you do to prepare yourself for presenting a lecture?" Because the participants have often been required to give lectures for their courses, they were expected to be able to answer this question. Then, they described a sequence of six pictures in four-five minutes. The oral recordings and their transcriptions were analyzed and rated by two raters using a scale adapted from Fulcher (1996). Several standardization meetings were held to ensure inter-rater reliability. To ascertain the raters' consistency in rating the recordings, Kappa Measure of Agreement was run. As it is evident from Table 1, the Kappa Measure of Agreement value was 0.705 ($p < 0.05$), which according to Peat (2001), represents a good agreement and hence a good estimate of inter-rater consistency.

TABLE 1
Kappa Measure of Rater's Consistency in Scoring

	Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Measure of Agreement Kappa	.705	.083	6.868	.000
Number of Valid Cases	50			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Then, the OCSI was administered to the participants in order to determine their use of OCSs. It is worth emphasizing at this point that the fluent and nonfluent L2 speakers' use of both verbal and nonverbal OCSs was probed through collecting only the self-reported data. It will however be noted as one of the limitations (at the end of the paper) that the use of multiple data-collection sources such as retrospective interviews and diaries could have enriched the interpretations of the findings, what is strongly suggested for future related research. Finally, a series of MANOVAs were run to analyze the collected data.

RESULTS

A one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance was performed to investigate the oral communication strategy use of the fluent and nonfluent L2 speakers while speaking. Eight dependent variables were involved in the analysis: social-affective, fluency-oriented, meaning-negotiation, accuracy-oriented, message reduction and alteration, nonverbal, message-abandonment, and attempt to think in English strategies while speaking. The independent variable was fluency. Preliminary assumptions of normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, and multicollinearity were checked, and no serious violation was evidenced. The results of the multivariate tests of significance for strategies for coping with speaking problems showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the fluent and nonfluent L2 speakers on the combined dependent variables, $F(8, 41) = 198.76$, $p < 0.0005$; Wilks' Lambda = .025; partial eta squared = .97. The results of the tests of between-subjects effects in Table 2 clearly demonstrate where the differences lie.

TABLE 2
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Speaking Strategies of the (Non)Fluent Learners

Source	Dependent Variables	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Fluency	Social-affective	3005.938	1	3005.938	907.212	.000	.950
	Fluency-oriented	3150.081	1	3150.081	1076.806	.000	.957
	Meaning-negotiation	1290.273	1	1290.273	1121.027	.000	.959
	Accuracy-oriented	.178	1	.178	.034	.854	.001
	Message-reduction	29.302	1	29.302	5.186	.027	.098
	Nonverbal	11.766	1	11.766	6.483	.014	.119
	Message-abandonment	1.933	1	1.933	.153	.697	.003
	Attempt to think in English	5.782	1	5.782	3.201	.080	.063

As Table 2 displays, the difference in the use of social-affective strategy, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .006, reached a statistical significance, $F(1, 48)$ = 907.21, $p < 0.0005$, partial eta squared = .95. An inspection of the mean scores indicated that the fluent L2 speakers (M = 28.72, SD = .38) employed more social-affective strategies than the nonfluent ones (M = 13.1, SD = .34). The difference between the fluent (M = 28.45, SD = .36) and nonfluent (M = 12.46, SD = .32) L2 speakers' use of fluency-oriented strategy was also statistically significant, $F(1, 48)$ = 1076, $p < 0.0005$. In addition, the difference between the fluent (M = 19.09, SD = .22) and nonfluent (M = 8.85, SD = .2) L2 speakers' use of meaning-negotiation strategy was statistically significant, $F(1, 48)$ = 1121, $p < 0.0005$.

A one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance was also performed to investigate the oral communication strategy use of the fluent and nonfluent L2 speakers while listening. Seven categories of listening strategies (as dependent variables) were of interest with the independent variable of fluency: meaning-negotiation, fluency-maintaining, scanning, getting-the-gist, nonverbal, less active listener, and word-oriented strategies while listening. Preliminary analyses indicated no serious violation of the necessary assumptions for running MANOVA.

The results of multivariate tests of significance for strategies for coping with listening problems showed that there was a statistically significance difference between the fluent and nonfluent L2 speakers on the combined dependent variables, $F(7, 42) = 90.84$, $p < 0.0005$; Wilks' Lambda = .062; partial eta squared = .93. Table 3 shows the complementary results of the tests of between-subjects effects.

TABLE 3
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Listening Strategies of the (Non)Fluent Learners

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Fluency	Meaning-negotiation	7.732	1	7.732	1.428	.238	.029
	Fluency-maintaining	.583	1	.583	.237	.629	.005
	Scanning	539.938	1	539.938	217.713	.000	.819
	Getting-the-gist	388.239	1	388.239	133.262	.000	.735
	Nonverbal	240.915	1	240.915	214.922	.000	.817
	Less-active-listener	3.536	1	3.536	2.149	.149	.043
	Word-oriented	681.647	1	681.647	259.401	.000	.844

The results reveal that the difference in the use of scanning strategy (using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .007) was statistically significant, $F(1, 48) = 217.71$, $p < 0.0005$, partial eta squared = .819. Specifically, the fluent L2 speakers ($M = 18.72$, $SD = .33$) employed more scanning strategies than the nonfluent participants ($M = 12.1$, $SD = .29$). The fluent ($M = 18.86$, $SD = .36$) and nonfluent ($M = 13.25$, $SD = .32$) L2 speakers also employed getting-the-gist strategy differently, $F(1, 48) = 133.26$, $p < 0.0005$, partial eta squared = .735. Moreover, the difference in the use of nonverbal strategy, was statistically significant, $F(1, 48) = 214.92$, $p < 0.0005$, partial eta squared = .817. Clearly put, the nonfluent L2 speakers ($M = 8.78$, $SD = .2$) reported more frequent use of nonverbal strategy than the fluent ones ($M = 4.36$, $SD = .22$). The difference between the fluent ($M = 10.45$, $SD = .34$) and nonfluent ($M = 17.89$, $SD = .3$) L2 speakers' use of word-oriented

strategy also reached a statistical significance, $F(1, 48) = 259.4$, $p < 0.0005$, partial eta squared = .844.

As noted earlier, this study also intended to examine if the independent variable of gender had any statistically significant role to play in the participants' use of OCSs while speaking. First, another MANOVA was run after the preliminary inspections of the assumptions. The multivariate tests of significance for strategies for coping with speaking problems revealed a statistically significant difference between the male and female L2 speakers on the combined dependent variables, $F(8, 41) = 21.32$, $p < 0.0005$; Wilks' Lambda = .194; partial eta squared = .8. The results of the tests of between-subjects effects are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Speaking Strategies of the Male and Female Participants

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
gender	Social-affective	536.003	1	536.003	16.962	.000	.261
	Fluency-oriented	1610.083	1	1610.083	100.576	.000	.677
	Meaning-negotiation	525.363	1	525.363	79.221	.000	.623
	Accuracy-oriented	8.333	1	8.333	1.577	.215	.032
	Message-reduction	3.413	1	3.413	.717	.401	.015
	Nonverbal	2.430	1	2.430	1.487	.229	.030
	Message-abandonment	20.803	1	20.803	1.760	.191	.035
	Attempt to think in English	5.603	1	5.603	3.279	.076	.064

The results in Table 4 demonstrate that the differences in the male and female speakers' use of social-affective strategies, $F(1, 48) = 16.96$, $p < 0.0005$, partial eta squared = .26; fluency-oriented, $F(1, 48) = 100$, $p < 0.0005$, partial eta squared = .67; and meaning-negotiation strategies, $F(1, 48) = 79.22$, $p < 0.0005$, partial eta squared = .62 were statistically significant (using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .006). A closer look at the mean scores revealed that the females ($M = 24.73$, *SD*

= 1.02) used social-affective strategies more frequently than the males (*M* = 18.05, *SD* = 1.2). In contrast, the male speakers employed statistically more fluency-oriented (*M* = 27.05, *SD* = .89; females, *M* = 15.46, *SD* = .73) as well as meaning-negotiation strategies (*M* = 19.05, *SD* = .57; females, *M* = 12.43, *SD* = .47).

Second, the MANOVA results for the male and female participants' use of OCSs while listening (after ensuring the preliminary assumptions) showed statistically significant differences between the two groups on the combined dependent variables, *F* (7, 42) = 22.39, *p* < 0.0005; Wilk's Lambda = .211; partial eta squared = .78. The complementary results of the tests of between-subjects effects in Table 5 exhibit the listening-strategy differences of the male and female L2 learners.

TABLE 5
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Listening Strategies of the Male and Female Participants

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
gender	Meaning-negotiation	.853	1	.853	.171	.681	.004
	Fluency-maintaining	7.363	1	7.363	2.600	.113	.051
	Scanning	392.163	1	392.163	95.496	.000	.665
	Getting-the-gist	246.613	1	246.613	76.338	.000	.614
	Nonverbal	156.963	1	156.963	85.213	.000	.640
	Less-active-listener	.563	1	.563	.321	.574	.007
	Word-oriented	203.363	1	203.363	37.672	.000	.440

As seen in Table 5, the differences in the use of scanning, *F* (1, 48) = 95.49, *p* < 0.0005, partial eta squared = .66; getting-the-gist, *F* (1, 48) = 76.33, *p* < 0.0005, partial eta squared = .61; nonverbal, *F* (1, 48) = 85.21, *p* < 0.0005, partial eta squared = .64; and word-oriented strategies, *F* (1, 48) = 37.67, *p* < 0.0005, partial eta squared = .44, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .007, reached a statistical significance. An inspection of the group mean scores indicated that the

males more generally preferred to use the scanning ($M = 18.55$, $SD = .45$; females, $M = 12.83$, $SD = .37$) and getting-the-gist strategies ($M = 18.8$, $SD = .4$; females, $M = 14.26$, $SD = .32$). On the other hand, the female participants more frequently employed the nonverbal ($M = 8.26$, $SD = .24$; males, $M = 4.65$, $SD = .3$) and word-oriented strategies ($M = 15.16$, $SD = .42$; males, $M = 11.05$, $SD = .52$).

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrated that the fluent L2 speakers made use of more OCSs than the nonfluent ones. Successful L2 learners employ more CSs than less successful ones (Green & Oxford, 1995; Huang & Van Naerssen, 1987; Li, 2010). L2 learners need to cope with a wide range of difficulties in L2 communication, and their linguistic knowledge is not perfect; thus, they need to handle more processing problems (Dörnyei, 1995; Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). Because fluent L2 speakers do not rely only on their linguistic repertoire, they tend to employ a greater variety of strategies to compensate for their communication impasses. Therefore, there is a direct association between strategic competence and fluency in speaking in that fluency is affected by other factors than linguistic knowledge. When encounter with hindrances in speech production, fluent L2 speakers make the best use of their linguistic reservoir through benefiting from their strategic competence (Chambers, 1997). This result runs counter to the findings of Labarca and Khanji (1986), Poulisse and Schils (1989), Liskin-Gasparro, (1996), and Wannaruk (2003) who reported that less proficient students use more CSs.

The results related to the use of strategies for coping with speaking problems indicated that there was a significant difference in the mean scores of the fluent and nonfluent L2 speakers' use of social-affective strategies. In other words, the fluent participants utilized social-affective strategies more frequently. That is, they paid more attention to controlling their feelings to reduce anxiety and thus tried to enjoy their communication. Successful language learners are often aware of controlling their emotions and attitudes towards L2 learning and tend to take risks and make mistakes (Oxford, 1990). Therefore, successful L2 learning relies on the emotional

reaction of the learner (Horwitz, 1995). Similarly, Chen (2009) reported the same result in his study of Taiwanese L2 learners divided into low and high speaking proficiency participants. Nakatani (2006) also found that Japanese fluent L2 speakers made more use of social-affective strategies.

Secondly, the fluent L2 speakers were found to use fluency-oriented strategies more frequently than the nonfluent participants. That is, fluent L2 speakers are aware of the rhythm, intonation, pronunciation, and clarity of their speech to improve the listener's comprehension (Nakatani, 2006). Specifically, pronunciation is a principal component of communicative competence that can influence not only the desire to use language but also the quantity and quality of the input and output (Derwing & Munro, 2006). In addition, fluent L2 speakers take into account the speaking context and try not to send untimely messages to their interlocutor (Nakatani, 2006). This result is in line with Chen's (2009) and Nakatani's (2006) finding. However, Li (2010) observed that low proficiency English proficiency students in Taiwan used fluency-oriented strategies more frequently.

Thirdly, along with Chen (2009) and Nakatani (2006), this study revealed that meaning-negotiation strategies were utilized more frequently by the fluent participants. In fact, fluent L2 speakers try to avoid communication impasses and thus resort to strategies for negotiation. They also check the listener's understanding and give examples to clarify their meaning (Nakatani, 2006). This may be due to the fact that fluent L2 speakers care about the accomplishment of communication and thus trust their linguistic repertoire to avoid any breakdown. Related research also demonstrated that negotiation of meaning has a key role in the process of L2 acquisition and that learners can improve L2 acquisition through negotiation of meaning with an interlocutor (Ellis, 1999; Foster, 1998; Gass, 1998; Long, 1983, 1996; Nakahama, Tyler, & van Lier, 2001; Nakatani, 2005; Pica, 1996; Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, & Linell, 1996). However, the nonfluent participants tended to abandon message when facing difficulty in conveying their massage.

As to the participants' use of strategies for coping with listening problems, there was a significant difference between the fluent and nonfluent participants' employment of scanning strategies. Specifically, the fluent listeners utilized more scanning strategies. To get the intended meaning of the speaker, these L2 listeners

focus on specific parts, such as subject and verb, the interrogative, and the first part of the speaker's utterance (Nakatani, 2006). Because it is impossible for L2 learners to comprehend every part of the message, this can be considered as an invaluable skill.

Getting-the-gist strategies were more employed by the fluent participants. By employing this type of strategy, fluent L2 listeners get the general information, and they also consider the context and the speaker's previous sentences to guess overall meaning. That is, fluent listeners rely on top-down processing and what they already know to comprehend what they hear. Because following every detail is demanding for L2 listeners, this strategy can also be considered as a significant one because it helps listeners to activate their schemata of background knowledge (Lynch & Mendelsohn, 2002). Anderson and Lynch (1988) called top-down processing as "listener as active model-builder" (p. 11). Irgin (2011) also reported that advanced level Turkish students used getting-the-gist strategies more frequently than the intermediate students.

The findings also indicated that the nonfluent participants made use of nonverbal strategies more frequently. To enhance comprehension, L2 listeners pay attention to nonverbal information, such as speaker's eye contact, facial expression, and gestures. Researchers primarily considered CSs as verbal or nonverbal means that L2 speakers employ to compensate their deficient L2 knowledge (Canale & Swain, 1980; Færch & Kasper, 1983; Tarone, 1977).

The finding that nonfluent participants utilized word-oriented strategies more frequently can be justified by their inclination towards paying attention to every word and interrogative sentences (Irgin, 2011; Nakatani, 2006). Because it is impossible for L2 learners to capture the meaning of every word, it seems that this strategy weakens their overall understanding. As Nation and Meara (2002) pointed out, developing fluency requires learning to make the best use of vocabulary repertoire already at hand. Therefore, it would be beneficial for nonfluent L2 learners to develop getting-the-gist and scanning strategies to optimize their understanding and get the meaning of the words from the context.

The results concerning the role of gender in the participants' use of OCSs while speaking revealed that the females utilized more social-affective strategies, the male

L2 speakers used more fluency-oriented and meaning-negotiation strategies. This suggests that the female speakers were more concerned about controlling their feelings in L2 communication and were inclined to convey their messages at the cost of making mistakes. On the contrary, the male speakers were more sensitive to the rhythm, intonation, pronunciation, and comprehensibility of their speech to clearly verbalize their intended meanings. In addition, the male participants showed more facility at using meaning-negotiation strategies to keep the communication channel open and made the best use of their linguistic knowledge.

Finally, it was found that the male participants more generally preferred to employ scanning and getting-the-gist strategies while listening; however, the female participants tended to resort more frequently to nonverbal and word-oriented strategies to grasp the intended meanings or feelings of the interlocutors. This finding suggests that the male listeners generally tended to focus on only the important parts of the message and tried to get the general ideas, whereas the female participants preferred to care for every word their partners used that in cases can be considered as a disadvantage to the ongoing communication. On the other hand, the female participants were more aware of the nonverbal body language facets (e.g., eye contacts and facial expressions) of their interlocutors to heighten their understanding of the expressed intentions and emotions (Knapp & Hall, 2010).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the OCSs that the fluent and nonfluent as well as male and female Iranian L2 speakers employ during listening and speaking in English. In summary, the results indicated that the fluent participants employed more strategies than the nonfluent ones during oral communications. Specifically, the fluent L2 speakers utilized social-affective, fluency-oriented, and meaning-negotiation strategies while coping with speaking problems, and scanning and getting-the-gist strategies while coping with listening problems more frequently. However, nonverbal and word-oriented strategies were more frequently employed by the nonfluent participants while coping with listening

problems. As to the role of gender in the OCS use, it was found that the male participants employed fluency-oriented and meaning-negotiation strategies while speaking as well as scanning and getting-the-gist strategies while listening more frequently than the females. However, the females more preferably used social-affective strategies while speaking as well as nonverbal and word-oriented strategies while listening.

The findings of this study might suggest some implications. In this study, the fluent L2 speakers were found to frequently employ OCSs while listening and speaking; that is, they are certainly strategy users, whereas the nonfluent L2 speakers used fewer OCSs. However, it is often the case that L2 learners are not aware of the fact that they need to utilize strategies in their oral communications. It is suggested that L2 teachers explicitly introduce OCSs to less fluent learners and encourage them to consciously use a greater variety of OCSs to promote their ability to cope with difficulties during listening and speaking. In this regard, Færch and Kasper (1983) state that "by learning how to use communication strategies appropriately, learners will be more able to bridge the gap between pedagogic and non-pedagogic communication situations" (p. 56). Related literature has validated the beneficial effects of teaching and enhancing the awareness of OCSs (e.g., Brown, 2000; Dörnyei, 1995; Huang & van Naerssen1987; Maleki, 2007; Nakatani, 2005). Furthermore, L2 learners can raise their awareness of efficient strategies by examining their performance, and thereby improving their target proficiency (Nakatani, 2005).

However, the small sample size suggests that the findings of this study must be treated with caution. The second limitation is posed by the nature of self-report questionnaire. Questionnaires are more based on perception than performance, and this feature may have influenced representativeness of the results. That is, reliability of the data depends to a great extent on the truthfulness of the participants. Therefore, it seems advisable that future research adopt methods triangulation that involves the use of multiple data-collection sources such as retrospective interviews, observation schedules, and diaries besides questionnaires. It is also suggested that video-recorded oral data be obtained to more visibly probe the participants' use of specifically nonverbal strategies such as body language and other transitory facets

of communication in addition to their self-reported data. By incorporating multiple sources of data, researchers can check one perspective against another and hereby boost more confidence in the findings.

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