

Is Strategic Competence Teachable?

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Research into the teaching and learning of speaking in the ESL context is relatively neglected. There have been only a few studies that addressed the need to incorporate the development of strategic competence into the L2 oral classroom (e.g., Cohen, 1998; Dörnyei, 1995; Konishi & Tarone, 2004). This paper will report findings from a strategy interventionist study conducted in the secondary English oral classroom in Hong Kong. Based on a psycholinguistic model of speech processing, eight strategies were identified and introduced to the treatment class in the study. A data collection method comprising stimulated recall interviews and observations that aimed to investigate respectively the learning process (i.e., covert thoughts) and the learning product (i.e., overt speech) was employed. A comparison of the findings between the treatment class and the control class which was not exposed to any strategies-based instruction supports the view that not all strategies are equal and that some are more teachable than the others. Specifically, 'Resourcing' seems to function as a 'bedrock strategy' for young L2 speakers. Possible implications for strategy instruction are made with a view to enhancing the development of strategic competence in the L2 classroom.

Very few teachers are aware of the value of strategy use in developing interactive skills for oral communication in the English as Second Language (ESL) classroom (Lam, 2004; Lam & Wong, 2000). Reactions to strategy training have been mixed and the value of strategy training has not been fully recognised (Cohen, 1998). In view of this, the present study aims to gauge

Is Strategic Competence Teachable?

the impact of training in the use of strategies for oral communication tasks on learners' strategy use in Hong Kong secondary ESL classrooms. The training issue is of interest to ESL strategy research, and in particular, to strategy interventionist studies that have a focus on the speaking skill in the Asian context.

STRATEGIES FOR L2 ORAL COMMUNICATION

Definitions and Significance

Strategies for L2 oral communication are commonly known as 'communication strategies' (CS), the definitions and descriptions of which have been documented in the literature (see Dörnyei & Scott, 1997, for a thorough review). One generally accepted definition of CS is that they are strategies used "only when a speaker perceives that there is a problem which may interrupt communication" (Bialystok, 1990, p. 3). It is commonly held that while CS are important in enabling the L2 speaker to solve problems to keep the communication going, they are concerned more with language use than language learning and may not lead to language learning per se (Cohen, 1998; Rubin, 1987). This article echoes the position adopted by Konishi and Tarone (2004) that communication strategy teaching is an effective pedagogical tool for ESL communicative language teaching. The instruction provides learners with both communicative practice and the opportunity to learn a core set of English linguistic expressions. This way, learning to use CS has language learning potential.

This study also argues that the effective deployment of CS is closely associated with the development of strategic competence. Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991) postulate that learning to deploy CS facilitates the development of strategic competence which is defined as one's "ability to get one's meaning across successfully to communicative partners, especially when problems arise in the communication process" (p. 17). The teaching of

strategic competence is particularly relevant to the foreign language classroom not least because the mastery of linguistic ability alone does not guarantee success in using an L2 in oral communication. Very often, L2 speakers lack the ability to keep going when there is a communication breakdown. This paper adopts Dörnyei's and Thurrell's (1991) stance, arguing for the training of CS in the L2 classroom on the grounds that the teaching strengthens learners' strategic competence, which is part and parcel of the language ability to overcome communication problems and to keep going. This argument is in line with Bachman's (1990) definition of strategic competence which views strategy as the central part of language competence and underscores the significance of strategies to the development of communicative language ability. As McDonough (1999) succinctly explicates, "Applied Linguistics theorists have attempted to integrate the notion of learning and CS in particular in theories of communicative competence... such a strategic 'competence' is part of what is needs to be taught and tested in overall language teaching operation" (p. 3).

Communication Strategy Training Research

There are broadly two different schools of thought to research on CS (Kasper & Kellerman, 1997; Yule & Tarone, 1997). One approach focuses on the cognitive processes involved in selecting one or another strategy and proponents of this approach (e.g., Bialystok, 1990; Kellerman, 1991) believe that cognitive processes are unaffected by instruction and that CS are therefore not teachable. The other approach, however, focuses on the linguistic expressions used in CS in identifying strategy types and proponents of this approach (e.g., Dörnyei, 1995; Konishi & Tarone, 2004) advocate the necessity to teach these linguistic expressions needed for effective L2 communication language use. The present investigation adopts the latter stance that, through instruction and communicative practice, L2 learners' strategic competence is likely to develop.

There are, however, few studies on the teaching of CS. Dörnyei and

Is Strategic Competence Teachable?

Thurrell (1991) report on helping teachers develop learners' strategic competence by teaching them strategies including paraphrasing, using circumlocution, getting off the point, and using fillers. Classroom activities were introduced to teachers to help them incorporate strategy training in the foreign language classroom. The study ended with a positive note on strategy training, concluding that "besides developing confidence, strategy training also facilitates spontaneous improvisation skills and linguistic creativity" (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991, p. 22). Nonetheless, there was no reporting on the results of the teaching to support the claim that the strategy exercises "improve the learners' performance skills" (p. 22).

In response to the need for empirical evidence, Dörnyei (1995) relates a pilot six-week training experiment with 109 students in Hungary in the use of three CS namely, topic avoidance and replacement, circumlocution, using fillers and hesitation devices. The main purposes of the research were to help learners in learning to use these strategies to cope with communication problems and to improve performance skills. The results showed that there was improvement in measures related to both the quality and quantity of strategy use (i.e., quality of circumlocutions and the frequency of fillers and circumlocutions) in the oral post-tests. Dörnyei (1995) provides some evidence for the view that strategic competence may be teachable and that strategy training may alter patterns of students' strategy use both qualitatively and quantitatively. In addition, the study provides the necessary insights into the value of strategy training, particularly in terms of awareness raising and scaffolding strategy use by linguistic help.

Given the small number of communication strategy training studies, there is a definitive need for more interventionist studies to gauge the effects of strategy training on learners' uptake of strategy use, particularly in participatory, interactive L2 oral tasks.

Identification of Communication Strategies for Teaching: A Theoretical Framework

The present study investigates the impact of the teaching of a set of

strategies that may help L2 learners overcome communication problems in interactive oral tasks. It is argued that the proposed strategies targeted for training (i.e., target strategies) may be effective in developing L2 speakers' strategic competence. Moreover, they may have language learning potential, thereby facilitating learners' inter-language development.

The eight target strategies are proposed on the basis of a speech-processing model postulated by Dörnyei and Kormos (1998). The model identifies, from a psycholinguistic perspective, potential problems at different phases of on-line speech production for L2 communication (see Table 1). The explanation of these problems and the rationale for selecting the target strategies for training will follow Table 1.

TABLE 1
L2 On-line Speech Processes, Problems, and the Proposed Target Strategies for Teaching (Adapted from Dörnyei & Kormos, 1998)

Phases of speech production *	Potential problems encountered by the L2 speaker *	Strategies identified for training by the present study and their definitions +
Planning and encoding the preverbal message	Resource deficits	1. 'Resourcing' The speaker uses vocabulary, structures and some suggested ideas in the task instruction sheet to help him/her solve problems with 'what to say' or 'how to say it' during the discussion task.
		2. 'Paraphrasing' The speaker uses alternative expressions to replace those that s/he does not know or cannot think of.
Planning and encoding the preverbal message	Processing time pressure	3. 'Using self-repetition' The speaker repeats what s/he has just said as a stalling device to gain time to think.
		4. 'Using fillers' The speaker uses empty words such as 'well', 'actually', 'you know', etc. as a stalling device to gain time to think.

Is Strategic Competence Teachable?

Monitoring the phonetic plan and the articulated speech	Perceived deficiencies in one's own speech	5. 'Self correction' The speaker hears himself/herself make a mistake in pronunciation, grammar, choice of words, etc. and immediately corrects it.
Post-articulatory monitoring	Perceived deficiencies in interlocutor's speech	6. 'Asking for repetition' The speaker asks the interlocutor to repeat what he/she has just said with a view to solving comprehension problems. 7. 'Seeking clarification' The speaker asks the interlocutor to clarify the meaning of what he/she has just said with a view to solving comprehension problems. 8. 'Seeking confirmation' The speaker asks the interlocutor to confirm the meaning of what he/she has just said with a view to solving comprehension problems.

* Based on Dörnyei's and Kormos's (1998) model

+ The operational definitions used for data analysis are based on these definitions.

First and foremost, at the initial planning stage during speech production, "resource deficit" i.e. insufficient knowledge of vocabulary items is the fundamental problem that an L2 speaker is likely to encounter (Dörnyei & Kormos, 1998, p. 371; Levelt, 1989). To address this problem, the present research proposes that 'Resourcing' which functions as linguistic scaffolds in the form of ready-to-use content words, structures, and phrases may help an L2 speaker to solve the immediate problem of 'what to say' or 'how to say it.' Moreover, there is potential learning value in the use of 'Resourcing'; given adequate practice, the linguistic scaffolds may be internalized by the learner to become part of his/her linguistic repertoire. 'Paraphrasing' is also recommended for the obvious reason that the strategy may enable students to use alternative expressions to cope with deficiencies in their own linguistic repertoire.

The second problem is "processing time pressure" and is related to the fact that L2 speech processing is far less automatic than L1 speech processing

(Dörnyei & Kormos, 1998, p. 371), and that retrieval may take “more time than the production system will allow” (de Bot, 1992, p. 14). It is argued that strategies such as ‘Using fillers’ and hesitation devices that aim to enable L2 speakers to remain in the conversation, to gain time to think, and to maintain surface fluency may be helpful (Bygate, 1987; Rubin, 1987). It has also been argued that knowledge and confident use of fillers are a crucial part of learners’ strategic competence (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991).

The third problem occurs when “the monitor inspects the language output both before articulation and after articulation” (Dörnyei & Kormos, 1998, p. 371) and detects “deficiencies in one’s own language output” (p. 371). To cope with the problem, the L2 speaker may benefit by using ‘Self correction’ to adjust the accuracy of language use, which may facilitate pushed or forced output (e.g., Swain, 1998). That is, ‘Self correction’ may force the learner to produce grammatically accurate and appropriate utterances, which is beneficial to inter-language development.

The fourth problem may arise when an L2 speaker experiences “perceived deficiencies in the interlocutor’s performance” (Dörnyei & Kormos, 1998, p. 374). Problems may occur when the L2 speaker does not hear or have sufficient L2 knowledge to understand the speech of his/her interlocutor(s). To resolve this problem, L2 students may benefit if they are taught strategies for meaning negotiation such as ‘Asking for repetition,’ ‘Seeking clarification’ and ‘Seeking confirmation.’ There is a good deal of evidence to support the notion that opportunity for learners to engage in meaning negotiation may promote second language acquisition (Ellis, 2000; Lightbown & Spada, 1999; Long, 1983; Spada & Lightbown, 2002).

In short, in addition to helping the L2 speaker to solve immediate communication problems, the aforementioned target strategies have language learning potential in that their uptake by L2 learners might help promote inter-language development.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of strategy instruction on the ESL learners' observable strategy use when performing group discussion tasks. In addition, the investigation explores learners' reported strategy use via stimulated recall interviews i.e. a retrospective method employed to tap learners' strategic thoughts (if any) when engaging in the group tasks (Gass & Mackey, 2000). This way, the study investigates the teachability issue of communication strategies from both the product (i.e., overt strategy use) and process (i.e., covert strategic thinking) points of view. The key research questions are:

- (1) What are the effects of teaching in the use of the eight, target strategies on the learners' observed use of these target strategies?
- (2) Does the teaching have different effects on the *observed* use of individual, target strategies?
- (3) What are the effects of teaching in the use of the eight, target strategies on the learners' *reported* use of these target strategies?
- (4) Does the teaching have different effects on the *reported* use of individual, target strategies?

RESEARCH DESIGN, STRATEGY TRAINING AND TRAINING MATERIALS

An interventionist study was conducted with Secondary Two students who had seven years of English in Hong Kong ESL oral classrooms. Two intact classes were selected for the study; they had no statistically significant differences in English proficiency and were randomly allocated to two treatment conditions. The treatment class, E, received training in the use of the eight, targeted strategies while the comparison class, C, did similar oral activities as the E class but was not exposed to any strategy instruction. Strategy intervention was implemented over a span of five months through

eight strategy sessions for the E class, each of which lasted two hours. Table 2 gives an overview of the intervention as well as the data collection schedules, details of which will be explained in the sections that follow.

TABLE 2
An Overview of the Interventionist Study and a Schedule of Data Collection

Session number	Target strategies taught to the E class	Data collection schedule	Data collection method	Number of recordings	
				C class #	E class
		Phase 1 (Pre-training)	Observations	2	2
			Stimulated recall interviews	8	8
1	'Resourcing'				
2	'Paraphrasing'				
3	'Using fillers'				
4	'Using self-repetition'				
		Phase 2 (While-training)	Observations	2	2
			Stimulated recall interviews	8	8
5	'Self correction'				
6	'Asking for repetition'				
7	'Asking for clarification'				
8	'Asking for confirmation'				
		Phase 3 (Post-training)	Observations	2	2
			Stimulated recall interviews	8	8

The comparison class, C, did similar tasks to those of the treatment class, E, but was not exposed to any strategy instruction.

The researcher developed two sets of teaching materials: one for the E class and one for the C class. Each set consisted of materials for eight lessons with students' notes and teacher's guidelines. All the materials were field-tested and revised on the basis of the feedback of the teachers and students in a pilot study (Lam, 2002). Explicit strategy training was preferred (Oxford, 1996) and conducted by regular teachers of the students. The teachers had

Is Strategic Competence Teachable?

similar educational and professional backgrounds. As they were also involved in the piloting, they were familiar with strategy instruction. Students were explained the rationale for strategy use, given demonstrations of strategy use, provided with practice time to try out each of the eight recommended strategies, and given the opportunity to evaluate strategy use at the end of each strategy session as well.

DATA COLLECTION, METHODS OF ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

To assess the impact of strategy training, two data collection methods i.e. observations and stimulated recall interviews (SRIs) were employed to investigate overt strategy use and covert strategic thoughts respectively. The two complementary methods also aim to gauge the effects of strategy intervention on students' implicit, procedural knowledge (i.e., what students are able to do in terms of strategy use) and on students' explicit, declarative knowledge (i.e., what students are aware of in terms of strategy use).

Observing Strategy Use in Action

Data Collection and Method of Analysis

Two 'pull-out' groups (one high-proficiency group and one low-proficiency group) of four students each in the E and in the C classes (i.e., a total of four groups) were invited to do a 12-minute English group discussion task outside normal class hours. The students were given an imaginary situation in which they could buy body parts (e.g., powerful ears that can hear what other people think, a super strong heart that can last 100 years). Each member was given two body parts which they had to convince the group to buy, and the group had to reach a consensus regarding the priority of the eight body parts. Whoever could get at least one of his/ her body parts in the top three won the

game. This task was considered motivating and cognitively challenging in pushing the students to deploy communication strategies in order to gain time to think of the appropriate reasons and to express the right meanings.

The same English group task was conducted and videotaped three times on a pre-, while-, post- basis (see Table 2). The dataset therefore consisted of 12 recordings, each of 12 minutes' long. That is, a total of 12 transcripts (144 minutes) of English discussion were transcribed for analysis.

A speaker's turn in the transcript was identified as the unit of analysis. As observable strategy use was the focus of the present study, every turn was segmented into units in which each indication of the use of a target strategy type was categorized and coded.¹ Two independent raters were employed to code six out of 12 transcripts (50%) of the entire dataset. To help enhance the rigour of analysis (Weitzman, 2000), the data analysis software NUD*IST (Version 4) was used by both raters. Of the 1,484 segments coded by the two raters, 1,367 were given identical codes. The inter-rater reliability coefficient was therefore 0.9212.

In addressing research question (1), the frequency count of observed use of the whole sample (i.e., all strategies taken together) of the eight target strategies per group was conducted. With regard to research question (2), the frequency count of observed use of individual strategies per group was conducted. As a standardized measure of frequency counts across the E and C classes and across the three time points (i.e., pre-, while-, post-), frequency of strategy use per 100 words (F) produced by each group was used for comparison. That is, the F value of each type of strategy was calculated as follows:

$$F = \frac{N \times 100}{W} = \frac{\text{Total number of segments coded as a strategy type (N) x 100}{\text{Total number of words produced per group (W)}}$$

¹ It should be noted that non-target strategies (i.e., strategies not taught by the teacher) were also used and/or reported by the students. Given the limitation of space, the discussion of non-target strategies is beyond the scope of this paper.

Presentation and Description of Findings

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics to compare C's and E's frequencies of the observed use of the whole sample of target strategies across Phases 1, 2, and 3. The data (N/W) presented on the left hand side of Table 3 indicate the total raw frequency of strategy use (N) in relation to the total number of words (W) produced by the two pull-out groups together. The data ($N/W \times 100 = F$) on the right hand side indicate the standardized frequencies per 100 words (F) used for comparison across the C and the E classes over time. As each class comprised one high-proficiency group and one low-proficiency group, each figure in Table 3 represents the value of two groups of students added together.

TABLE 3
Comparison of C's and E's Frequencies of the Observed Use of the Whole Sample of Target Strategies per 100 Words

Class	N/W			N/W x 100 = F		
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
C	168/2352	136/2372	118/1798	7.1	5.7	6.6
E	117/2105	118/1958	117/2141	5.6	6.0	5.5

To answer research question (1), we are interested to know whether the E class, given the training in the use of the target strategies, would show consistent increases over time as compared with the C class. As shown in Table 3, for the E class, observed strategy use rose slightly at Phase 2 and, at Phase 3, returned to almost where it was prior to training (i.e. 5.6, 6.0, 5.5). The range was small; it was between 5.5 and 6.0 only. Given that the increase at Phase 2 was only marginal (i.e. from 5.6 to 6.0), the training effect (if any) was rather limited. In short, the strategy training appeared not to be associated with any increases in the observed use of the whole sample i.e. all the eight target strategies taken together.

To answer research question (2), we now study the observed use of individual target strategies to see whether the E class displayed a tendency to

use more of them over time, and if so, whether there were differences regarding the uptake of individual target strategies. It was expected that an uptake of a strategy would be reflected by steady increases in the frequency counts (F) of the strategy across Phases 1, 2 and 3. Table 4 sets out standardized frequencies of use (F) of individual target strategies per 100 words across phases and classes.

TABLE 4
Comparison of C's and E's Frequencies of the Observed Use of Individual Target Strategies per 100 Words (F)

Target Strategies	C			E		
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
	W=2532 N=168	W=2372 N=136	W=1798 N=118	W=2105 N=117	W=1958 N=118	W=2141 N=117
1.Resourcing	0.6	0.2	1.3	0.1	0.5	1.6
2.Paraphrasing	0.2	0.1	1.3	0.4	0.3	0.3
3.Using fillers	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.4	0.4
4.Self repetition	5.4	3.8	2.0	4.3	3.7	2.4
5.Self correction	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.5
6.Asking for repetition	0.1	0.1	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.1
7.Seekig clarification	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1
8.Seekig confirmation	0.1	0.2	0.7	0.1	0.2	0.1
Aggregated frequency of use	7.1	5.7	6.6	5.6	6.0	5.5
Aggregated variety of use	8	8	8	5	7	8

The findings presented in Table 4 indicate that there was a clearly upward trend in the use of 'Resourcing' by E1 (0.1, 0.5, 1.6). Considering the majority of the F values were below 1.0, the rise from 0.1 at Phase 1 to 1.6 at Phase 3 was dramatic. In contrast, the C class did not show such a consistent upward trend. This seems to lend some evidence that strategy training might have an impact on students' uptake of 'Resourcing.' For other target strategies, there was no evidence that the training was related to any increased use over time. In short, the strategy training appeared to be related

Is Strategic Competence Teachable?

to a clear and strong upward trend in the students' uptake of 'Resourcing.' There was, however, no evidence that the teaching was associated with a similar trend in the observed use of other target strategies.

Tapping Strategic Thoughts in Group Discussions

Data Collection and Method of Analysis

Immediately after doing the 12-min English discussions, the researcher conducted stimulated recall interviews (SRIs) with individual students. Stimulated recall (SR) is "one subset of a range of introspective methods that represent a means of eliciting data about thought processes involved in carrying out a task or activity" (Gass & Mackey, 2000, p. 1). The SR is a retrospective technique based on retrieval cues, which in the case of the present study, is the video play-back of the lesson. The video-taped English discussion task was played back to individual students and they were asked to pause the tape (whenever they liked) to report on what they were thinking about during the discussion task. Every time the student paused the tape to report constitutes a recall. (There was an average of eight recalls in each interview.) All the students' recalls were audio-taped and transcribed for analysis. The dataset of the SRI consisted of 48 recalls; each lasted about 15 minutes.

Every recall was segmented into unit(s) in which each mention of a target strategy type was categorized and coded (Gass & Mackey, 2000; Green, 1998). Each segment was marked and bounded by a pair of slashes `</>` and was assigned one code. Altogether 24 SRIs (i.e., 50% of the entire data) were randomly selected for coding by two coders. The codings of 412 out of 461 segments analysed by the two coders matched. The reliability coefficient was therefore 0.8937.

In addressing research question (3), the frequency of the reported use of the whole sample of target strategies per interview (i.e., per student) was counted. With respect to research question (4), the frequency of the reported use of each target strategy per interview was counted. The number of recall segments coded at a given strategy is equivalent to the frequency count of the

reported use of the strategy. The proportional frequency of the reported use of individual target strategies is expressed in terms of percentage (%) and calculated as follows:

$$\text{Proportion (\%)} = \frac{\text{Total number of recall segments coded as a strategy type}}{\text{Total number of recall segments coded per interview}} \times 100\%$$

Presentation and Description of Findings

Table 5 presents descriptive statistics to compare C and E in terms of the reported use of the whole sample of target strategies, non-target strategies and non-strategies across Phases 1, 2 and 3.² The findings shown on the left hand side of Table 5 are raw frequency counts (N) while those on the right hand side are proportions (%) of frequency counts. As each class had two groups of four students, each figure represents the value of eight students added together. (It should be acknowledged that, given the small sample size necessary for the iterative process of coding strategies, statistical analyses involving ANOVA and the pair-wise comparison for larger samples were not used to detect statistically significant results in the present study. The findings should, therefore, be viewed in the light of this limitation.)

TABLE 5
Comparison of C's and E's Frequencies (N) and Proportions (%) of Reported Use of the Whole Sample of Target Strategies, Non-target Strategies and Non-strategies

Class	Frequency (N)						Proportion (%)					
	C			E			C			E		
Phase	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Target strategies	10	3	7	7	24	25	21.7	8.6	14.9	9.6	25.8	39.7
Non-target strategies	15	24	20	40	40	21	32.6	68.6	42.6	54.8	43.0	33.3
Non strategies	21	8	20	26	29	17	45.7	22.8	42.5	35.6	31.2	27.0
Total (T)	46	35	47	73	93	63	100	100	100	100	100	100

² Non-target strategies were not taught but were reported by the students. Non-strategies were non-strategic thoughts identified in the students' recalls. Target strategies, non-target strategies and non-strategies constitute 100% of all the recalls.

To answer research question (3), it would be interesting to see whether the proportions (%) of recall segments coded as target strategies for the E class would increase over time, compared with the C class, on the assumption that strategy training would possibly raise the learners' awareness of the target strategies and consequently would report using them during the SRIs. The shaded figures in Table 5 show some interesting patterns regarding the overall picture. There were consistent substantial increases (9.6%, 25.8% and 39.7%) for E. In contrast, C went down and then up (21.7%, 8.6%, 14.9%), giving a random impression. The general picture we have gained so far is clear-cut: E, the target group, seemed to focus more on target strategies (9.6%, 25.8% and 39.7%), less on non-target strategies (54.8%, 43.0%, 33.3%) and non-strategic talks (35.6%, 31.2%, 27.0%) across phases 1, 2 and 3. In comparison, the C group appeared to change its focus from time to time with no predictable patterns. That is, the finding seems to suggest that strategy training might have had an impact on drawing the attention of the E class to the identification of target strategies during the SRIs.

To answer research question (4), let us examine whether, for the E class as compared with the C class, there was a trend of increased reported use of individual target strategies across Phases 1, 2 and 3, and if so, whether there were differences across the eight strategies in Table 6.

The proportions (%) of reported strategy use indicated in Table 6 support the view that, for the E class, there was a consistent tendency to report more of 'Resourcing' (4.1, 17.2, 17.5), 'Using fillers' (0.0, 3.2, 4.8) and 'Self-correction' (0.0, 1.1, 3.2) across Phases 1, 2 and 3. Nonetheless, the raw scores (N) on the left hand side indicate that the frequency counts of 'Using fillers' and of 'Self correction' are low and the upward trend is therefore not considered strong. In fact, a strong and sustained increase in the reported use of the target strategies was limited to one atypical strategy, i.e., 'Resourcing.' That is, strategy training appeared to be related to a noticeable impact on the reported use of 'Resourcing'.

TABLE 6
Comparison of C's and E's Frequencies (N) and Proportions (%) of the
Reported Use of Individual Target Strategies

Class Phase	Frequencies (N)						Proportions (%)					
	C			E			C			E		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
1.Resourcing	0	0	0	3	16	11	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.1	17.2	17.5
2.Paraphrasing	9	2	7	4	4	7	19.6	5.7	14.9	5.5	4.3	11.1
3.Using fillers	1	0	0	0	3	3	2.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.2	4.8
4.Self correction	0	0	0	0	1	2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1	3.2
5.Self repetition	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.6
6.Asking for repetition	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.6
7 Seeking clarification	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.0	2.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
8 Seeking confirmation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Group's total in frequencies (N) or proportions (%)	46	35	47	73	93	63	100	100	100	100	100	100
Group's aggregate in variety	2	2	1	2	4	6	2	2	1	2	4	6

It is also interesting to note that the E class outperformed C in the variety of reported strategy use over time. Whereas both E and C reported using only two types of strategies in Phase 1, E showed a clear and consistent tendency to use more types of strategies (four in Phase 2 and six in Phase 3) and C indicated a downward trend (two in Phase 2 and one in Phase 3). This finding suggests that strategy training seemed to be associated with motivating students to identify and report more types of target strategies in the SRIs.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Recapping Major Findings

Teaching in the use of the eight target strategies for L2 oral communication appeared to be associated with consistent increases in terms of frequency and

Is Strategic Competence Teachable?

variety of the reported strategy use but not observed strategy use when the whole sample of the target strategies was taken together. Regarding the teachability of individual target strategies, the training was likely to be related to a clear and strong upward trend in the students' reported use as well as observed use of 'Resourcing' only.

Findings by the Whole Sample of Target Strategies

While strategy instruction was not correlated to any increased applications of observed strategy use across Phases 1, 2 and 3, it appeared to be connected with enhanced and sustained strategic awareness on the part of the learners as evident in the consistent increases in the variety and in the frequency of reported strategy use in the stimulated recall interviews over time.

A cognitive psychologist perspective to second language learning as skill learning may offer a plausible explanation for this result (Johnson, 2002). The present study aimed to investigate the teaching effects of the eight target strategies. In order to expose students to a spectrum of strategies and to comply with the time constraints of the school, only one session could be allocated to the teaching and learning of each strategy. So while the conscious effort on the part of the teachers to help students consolidate previously-learned strategies could raise students' general strategic awareness as reflected in the stimulated recall interviews (SRIs), this was probably not adequate to bring about their sustained use as reflected in task performance because of limited practice time assigned to individual strategies.

These findings also indicate that the explicit focusing of strategies in the training may have a pervasive impact on students' strategic awareness. Consciousness-raising is implicit and it may not yet be reflected in performance. Strategy training may, therefore, be associated with a positive impact on students' explicit knowledge about strategy use though not yet on the implicit knowledge of implementing strategy use that can be reflected in observable performance.

The apparent differences in the effects of strategy intervention on learners'

observed strategy use and reported strategy use support Schmidt's (2004) postulation that learning manifests in ways that may or may not be observable. That is, learning may be latent and not yet implemented because learners may first acquire declarative knowledge via consciousness-raising. Then, the process of "proceduralising declarative knowledge" through practice may begin (Johnson, 1994, p. 125). In fact, declarative knowledge (e.g., knowing about strategy use) and proceduralised knowledge (i.e., knowing of how to implement strategy use) do not seem to be two completely different types; the two types of knowledge are rather on a continuum, and are affected both by practice and by the ways in which tasks are combined. In fact, it can be argued that declarative knowledge is on one end of the learning continuum whereas procedural knowledge is on the other.

The value of strategy training may lie in its helping students acquire declarative knowledge, which is the first step to proceduralisation on the learning continuum, and which is often not observable and cannot be reflected in performance. Given that in strategic awareness and in the development of strategy use, learning may or may not be observable, it is desirable to employ research instruments that can gauge both observable and unobservable changes in order to get a full picture of the impact of strategy intervention. The use of observations and stimulated recall interviews in the present study is one example of such an approach to research methodology.

Findings by Individual Target Strategies

'Resourcing' was the only target strategy on which the E class had consistent increases in both observable and reported strategy use, suggesting that the strategy is most teachable and amenable to reporting and that it is probably the most favoured strategy of junior L2 speakers when handling interactive, oral tasks. In fact, this finding corroborates one in Samuda (2001) which lends evidence that learners mined the language from the task input data (i.e., task rubrics) to enable greater precision in negotiating meaning in group oral tasks. Samuda (2001) argues that the mined language functions as

a communication strategy and as such it functions in a similar way as 'Resourcing' in the present study.

One plausible reason for the apparently high uptake of 'Resourcing' is that it enables the L2 speakers to cope with the problem of 'resource deficits' during the initial phase of speech processing (Dörnyei & Kormos, 1998, p. 356). Most L2 speakers, and elementary-intermediate learners in particular, probably face the problem of a lack of L2 vocabulary with the accompanying grammatical knowledge. The finding that only 'Resourcing' was consistently used by the E class is perhaps congruent with the argument that the deployment of this strategy might help fill lexis-related knowledge gaps of the L2 speaker. That is, the strategic use of the notes (i.e., 'Resourcing') enables the L2 speaker - almost effortlessly under time pressure - to solve the problems of 'what to say' and 'how to say it' during the initial planning and preverbal stage of speech processing (see Table 1).

In addition, the finding regarding 'Resourcing' appears to indicate that the speech processing framework (see Table 1) based on Dörnyei's and Kormos's (1998) may be useful for guiding the selection of communication strategies for learners at different course levels. Junior learners engaging in L2 oral tasks may find strategies that help them first and foremost solve problems at the initial stages of speech processing (i.e., planning and encoding the preverbal message) more 'user-friendly' than those strategies that presumably help learners solve problems at the higher stages of speech processing (i.e., monitoring the phonetic plan and the articulated speech; post-articulatory monitoring). This might explain why 'Self correction,' 'Seeking clarification,' 'Seeking confirmation' and 'Asking for repetition' were sparsely used or reported by students in the present study while there was evidence that some of these interaction strategies were picked up by more advanced students in earlier studies (Bejarano, Levine, Olshtain, & Steiner, 1997; Lam & Wong, 2000).

The other reason for the apparently high uptake of 'Resourcing' may be related to the learning stage (cognitive level) and proficiency level of the students and the corresponding linguistic and cognitive demands of

'Resourcing.' When the strategy intervention began, the students had only seven years of English. When using 'Resourcing,' all the learners need is to be able to comprehend, select and make use of the suggested ideas or language structures in the task instruction sheet in order to operate at a basic level during the English tasks. This is consistent with the notion that strategies that demand only surface processing tend to be favoured by elementary learners (Chesterfield & Chesterfield, 1985; Green & Oxford, 1995). It is therefore possible that oral strategies that enable speakers to formulate ideas and to express them in a relatively effortless way may serve as 'bedrock strategies' (Green & Oxford, 1995, p. 282) in oral communication for young learners, an example of which appears to be 'Resourcing.'

The notion of 'bedrock strategies' (Green & Oxford, 1995, p. 282) may also explain why strategy training did not have much impact on 'Paraphrasing,' which was another strategy recommended to learners on the assumption that they might use it to solve 'resource deficits' problems (Dörnyei & Kormos, 1998, p. 356). A possible reason may be attributed to its high linguistic demands. That is, L2 speakers have to have a repertoire of linguistic structures (i.e., vocabulary with accompanying grammatical structures) at their disposal in order that they can choose without effort. In other words, it may well be the case that a linguistically deficient speaker is likely to deploy 'Paraphrasing' to little avail. It may therefore be desirable to provide linguistic scaffolding for strategy use, thereby enabling speakers to use linguistically demanding strategies such as 'Paraphrasing.'

IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGY INSTRUCTION FOR L2 ORAL COMMUNICATION

The study discussed here is modest, and limited in its sample size and the narrowness of its scope. The target strategies taught to the learners need to be rigorously investigated beyond the Hong Kong context in order to build a picture of how they might interact with learners in other Asian cultures and

beyond given that cultural preferences affect strategy use (Oxford, 1996). However, although it is preliminary to talk of implications for strategy instruction, some issues have emerged that warrant further mentioning.

First, this study has sought to highlight explicit focusing to raise strategic awareness. Such awareness appears to be a necessary condition for developing declarative knowledge of strategy use, which is likely to be the first step to develop automatised strategy use. It may therefore be desirable to maximize the learners' knowledge about strategy use. This can be done by explicit strategy instruction whereby the learner is provided with the opportunity to understand the rationale for strategy use and to observe the demonstration of strategy use by the teacher.

It may also be necessary to provide time and space before and after the task proper for the learners to practise and reflect on strategy use. Prior to the task, learners can be asked to practise the use of the target strategies, which may enhance their deployment during the task proper. To facilitate post-task reflection and the development of strategic awareness, it may be desirable to incorporate procedures to access the learners' thought processes. One example of such procedures is to incorporate the use of stimulated recall interviews after the oral task to track strategic thinking (if any).

It takes time for strategy use to be fully proceduralised (automatic). This might explain why training in the use of communication strategies may have a greater impact on learners' knowledge about strategy use (i.e., declarative knowledge) than on implementation of strategy use (i.e., procedural knowledge) when the strategy intervention is conducted within a relatively short duration. Hence, it may be necessary to conduct strategy training for an extended period of time to bring about observed strategy use. Moreover, strategy training is likely to be a gradual process combined with developing awareness of the learning process on the part of the learners. To make provisions for strategies to be assimilated, applied and transferred to similar tasks, it is desirable to fully incorporate strategy-based instruction into the normal curriculum on a longitudinal basis to yield optimal results.

This study has also sought to open discussion on the possibility of

introducing 'Resourcing' as one example of "bedrock strategies" (Green & Oxford, 1995, p. 282) to elementary L2 learners to achieve their communicative intent and to solve communication problems under real-time constraints. That is, elementary ESL learners might benefit from exposure to "bedrock strategies" (p. 282) that help them first and foremost cope with the difficulty of 'what to say' or 'how to say it' without incurring undue linguistic and cognitive demands. As time passes, they might be able to internalize some of the vocabulary or structures, which will in turn benefit learners' inter-language development.

In addition, junior L2 learners may also benefit if they are provided with linguistic scaffolding when deploying strategies so that learners might be able to employ them to good effect (Lam & Wong, 2000). For example, some students may need to be taught the language of clarification (i.e., 'Seeking clarification') or confirmation (i.e., 'Seeking confirmation') or may need to see ample examples of alternative phrasing (i.e., 'Paraphrasing') in order that they can be confident strategy users. In many circumstances, teachers may need to provide students with appropriate and accurate linguistic models (Littlewood & Liu, 1996).

Nonetheless, given the exploratory nature of the study, it raises more questions than it addresses. First, a more long-term longitudinal study is recommended so that qualitative changes in strategy use (if any) can be tracked and the sustainability of strategy use may be studied. Second, the same strategy-based instruction may be implemented at a different course level (e.g., Secondary Six) so that the results can be compared with findings of Secondary Two students in the present study. This way, we may be able to understand whether students at a more advanced course level would respond differently to the same set of strategies. Finally, it may be desirable to try out other task types apart from group work discussions as strategy use may partially be dependent on task type (Wenden, 1995). It would be interesting to study how strategy training in the L2 classroom might impact on oral presentations, information-gap activities, role plays, just to name a few.

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