



Analysis of Latent Factors Influential in the Employment of Communication Strategies Among Japanese EFL Learners

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In order to investigate strategic language reliance during the management of communication problems, a three-month quasi-experimental study was undertaken in the instruction of 12 wide-ranging communication strategies. Observed interactions of 41 Japanese foreign language learners aimed to assess the relationship between communication strategies and their application during authentic interaction. The findings based on quantitative analysis of the interactions reveal increased use of interaction and reduction-based strategies improved learners' communicative language ability as measured by a reduction in non-lexicalised pauses. Additionally, qualitative assessment indicates Japanese learners' selection process in communication strategy reliance is influenced by sociocultural factors prevalent in Japan. Finally, pedagogical application of strategic language instruction is set out to provide EFL Japanese learners with more opportunity to develop productive vocabulary and communication strategy proficiency in order to raise their socio-pragmatic awareness of L2 interactional conventions.

Keywords: communication strategies, strategic language, communicative competence

Introduction

Under The Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2013, henceforth MEXT) since 2017 at least half of all 16-year-olds upon completion of secondary education are expected to have achieved a level of English proficiency equivalent to Grade 3 on the Eiken Test in Practical English Proficiency.¹ Likewise, half of all college students are supposed to have acquired English proficiency equivalent to Grade 2 or Grade Pre-2² by the time they matriculate.³ However, only 42.6% of students in their final year of secondary school actually achieved this target in 2017 (the figure was 40.2% for college leavers). By skill, only 33% of secondary school graduates (12% for college leavers) were proficient enough to pass the speaking section of the respective test (MEXT, 2018). A seemingly continual failure in achieving government language targets

¹ Eiken is an abbreviation of the Japanese Jitsuyo Eigo Gino Kentei (Test in Practical English Proficiency), one of the most widely used English-language testing programmes in Japan. A pass score on Eiken Grade 3 (1,456 points) equates to CEFR A1 level. A score over 1,699 points (out of 2,220) represents CEFR A2 level. A perfect score represents B1 level.

² A pass score on Eiken Grade 2 (1,980 points) equates to CEFR B1 level. A score over 2,299 points (out of 2,600) represents CEFR B2 level. A perfect score represents the border between B2 and C1 level. For Grade Pre-2, a pass score (1,728 points) equates to CEFR A2 level. A score over 1,949 points (out of 2,400) represents CEFR B1 level. A perfect score represents B2 level.

³ After leaving college approximately 55% of students continue on to university.



has resulted in the focus of language instruction and the traditional grammar-translation methodology it encapsulates attracting increasing domestic criticism (Aoki, 2017).

For Japanese educators, addressing perceived pedagogical weaknesses has also led to pronounced amendments in language policy, curricula and approaches to teaching in primary and secondary education. Prior to the most recent revisions, from April 2011 compulsory English language education commenced in the fifth year of primary school and was completed in the first semester of the third year of sixth-form college.⁴ Beginning in 2017, with the stated aim of drastically improving English education in order to cultivate ‘Japanese with English abilities’ (MEXT, 2013, p. 20) the government has mandated that all children be taught communicative English (in addition to reading and writing classes) from the age of eight by native English-speaking teachers. This policy expects the average sixth-form college leaver to be able to participate in ‘*normal* communication with regard to topics, for example, relating to daily life’, and ultimately for university graduates to be sufficiently competent to be able to use English ‘at a *professional level* in their workplace’⁵ MEXT, 2013, p. 20, emphasis added). The incorporation of a more communicative, functional pedagogical orientation⁶ through employment of foreign teaching assistants is acknowledgement that the structural-methodological approach (focusing predominantly on English grammar and the advanced translation skills required for university entrance exams) has had limited pedagogical impact in adequately developing communicative language proficiency (Hosoki, 2011). Native speakers create all-English environments largely functioning to facilitate effective speaking communication that aims to develop a pragmatic competence developed within a more contextualised, meaningful context. However, despite the implementation of a curriculum to achieve these goals few would argue that Japanese college leavers emerge with sufficient language competence to engage in spoken communication at anything other than rudimentary level. The stereotype of Japanese learners who have extensive knowledge *of* the language but are poor *with* the language in communicative settings persists (Haneishi, 2012).

To further compound the issue, equipping Japanese learners with solely the required language constructs is recognised as insufficient for adequate development of communicative competence (Burrows, 2009; Cutrone, 2010) due to prominent linguistic and sociocultural factors in Japan. For example, the grammatical dissimilarity of Japanese to English furnishes additional difficulties as language distance⁷ leads to impediments involving both linguistic typology (e.g., structural, phonological) and lexical dissimilarity (Hughes, 1999). The nature of discourse further exacerbates matters as Japanese interaction favours fewer interjections and more indirect or apparently vague types of expression (in the perception of non-Japanese; Akiyama & Saito, 2016). Additional competences are considered necessary in enabling Japanese EFL learners to use language effectively in determining the most efficient means of conveying an intended communicative intention. For these reasons educators (see Foster & Ohta, 2005; Fujio, 2007; Nakatani, 2005; Tatsukawa, 2007) highlight the need for strategic competences to enable effective strategy ability and assist with the demands of L2 production generally and communication problem (henceforth CP) management specifically. This has been the motivation behind the author’s attempts to foster a strategic language competence among students taking English conversation classes at the universities he has taught. In addition to the constructs themselves the sociocultural and existential factors (CEFR, 2001) that shape the character and content of classroom discourse must also be acknowledged. For communicative strategy acquisition to remain an achievable ambition instruction must recognise the complex competing expectations and beliefs prevalent in the Japanese EFL classroom. If

⁴ 94% of secondary school students proceed on to 6th form college (3 years), with 75% continuing into some form of higher education (The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2018).

⁵ Cited from the homepage of the Japanese Ministry of Education: <http://www.mext.go.jp/english/shotou/030301.htm>

⁶ Although the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology stresses the importance of communicative ability, no clear definition emerges in the policy documents.

⁷ Hart-Gonzalez and Lindemann (1993) calculate linguistic dissimilarity on a range from 1.0 (1.0 represents ‘harder to learn’) to 3.0 (‘easier to learn’) for native English speakers. Japanese is classified as being the most distant (from English) and scores 1.0, followed by Mandarin which scores 1.5. To offer comparison, French is rated 2.5.

the findings for similarly-focused studies into communication strategy instruction are applicable to the Japanese setting (Bui, 2016; Hmaid, 2014; Kongsom, 2009) any reduction of inhibiting sociocultural influences through strategic competence is likely to propitiously impact fluency and communicative language proficiency.

Research and Pedagogical Background

Tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon demonstrates the difficulty of retrieval or partial recall due to temporary inaccessibility of a stored item (Nelson, 2000). Occurring in the first language (henceforth L1) the target word or phrase is often a known lexical item (i.e., present in either the passive or active vocabularies) but in second language use, however, it often indicates a gap (Váradi, 1983) between communicative intention and available linguistic resources. Both scenarios demonstrate a degree of *problematicity* (Bialystok, 1990) but for foreign language learners the linguistic, retrieval, or proficiency shortfall represents a perceptible indicator of an impediment to a communicative goal. The means by which speakers (both native and non-native) compensate between their communicate intention and immediately available linguistic resources are known as communication strategies (henceforth CSs). For foreign language learners they symbolise attempts to incorporate a strategic competence into their *interlanguage* (Selinker, 1972) that would allow communication barriers to be minimised or transcended. Representing a subset of communicative competence (see Bachman, 1990; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980) they deal with language production problems primarily due to insufficient linguistic competence (Poullisse, 1987). The pedagogical rationale for direct strategic language instruction⁸ within EFL (see Dörnyei, 1995; Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991; Iwai & Konishi, 2003; Yule & Tarone, 1997) affirms its effectiveness by relating language competence (i.e., declarative language knowledge) to knowledge of the structures and features of the context in which communication occurs (i.e., procedural knowledge; Bachman, 1990). This practical application, proponents assert (Iwai, 2005; Sato, 2008), can be highly influential in determining the most effective means of minimising or overcoming potential or emergent CPs.

The Working Definition of Communication Strategies

In the present research CSs are posited as problem managing devices that incorporate both a compensatory aspect (i.e., lexical-compensatory strategies), in addition to the communicative features of discourse that the research aims to measure. Restricted to the means employed when facing difficulty verbalising a mental plan (Cook, 1993; Færch & Kasper, 1984; Váradi, 1992; Yule & Tarone 1991) attention shifts to an alternative representational system for means of expression (Bialystok, 1990). Their use has come to represent not an overarching tactic but a technique in selection of the best resource to minimise or transcend communication breakdown. Although definitions highlight learner L2 insufficiency and dysfluency in interlanguage competency, CSs need not be characterised as symbolic of insufficient competence rather as evidence of resourcefulness and endeavour in facilitating preclusion of communication breakdown despite difficulties (CEFR, 2001).

Taxonomy of Communication Strategies Adopted

The adopted classification reflects the extended framework taxonomy underlined by categorical criterion based on the source of information employed. CSs are grouped into five major categories and subcategories on the basis of their commonalities. The five overarching strategies are:

⁸ Strategic language is an overarching term used to incorporate all individual communication strategies.

1. Reduction-based strategies
2. L1 knowledge-based strategies
3. Avoidance strategies
4. Interaction-based strategies
5. Paralinguistic strategies

Common features within the frameworks provide theoretical considerations upon which a provisional CS taxonomy can be developed. Table 1 summarises commonality among established empirical CS studies. Although terminology differs among taxonomies, CSs have been classified according to the essential role of the strategy. Every effort has been taken to represent the most salient features although the author acknowledges that some taxonomies are so detailed (e.g., Dörnyei & Scott's 1997 taxonomy incorporates 33 individual CSs) and referent-specific that generalisability is limited or distinctions made between classifications seem non-existent or arbitrary. Specific instances of CS employment during the pre/post interactions are provided later in the section.

TABLE 1
Summary of Overarching and Individual Strategic Language

Overarching CSs	Description	Individual strategies
A. Reduction-based strategies	Diminution in the optimal meaning (at the phonological, morphological, or lexical level) through reduction or omission.	1. Approximation 2. Circumlocution
B. L1 knowledge-based strategies	Reliance on the L1 code as a source of formal knowledge.	3. Literal translation 4. Word coinage 5. Code-switching 6. Foreignising
C. Avoidance strategies	Non-fulfilment of the communicative goal due to avoidance or abandonment.	7. Topic avoidance 8. Message abandon. 9. Semantic avoidance
D. Interaction-based strategies	Strategies that engage and utilise the interlocutor as a source.	10. Direct appeal 11. Indirect appeal
E. Paralinguistic strategies	Alternative mediums of expression, such as non-verbal strategies (e.g., mimetic gestures and sound imitation).	12. Non-verbal

Research Objectives

The aim of the present research is the clarification of the pedagogic application of strategic language employment in maximising L2 interaction (see Burrows, 2008) and student participation in the learning and language production process. It is theorised that this understanding can equip native English-speaking university instructors who come to teach in Japan with knowledge of the benefits of strategic language competence, as well as provide an insight into countervailing factors that must be counterbalanced in optimising student participation in verbal interaction. The paramount objective in the author's EFL classroom remains the improvement of learners' communicative competence through development of awareness of the means to manage and overcome potential and emergent CPs.

Specifically, the research investigates the contributions that CSs make in equipping Japanese EFL learners with the strategic tools to manage and minimise CPs. The three-month intervention study aims to raise awareness of the potential for CS use in SLA, in addition to teaching and practicing how and when individual strategic items can be employed. Subjects who have undergone the intervention will then be observed to assess the extent of their selection and employment (or rejection) of CSs in assisting communicative language proficiency, with particular focus on the relationship between CS selection and the type of CPs they are used in response to. In addition to CS employment the rationale behind learners' decision making-process in CS selection (or rejection) will also be examined. The degree of CS effectiveness in improving language proficiency is not within the scope of the research. The research specifically addresses the following three research questions:

- Question 1. How does the direct teaching of communication strategies influence subjects' selection and employment of strategic language following a three-month intervention study?
- Question 2. Which specific communication strategies are selected and employed in their management of potential or emergent communication problems?
- Question 3. What latent factors are influential among subjects in the selection and employment of strategic language?

Although the teachability and effectiveness of CSs in improving communicative performance has been demonstrated among Japanese EFL learners (Iwai & Konishi, 2003; Nakatani, 2005), the order of their application and how they are systematised remains less explored. In addition, the inferencing process (see Bialystok, 1979) and justification that differentiates CSs due to their cognitive demand, sociocultural or linguistic complexity is examined in relation to Japanese EFL learners' existential competence (CEFR, 2001). The extent to which Japanese EFL learners select, employ, and acquire CSs and the rationale behind their employment is the focus of this paper.

Research Methods

In answering the research questions presented earlier a quasi-experimental⁹ (non-randomised, pre-post intervention study) was adopted as the research design. It involved the deliberate, systematic alteration of the learning content to allow explicit instruction of strategic language (the key independent variable) in assessing the influence of CS instruction on learners' strategic language selection in managing problematcity. Data collection methods consisted of interactional observation of two structured interviews (pre and posttest) combined with immediate retrospective feedback. An overview of the research questions and the respective data sets (marked 'O') is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Summary of Elicitation Procedures Employed

Research question	Research theme	Research instruments	
		Pre/posttest interview	Video-stimulated recall
Research question 1.	CS identification and codification	O	O
Research question 2.	CP identification and management	O	O
Research question 3.	Influential factors in CS selection	-	O

As indicated in Table 2, CS identification and codification provided during both pre/posttest interviews address research question one. CS identification was further supported by subject feedback provided during video-stimulated recall. Informal, semi-structured interviews, also known as non-standardised or qualitative interviews (Saunders et al., 2009) are hybrid types of interview incorporating features of both structured and unstructured exchanges. They allow a list of predetermined themes and questions (the structured interview) to be addressed while employing flexibility to facilitate in-depth exploration of any topic raised. To maintain consistency throughout the interviews the author prepared core questions to ensure similarity of areas covered with each subject. The purpose was to obtain qualitative descriptions with respect to interpretation of meaning (Kvale, 1996) and yield direct quotations regarding rationale behind subjects' decision making-process. Interviews offered the most efficient means of objectively codifying thought processes from all participants. CS application in the type of CPs they are selected to

⁹ A quasi-experimental design rather than an experimental design may be used for a research design involving an experimental approach but where random assignment to treatment and comparison groups has not been used (Robson, 1993; Rudestam & Newton, 2001).

manage is also provided through VSRs. Finally, the selective process and reasons for choices in how to manage CPs are likewise addressed during this process.

Pre/Posttest Interviews

Elicitation of spoken data specifically aimed to overcome insufficiencies of deliberate CS generation through task bias evident in studies mentioned before. The interview format of the present research ensured strategic language use was employed *if* selected, while variability owing to extraneous contextual factors were minimised or at least documented. An overview of the requisite features of the interview is provided here:

1. Dyadic interaction between subjects and native English-speaking interlocutors through verbal and non-verbal channels.
2. Referential, authentic exchange of information occurring in a discursal and sociocultural context.
3. Elicitation of compatible data in terms of quantity and quality.
4. Unrestricted prerogative in how CPs are managed.
5. Enabling reliable quantitative evaluation of problematicity during subject performance.

To allow for an initial appraisal of L2 strategic usage an informal interview (pretest) between subjects and native English-speaking international exchange students was conducted. Exchange students were chosen in order to stimulate an expansive interaction and reduce affective influences likely to occur had the author conducted the interviews. Reduction of asymmetrical power distribution (Doughty & Pica, 1986) results in a greater variety of pedagogical moves, social skills and interactive behaviours (e.g., comprehension checks, confirmation requests, clarification requests, self- and other-repetitions, repairing, preventive or reacting acts). Elicitation methods, adapted from the International English Language Testing System test's (henceforth IELTS^{TM12}) speaking section afforded unrestricted opportunities to engage in verbal and non-verbal interaction relating to various aspects of university life. Consistent with previously conducted pilot studies (Burrows, 2013), subjects were likewise informed of the similarity to the IELTS test's speaking section to allow an element of format and content familiarisation. In addition, subjects were instructed to ask several (at least five) questions in order to achieve a more interactive, spontaneous exchange. Furthermore, in order to furnish extensive quantitative data a list of topics relating to university life was provided in advance, with subjects informed they would be asked to provide their thoughts and opinions in an informal interaction related to several of them. All subjects were informed (all oral and written instructions were provided in Japanese) that a 'correct' answer was not being solicited in terms of opinion and they were encouraged to express themselves and interact freely.

In accordance with the IELTS test format, the general and level-specific structure of the interview consists of four phases: warm-up, level check, probe, and wind-down. The four phases of the interaction are summarised in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Summary of the Elicitation Procedures

Test phase	Time (mins.)	Purpose	Topics (pretest)
1. Warm up	2 - 3	Allow interlocutors situational familiarisation through preliminary interaction.	University life, part-time work, sports, EFL study
2. Level check	4 - 5	Elicitation of more expansive speech through open-ended questions (based on phase one) on familiar topics	University course, future employment
3. Probe	4 - 5	Extended monologues related to more cognitively demanding topics.	Japanese universities
4. Wind-down	1 - 2	Conclusion of the interaction	Reflection on the interview

Upon completion of the strategic language training programme all subjects participated in a final observed interaction (posttest) to similarly evaluate the extent and range of strategic language reliance. Alternative topics of discussion were employed from the pretest to avoid adaption through accustomedness of test content. Similarly, subjects were only provided outlines of the topics as without an element of familiarisation it was felt that speaking proficiency would be insufficient to provide adequate quantitative research data. Although subjects were informed they would be expected to discuss a cultural-related topic the specific topic of the question was not revealed.

Video-stimulated Recall

Identification of strategic language based on surface features was triangulated with comprehensive pre and posttest retrospective feedback. The unobservable nature of avoidance and reduction-type CSs dictates that comprehensive data collection is unobtainable solely through subject observation. The present research recognises the difficulty of empirically and unequivocally accessing many internal states and processes occurring during interaction (Pomerantz, 2005), consequently revealing these underlying thought processes and covert strategic reasoning requires the employment of additional analytical methods. The VSR employed adopts Ericsson and Simon's (1993) information processing model that postulates that information which has recently been paid conscious attention to (attended to or heeded) is still part of one's declarative knowledge and can be amenable to reporting (if stimulated immediately following task completion accessibility is through working memory) and verbally encoded (Cohen, 1994, 1998; Færch & Kasper, 1987; Gass & Mackey, 2000; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Table 4 provides an outline of the complete data collection procedures employed during the research.

TABLE 4

Summary of the Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection Procedures

Procedure	Target	Interlocutor	Length (avg. mins.)
1. Pretest interaction	Quantitative	International exchange students	12~14
2. Posttest interaction	Quantitative	International exchange students	12~14
3. Video-stimulated recall	Quantitative/Qualitative	Author	20~25

For the purpose of the present study 12 individual CSs from Tarone's (1977), Færch and Kasper's (1983b), Bialystok's (1990), Dörnyei's (1995) and Dörnyei and Scott's (1997) classification were adopted for the strategic language training programme. The intention was to provide at least two individual CS options for each of the five overarching categories (excluding paralinguistic strategies). The selection was to achieve a balance that recognises the wide variety of strategic language yet minimise the use of 'high inference categories' (Long, 1980, cited in Allwright & Bailey, 1991) to ensure a purely descriptive analysis. Conceptual definitions are clarified and each strategy presented individually with excerpts taken from the data to illustrate contextual relevance. All strategic language use is underlined. All interactions are between non-Japanese exchange students (ES) and Japanese subjects (S).

Strategic Language Training Program

The three-month intervention study consisted of informed training (see Oxford & Crookall, 1989) based on the instruction cycle proposed by Chamot et al. (1999). In addition to the course content (set out in institution X's English Oral Communication syllabus) the quasi-experimental group was informed of the purpose, rationale and value of strategy instruction and provided a list of names and examples (in Japanese) of the target strategies. Explicitly embedded instruction incorporates contextualised training to illustrate their relevance and equip learners internally with necessary competence or mechanisms to compensate for CPs strategically. The instructional sequence developed by Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994) provides a five-phase recursive

cycle for the introduction, teaching, practice, evaluation, and application of strategic language instruction. The five-phase instructional sequence consists of:

1. Preparation: identification of current CSs use and development of metacognitive awareness of the relationship between the subjects own mental processes and strategic language use. Identification can additionally assist the instructor determine the focus of activities.
2. Presentation: explaining and modelling the CSs. The assistance, application, and use of the CSs raises awareness about the nature and communicative potential of CSs. This includes demonstration and visualisation of its practical application.
3. Practice: incorporation of opportunities to recognise opportunities to employ CSs with authentic learning tasks illustrates their usefulness in problem management. Structured practice raises awareness of the types of CPs as well as developing conscious control over available strategic options.
4. Evaluation: self-evaluation of success in using CSs, thus developing metacognitive awareness of individual learning processes. Establishing a connection between the CP experienced and the solution employed to manage it.
5. Expansion: learner reflection on the effectiveness and preference of strategic use in the context of managing problematicity. This encourages deliberation and experimentation of strategic language application.

The procedures outlined previously served as the instructional framework for the process of the 24 lessons that incorporated the strategic language component. The contents, presentation, and allocation of both classes were identical in length except for a 15-minute section during which the quasi-experimental group undertook strategic language instruction. A similar timeframe (10 ~ 15 minutes) used for CS instruction was used for reading and grammar-based, problem-solving questions in the comparison class. The data (marked 'O') was collected during the first semester of the 2018-2019 academic year (see Table 5).

TABLE 5
Data Collection Schedule (April ~ August 2020)

Month	Apr.	May.	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.
Week	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	
Introduction	O				
Pretest	O				
CS instruction	O	O	O	O	
Posttest					O

Setting and Participants

The three-month intervention study conducted at institution X took place between April 2020 and August 2020. 2nd-year undergraduates (quasi- experimental group $n = 21$, comparison group $n = 20$; average age: 20 years old) participated as subjects. All students were enrolled in a year-long (30 weeks) pre-intermediate English oral communication class (90 minutes, twice a week), an elective class as part of a language curriculum which aims to equip students with the required language proficiency to qualify as English language teachers in primary/secondary education. In addition to oral communication class all students ($n = 41$) were also enrolled in grammar-based and English proficiency test preparatory classes. All English oral communication classes are streamed according to written placement scores taken at commencement of the academic year. Proficiency scores ranged from high-beginner to intermediate level, (TOEIC™ scores between 540 to 660; 0 – 990 score range); average score: 555 points (CEFR: B1 equates to IELTS speaking section band 4 ~ 5). TOEIC test scores (April 2018) show no significant difference in English proficiency level between the groups. At the time of the pretest interaction the mean test score for both the experimental and comparison group was 563 and 548 ($SD = 82.28$ and 72.98)

respectively. Group homogeneity was verified by Levene's test for equality of variance ($F(1, 39) = 0.527$, $p = < .811$). The two classes were randomly assigned as the quasi-experimental class or the comparison class. All subjects had completed eight years compulsory English language education, yet, consistent with false-beginners detailed grammar knowledge belied weak speaking proficiency. In addressing research question one, the quasi-experimental group ($n = 21$) received explicit CS instruction whereas instruction was omitted for the comparison group. Both groups were taught by the author using a communicative approach with emphasis on oral production. The makeup of both groups is presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6

English Proficiency Level and Education Background of Subjects

Group	Proficiency level	No. of years of English education	Males	Females	Total no. of subjects
Experimental	pre-intermediate	7-8	7	14	21
Comparison	pre-intermediate	7-8	5	15	20
Total			12	19	41

Changes in CS Employment Between Pre/Posttest Interactions

Appreciable divergence was observed in CS reliance between pre and posttest interactions. The skewed distribution evident in pretest interactions around L1 knowledge-based and avoidance strategies is less pronounced during posttest interactions for the experimental group. Increased reliance on reduction-based strategies also importantly appeared to signal a willingness to tolerate a level of uncertainty and afforded the confidence to effectively minimise communication barriers. For the experimental group L1 knowledge-based strategies continued to be extensively employed in addition to increased reliance on reduction-based strategies. A clear increase in the use of indirect appeal strategies is also evident. For the comparison group this variation in use is less distinct; L1 knowledge-based and reduction strategies increase by 29% and 23% respectively. The recurring reliance on strategies commonly used by learners without the linguistic competence to employ more effective strategies was noticeable throughout both interactions (e.g., L1 knowledge-based strategies: literal translation +166%, code-switching +60% for the experimental group; and literal translation +225%, foreignising +200 for the comparison group). Although it should be acknowledged that decreases also occurred (code-switching -21% for the experimental group and word coinage -50% for the comparison group). In summary, seven of the individual strategies for the experimental group showed significant increase usage, whereas six instances out of the twelve CSs in the comparison group were employed approximately at the same level in percentage terms (i.e., with a 22% margin) across both interactions. Table 7 presents data of changes in frequency counts of actual CS employment before and following instruction.

TABLE 7
Changes in Pre/Posttest CS (both Overarching & Individual) Employment

Communication Strategies	Experimental Group				Comparison Group			
	Pretest	Posttest	Diff. +/-	t-value	Pretest	Posttest	Diff. +/-	t-value
L1 knowledge-based:								
1. Literal translation	3	8	+166%	-2.02	4	13	+225%	+2.33*
2. Word coinage	5	8	+60%	-1.14	6	3	-50%	-1.83
3. Code-switching	51	40	-21%	+2.75*	38	47	+23%	-2.32*
4. Foreignising	0	5	-	-2.50*	1	3	+200%	-1.00
Total	59	61	3%		49	66	+29%	
Avoidance:								
5. Topic avoidance	0	5	-	-2.50*	6	7	+17%	-0.81
6. Message abandon.	10	27	+170%	-3.17*	27	25	-7%	-1.14
7. Semantic avoidance	32	27	-16%	+1.56	29	32	+10%	-1.56
Total	42	59	+40%		62	64	+3%	
Reduction-based:								
8. Approximation	10	19	+90%	-2.12*	15	20	+33%	-2.17*
9. Circumlocution	3	8	+167%	-2.02	6	6	-	-0.44
Total	13	27	+107%		21	26	+23%	
Interaction-based:								
10. Direct appeal	0	14	-	-	9	11	+22%	-0.49
11. Indirect appeal	4	10	+150%	3.84***	8	14	+75%	-0.68
Total	4	24	+500%	-2.03	17	25	+47%	
Paralinguistic:								
12. Non-verbal	3	6	+100%		5	7	+40%	-0.69
Total	3	6	+100%	-1.83	5	7	+40%	
Total	121	177	+46%		154	188	+22%	

Note. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p > .01$, *** = $p > .001$

In order to determine the significance of variation between pre and posttest CS reliance, a dependent t-test was conducted to demonstrate whether variation in mean scores were significant. Results for the experimental group reveal statistically significant differences in use of half the individual strategies: code-switching, foreignising, topic avoidance, message abandonment, approximation, and direct appeal. For the comparison group significant differences were restricted to only three strategies: literal translation, code-switching, and approximation. For the remaining strategies the results show no statistical significance between the two tests. The difference between pre/posttest CS employment for the experimental group represents increased reliance on reduction and interaction-based strategies against a very marginal increase (3%) in reliance on L1 knowledge-based strategies. It should also be recognised that the data for the comparison group also indicates increased CS employment among all CSs. This was confirmed by gain score analysis of differences between pre/posttest CS reliance in a one-way ANOVA with the intervention as the independent variable. Increased CS reliance was greater for the experimental group ($M = 4.67$) than for the control group ($M = 2.83$), although no statistically significant increase for the experimental group was recorded $F(1, 22) = 4.30, p = 0.045$.

Similar to the pretest data, analysis also addressed the type and frequency of strategies employed across the phases of the interaction. The aim was to gain an understanding if CS reliance undergoes a transformation depending on the cognitive difficulty of the interaction. The data show how CS reliance modifies away from strategies that result in a diminution of the optimal meaning (i.e., avoidance strategies) to less impairing linguistic tools which manage CPs more directly and efficiently. This decisiveness in the CS selection was clearly evident with much less time and consideration taken by subjects in how to minimise linguistic difficulty. Table 8 presents data for the type and frequency of the individual CSs employed per phase for both groups across the three phases of the interaction (pretest figures are in brackets).

TABLE 8
Numbers of CS Employed per Question (Posttest Interactions)

	Experimental Group			Comparison Group		
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
<i>L1 knowledge-based:</i>						
1. Literal translation	2 (2)	3 (0)	3 (1)	3 (1)	5 (2)	5 (1)
2. Word coinage	2 (1)	4 (1)	2 (3)	1 (2)	2 (3)	0 (1)
3. Code-switching	11 (11)	15 (16)	14 (24)	17 (10)	23 (18)	7 (10)
4. Foreignising	2 (0)	2 (0)	1 (0)	2 (0)	1 (1)	0 (0)
<i>Avoidance:</i>						
5. Topic avoidance	0 (0)	2 (0)	3 (0)	2 (3)	3 (3)	2 (0)
6. Message abandon.	3 (5)	11 (2)	13 (3)	6 (7)	12 (11)	7 (9)
7. Semantic avoidance	8 (6)	13 (14)	6 (12)	7 (10)	17 (11)	8 (8)
<i>Reduction-based:</i>						
8. Approximation	3 (3)	7 (4)	9 (3)	5 (5)	8 (3)	7 (7)
9. Circumlocution	2 (2)	4 (0)	2 (1)	1 (2)	3 (2)	2 (2)
<i>Interaction-based:</i>						
10. Direct appeal	2 (0)	6 (0)	6 (0)	4 (3)	4 (2)	3 (4)
11. Indirect appeal	1 (2)	5 (1)	4 (1)	4 (1)	5 (3)	5 (4)
<i>Paralinguistic:</i>						
12. Non-verbal	0 (2)	3 (0)	3 (1)	1 (0)	4 (3)	2 (2)
Total No. CSs	36 (34)	75 (38)	66 (49)	53 (44)	87 (62)	48 (48)

To summarise comparisons among both overarching and individual CSs from the quantitative data upon completion of the three-month intervention study, the most significant insights are as follows:

1. Comparison of variation between pre/posttest indicates the number/type of CSs employed during posttest interactions to be influenced by CS instruction. This is confirmed through the percentage increase in CS reliance between the two groups (46% and 22% for the experimental and comparison group respectively).
2. CS instruction could clearly be associated with an increase in frequency of CS reliance among the majority of taught CSs (all three phases of the interactions recorded increase in CS reliance). The gains mentioned between the experimental and comparison suggest that direct CS instruction has a relationship with CS employment in awareness building and managing problematcity.
3. Variation in CS employment between pre/posttest indicate a strong increase in the application of interaction-based and reduction strategies among the experimental group. Task content difficulty (i.e., relating to phases of the interaction) seems to cause variation (experimental group) in the operationalisation of CSs resulting in an increased reliance in strategies both in type and relative frequency. For the comparison group the changes are less distinct again in both type and frequency.
4. Increased CS reliance among the experimental group represents a dependence on strategies that are more effective (e.g., interaction-based strategies) and require enhanced application of L2 linguistic resource.
5. From the increase reliance on CSs among the comparison group the implication is that even without direct CS instruction receptive learning of CS strategy use occurs within the ESL classroom.

Results by Research Question

This section addresses the three research questions on the extent CS instruction impacted on Japanese EFL learners' employment (or rejection) of strategic language.

Research Question One

The reader will recall that this research question examines the effect of direct CS instruction on their selection and employment. Predictably, direct instruction over a three-month period of twelve strategic language tools to assist in the management of problematicity resulted in increased employment during posttest interactions. The experimental groups 46% increase in CS reliance was more than double the 22% figure for the control group (see Table 7). Once subjects became aware of alternative strategic choices to assist in problem management they readily selected and relied on those which were the least demanding (in terms of linguistic requirements) yet diversely effective, for example, reliance on the interlocutor as a source was largely effective in overcoming linguistic barriers (even at times when the interlocutor was unsure of the precise meaning due to insufficient lexical knowledge of Japanese). Subjects exploited similar sources to compensate for insufficient knowledge of the target language during the pretest to a much less extent. Data from the present study is broadly in concordance with studies conducted among ESL learners (Chen, 1990 (conducted among Chinese learners); Nakano, 1996) that highlight L2 proficiency as being the most influential factor in determining CS reliance. In addition to interaction-based strategies, greater utilisation over the L2 knowledge (i.e., reduction-based strategies) meant subjects were able to rely on these to employ strategies which were the most direct, economical, and meaningful (e.g., use of synonyms or of the superordinate and componential analysis). In contrast, the ESL research highlights how less proficient subjects are prevented from reliance on non- L1 knowledge-based CSs due to a limited formal knowledge of the target language. To compensate for this leads to more reliance on avoidance and L1 knowledge-based strategies.

In hindsight, the data provided from pre/posttest interactions did not satisfy how changes occur beyond the quantitative measurement of CS use. Differences in CS selection could be observed and quantified but the brevity of the research only allowed for this snapshot of CS reliance. In this regard the similarity to research question two is not distinct enough to provide an extra dimension into CS employment among subjects. The wording only allows for general descriptions of increases or decrease in CS reliance. A more insightful wording of the research question could have addressed effectiveness or compared L1 CS employment and been more specific in what it aimed to measure. While this limitation is acknowledged, the reason that the research question was not amended during the study was that the data provided an initial understanding of how learners managed difficulties during referential interaction. The overall quantification of changes in CS usage was vital in providing a context of their prevalence among Japanese EFL learners.

Research Question Two

Research question two address CS selection and employment. Results from posttest interactions confirmed conclusions from earlier studies conducted among Japanese learners (Sato, 2008) of a sequential order in the development of strategic competence. A clear preference among the experimental group for interaction-based and reduction-based strategies emerged following completion of the intervention study. The reliance resulted in a noticeable improvement in colloquial flow with reduced hesitancy (i.e., in terms of reduced pauses) and lexical planning time. In this effect they served as fluency-maintaining strategies that distinguished the quality of responses compared to the comparison group. These categories were suggested as less effective strategies in the previous section yet it may be that the proficiency of the subjects meant they were not clearly aware of employing them or alternative options. Although the change in the frequency use of these strategies as a result of the training was significant, the fact that a sharp increase occurred in the interaction strategies is of great significance for the classroom. It is encouraging, therefore, that the training program adopted was particularly effective with respect to these types of strategies. In fact, according to (Hamada, 2013), successful learners (in terms of the effectiveness in CP management) are more likely to employ circumlocution or approximation more frequently than less successful ones. However, although they have the greatest potential for

facilitating successful communication (Littlemore, 2003) they make heavier linguistic demands on learners and may be too sophisticated for learners at earlier stages of proficiency. Finally, paralinguistic CSs, as aids to verbal output, were almost entirely not relied upon by either group during the pretest. This changed moderately for the experimental group during the posttest despite claims (Gullberg, 2006) that paralinguistic CSs are more frequently employed by low-proficiency learners.

Research Question Three

Addressing research question three in relation to reasoning behind CS selection and employment, posttest quantitative data combined with qualitative feedback provided through VSRs allowed a level of analysis of potential variables influential in the CS selection process. Regarding frequency of the most prevalent individual CSs, corroborating subject feedback supports the finding that for Japanese learners the ability to focus less on word-for-word translations and allow a degree of interpretative, measured ambiguity can be productive. The findings also substantiated actual objectives of CS employment in regard to the purpose (i.e., overcome, manage, cope) of CS selection. This was predominantly achieved through employment of reduction-based strategies that allow a degree of imprecision and vagueness in regard to the optimal meaning. The efficiency and convenience of interaction-based strategies has already been noted. At an individual level, subjects developed a reliance on interaction-based strategies and reduced their reliance on avoidance strategies. The context for CSs usage is predominantly as a pedagogic sequence to establish word-meaning relationships when lexical gaps are realised. Alternatively, an absence of focus on lexical compensation incorporates them into exchanges which are again focused primarily on word-meaning. Findings also indicated CS employment had a contrasting impact on the frequency of CS employment.

In regards to CS application, lexical CPs tended to elicit CSs regularly (most often direct and indirect appeals) while sociolinguistic CPs, especially those related to the contextual appropriacy of content induced CSs less frequently. In this case they had to be managed individually (reduction-based strategies) as opposed to the potentially problematic interaction-based strategies. A wide variety of categories, almost double the number of categories of CPs, was identified which implies that not all CPs are handled or may even be recognised.

Pedagogical Implications

The overriding motivation for the present research has been the pedagogical application of strategic language instruction to Japanese EFL learners. Recognition that learners of analogous language learning backgrounds with similar levels of linguistic knowledge display unequal speaking performance in L2 communication has driven research into L2 performance (Corder, 1967; Selinker, 1972). The assumption has always remained that the strategic competences used by successful language students could be identified and explicitly taught to weaker students in the development of communicative competence. The resulting development of observable, procedural strategy reliance would assist the management of potential CPs with a propitious influence on speaking performance. Acquiring such efficacious skills as a by-product of the language learning process (i.e., not taught directly or explicitly as part of language learning) however, reduces the effectiveness of the learning process as without the declarative knowledge of strategic competence (i.e., incorporation into learning mechanisms) may restrict them from becoming optimally salient. As evident from the findings, the process of proceduralisation is one of automisation (Johnson, 1994) requiring repeated CS exploration and practice over an extended period to consolidate into long-term memory and translate into internalised and proceduralised strategic competence (Anderson, 1982; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

The interactive model of second language acquisition mentioned earlier is based on the theory that language learning occurs through active participation in speech events (Mirzaei & Heidari, 2012; Van

Lier, 1988). In an EFL country such as Japan, however, little opportunity exists to participate in authentic, meaningful speech events in English. Indeed, a common complaint among Japanese English learners is frustration at the lack of opportunity to communicate verbally despite their efforts to acquire a working proficiency. A lack of communicative language development combined with a failure in improvement of strategic competence is at least partially responsible for learners' real and perceived lack of speaking proficiency (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991). In addition to practical skills, the language difficulty (for Japanese learners) while communicating in L2 requires additional linguistic tools to compensate for lack of familiarity between languages. If the goal of English language instruction is to produce independent, skillful L2 language communicators capable of participating in communicative situations outside the classroom, not only the language itself but also a set of those skills which contribute to enhancing a sense of security and self-confidence (Dörnyei, 1995; Manchon, 2000) when attempting to communicate in the L2 need developing. The possible effects of CS instruction should include at least the four possibilities (taken from Iwai, 2006, pp. 129-130):

1. Behavioral gains: L2 learners become more willing to communicate in L2 and try to deliver what they want to say by any possible means available to them, even though the language they use has no substantial change.
2. Strategic gains: L2 learners attempt to use the CSs that they could/did not use before CSs were taught, but the language itself has no substantial change.
3. Linguistic gains: L2 learners' strategy use is basically the same between before and after CS instruction, but the language itself has substantial change.
4. Dual gains: Noticeable good effects emerge from CS instruction not only in strategies but also the language itself.

In order to develop these skills it would be immensely beneficial to L2 communicative competence if the development of CS training were introduced at an early stage of language learning (Bialystok, 1990; Dörnyei, 1995). Without the incorporation of strategic instruction in managing and coping with language difficulty consigns learners of underdeveloped language ability to be dependent on L1 CSs that fail to enhance aspects of message adjustment and resource expansion. Without repeated and extended practice CSs remain part of declarative knowledge without being routinised within the long-term memory. In addition, maximising the benefits of strategy development and reliance requires matching of the cognitive demands of strategy use to learner proficiency level.

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