Abstract
When trying to communicate in a second or foreign language (L2), non-native speakers (NNSs) or learners encounter inevitable communicative difficulties. In order to overcome this confrontation and prevent miscommunication, they usually need more time than native speakers, as well as they have to negotiate for meaning. Despite these difficulties, learners are normally able to cope with foreign language communication. The focus of the present research is to examine the different techniques, that is, communication strategies (CS), used by learners to communicate in interactional situations in a foreign language.

The methodology employed analyzed 4 hours approximately of oral production in Spanish involving six NNSs of intermediate level while conversing with two native speakers (NSs). A total of 834 communication strategies were identified, classified, and analyzed. This study has yielded evidence of the existence and usage of communication strategies, as well as has noticed that communication strategies remain an important element in the learning of a foreign language. Although there was not significant variance in the choice of specific communication strategies used amongst the interlocutors, a strong interference from native language with the use of borrowing strategies was unexpectedly found. This finding suggests that communicative classroom tasks aimed at eliciting communication strategies should be employed, so that students could be offered the opportunity to acquire and practice the more problematic patterns in their language.

1. Defining the Concept of Communication Strategy in L2
After initial proposals to define the concept of CS (Tarone, Frauenfelder and Selinker, 1976; Tarone, Cohen and Dumas, 1976; Tarone, 1977), Tarone (1980, 1981) built a last definition of CSs with the intention of recognizing the previously overlooked interactional function of CSs. Moreover, this author also accounted for the role played by the interlocutor in the strategic communication process: “A mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared” (Tarone, 1981: 288). In this last attempt, Tarone made reference to two features that were the two basic defining characteristics of CSs: language use and interactional function. CSs were used to negotiate an agreement on a meaning between two interlocutors and, in this way, ensured that both of them were talking about the same thing.

Finally, taking all the previous considerations into account, Tarone (1981: 288) proposed the following criteria to characterize CSs:
1. A speaker desires to communicate meaning x to a listener;
2. The speaker believes the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure desired to communicate meaning x is unavailable, or is not shared with the listener; thus
3. The speaker chooses to
   a. Avoid – not attempt to communicate meaning x –or
   b. Attempt alternate means to communicate meaning x. The speaker stops trying alternatives when it seems clear to the speaker that there is shared meaning.

Although these three conditions have been widely used in later research and proven to be extremely helpful for the identification of CS uses in interlanguage (IL) performance, it is inevitable that Tarone’s definition has been generally accepted without being questioned. That is, it has been highly criticized by those scholars who adopt a psycholinguistic view on CS use. On the one hand, Færch and Kasper (1983) argued against the interactional condition because they considered that this excluded the possibility of using CSs in a monologue.

That is, whereas Tarone (1980, 1981) described CSs in interactional terms, Færch and Kasper (1983) located these strategies in the individual user. They assumed that the speaker was the person who experienced the problem and was, subsequently, the only one involved in developing a strategic plan for its solution. In their view, CSs were mental plans that belonged to the speech production process.

With these considerations in mind, I therefore followed Tarone’s approach to and classification (1981) of the conceptualization and definition of CSs:

1. Paraphrase:
   a. Approximation: use of a single target language vocabulary item or structure, which the learner knows is not correct, but which shares enough semantic features in common with the desired item to satisfy the speaker, e.g.: pipe for water pipe;
   b. Word coinage: the learner makes up a new word in order to communicate a desired concept, e.g.: “airball” for balloon;
   c. Circumlocution: the learner describes the characteristics or elements of the objects or action instead of using the appropriate target language item or structure, e.g.: She is smoking something. I don’t know what’s its name;

2. Borrowing:
   a. Literal translation: the learner translates word for word from the native language;
   b. Language switch: the learner uses the native language term without bothering to translate;
   c. Appeal for assistance: the learner asks for the correct term, e.g.: what is this?;
   d. Mime: the learner uses non-verbal strategies in place of a lexical item or action;

3. Avoidance:
   a. Topic avoidance: the learner simply tries not to talk about concepts for which the target language item or structure is not known;
   b. Message abandonment: the learner begins to talk about a concept but is unable to continue and stops in mid-utterance.
2. Aims of the Study

The present research attempts to analyze CS use in face-to-face oral interaction in Spanish involving six NNSs conversing with two NSs. I believe that it is accurate to have NNSs and NSs participants in order to see whether they use similar or different interactional procedures amongst them.

Bearing in mind that the ultimate goal of this paper is to identify CS used by learners of Spanish as a foreign language in interactional situations, this study aims to answer these questions:

1. What communication strategies do the students use in oral communication in Spanish?
2. To what extent do the communication strategies used vary amongst the interlocutors (i.e., NNS vs. NS / NNS vs. NNS)?

This investigation attempts to be compared and completed with the same participants during their sojourn abroad. In so doing, this study expects to answer the last research question:

3. How do the instruction setting and the experience abroad effect in the use of communication strategies?

In what follows, I present the design, development, and results of the data obtained in the study at home setting.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

All the informants taking part in this project were students at the University of Florida. This study was comprised of six participants, they were undergraduate students, had a mid-intermediate level of proficiency, had studied Spanish in the University of Florida for 3 years, and they were minoring and/or majoring in this foreign language. They were all native speakers of English. They had studied and learned Spanish in an instructional setting only. The six of them had applied to study abroad during the summer semester 2010 in Guanajuato, México. They ranged in age from 20 to 26, with a median age of 23.

Ideally, I selected an equal number of men and women. Therefore, this group of learners was relatively homogeneous in terms of proficiency level, linguistic background, age and sex. The six participants had freely volunteered to collaborate in this research. None of the participants was acquainted with the research study or other participants.

With respect to the native speakers, there were two participants. While one was the very researcher, the other was a person who did not work in teaching and/o research fields.

3.2. Data Collection Procedure

There were two meetings (2 hours/each) throughout the semester (spring semester 2010) with the crucial intent of obtaining the most natural speech out of the four hours. This work was conducted in two convenient settings: a quiet café on campus, where we had a coffee, and my own house, where I invited the participants for a Spanish dinner. Both interviews were conducted exclusively in Spanish.
For the data collection, I relied on audio- and videotaped instruments. Thus, not only verbal, but paralinguistic CSs could be gathered. Of these tapes, I transcribed orthographically those pertinent segments of production for this study. That is, I analyzed samples of language that could be considered as representative as possible of everyday naturally occurring FL communication, as well as suitable for CS research (i.e., involving identifiable and comparable CS uses). All of the CSs employed by the participants were categorized according to the taxonomy developed for this study (Tarone’s taxonomy, 1981). The quantitative analysis was done by a simple frequency count of the CSs produced for each category. At the end, the use of CSs was studied qualitatively.

3.3. The Tasks

As suggested by some researchers, a first method relied on photograph descriptions or picture-story narration tasks. As found, these instruments would make it possible to elicit extended samples of unplanned IL discourse (Váradi, 1973; Tarone, 1977). The researcher pre-selected the photographs or pictures taking into account the proficiency level of the learners (ACTFL).

These pictures, of realia content, illustrated different contexts, such as popular cities over Mexico, national festivities in this country, Mexican customs or habits, among others.

Following others attempts in CS, there was a second and crucial part in conducting the face-to-face interactions: topics introduced in a spontaneous way as if it were unstructured conversations. It has been proven that the samples of IL data obtained with these conversational tasks can be considered closer to naturally occurring interactions (Liskin-Gasparro, 1996). Topics of the open conversations included the students’ families, their studies, their free time, their hometowns, the university, their expectations for their sojourn abroad, their likings, the most exiting prank and the most horrible fright in their life, amongst others.

4. Analysis

Here I have analyzed two of the participants’ (referred as P1 and P4) data which displayed major aspects of interest concerning the CSs in interaction.

On the one hand, P1 (male) demonstrated a wide range of communication strategies, but they varied significantly between the two environments. While he made a vast usage of paraphrase in photograph descriptions (in the café), in the face to face open conversation in my house borrowing was surprisingly the main strategy instead.

In the café I noticed a few cases of borrowing (especially mime and literal translation versus language switch and appeal for assistance) and no instances of avoidance (either topic avoidance or message abandonment). His oral performance showed that he had enough language competence in the topics and descriptions related to photographs. Although the variety of topics was broad, he did a good job in describing and commenting the situations. All the photographs belonged to the researcher and real people (i.e., the researcher himself, alongside with his family and friends) were portrayed.
As stated before, P1 refused to resort to the strategy of avoidance (either topic avoidance or message abandonment). I believe the reason is that he had the possibility to improvise and focus on the aspects he found most interesting.

The main strategy P1 employed was that of paraphrase, among which approximation was highly repeated. That is, P1 used an approximation CS by presenting a related interlanguage term, which he believed would share enough semantic features with the original one to be understood by the interlocutors. (1) “Así, ¿la gente puede hacer así y dormir una siesta sin problemas? (...) Yo creo así porque ayuda a estar más descansado (...)” (C, 5693, M)[“So, can people do so and take a nap without problems? (...) I think so because it helps to be more relaxed (...)”] In (1) P1 did so most often with the use of the word “así” to a much greater degree expected in the speech of a (even the) native speaker (speakers) of Spanish, mainly because the transfer from the L1 term “so”, which works in English but not in Spanish in these contexts.

As far as the cases of borrowing are concerned, there were few literal translations and some use of mime. In regards to the literal translations, it was surprising that he was still using a syntactic construction that is highly emphasized in the elementary and intermediate levels and that is expected to have been acquired at this point.

The following example of this strategy illustrates this phenomenon:

(2) “¿Para él estar contento (...) ibas a pescar cada fin de semana (...)?” (C, 3357, M)
[“For him to be happy (…) would you go fishing every weekend (…)?”]

The previous utterance displayed a syntactic structure which is non-existent in Spanish and clearly a L1 translation. It is by reproducing the English model that this sentence turned out to be ungrammatical. In other words, there was a syntactic structure imported from English. Rather, the correct forms in Spanish would have been as (2.1) illustrates:

(2.1) “Para que él estuviera contento (...) iba a pescar cada fin de semana (…)”

With reference to the mime strategy, P1 found some problems on expressing certain TL references. To solve this and put his ideas across well, he used non-verbal strategies in place of a lexical item or action. A clear example that emerged in the interactional data is as follows:

(3) “¿Son estas fotos del mismo año? Aquí pareces más joven y aquí un poco más viejo. Creo que es por el… la…” {Y se toca la barbilla, haciendo el gesto de una perilla} (C, 6752, M)
[“Are these pictures from the same year? Here you look younger and here a bit older. I think that it is because of the… the…” {And he touches his chin, making the gesture of a goatee}]

Although this kind of behavior could be interpreted as a simultaneous combination of an oral complete omission and a nonverbal strategy, because of the fact that this lexical item appeared later and, again, could not pronounce it orally, I assume that the analysis of interactional data reveals, however, that non-verbal strategy (most frequently hand performed gestures) played a major role and could not be ignored in any comprehensive account of CSs. Language switch or appeal for assistance could have been easily employed as well, in order to help this situation, however, there were no signals of its usage.

In general terms, his oral performance shows that he had enough language competence in the topics and descriptions related to photographs. Whereas P1 made a vast usage of paraphrase in the description section, in the
face to face open conversation borrowing was surprisingly the main strategy employed. Within the borrowing category, language switch was very common. That is, P1 used the native language term without bothering to translate it into Spanish. Let us consider the following example:

(4) “Ahora en el programa de Bachelors (…)” (C, 6524, M)  
[“Now in the Bachelors program (…)”]

It is also surprising that P1 employed in the face to face interaction more appeal for assistance than in the photograph description. I believe that the reason may be because students are used to being assessed in oral exams with the use of picture description, during which they are not allowed to ask questions to the instructor. Since this situation was similar, I assume that P1 abstained from asking questions and, instead, produced as much as possible by selecting the structures and lexical items he knew. In the oral interview with an open topic L1 tended to ask for the correct term more frequently –something students are used and encouraged to do in the classroom when interacting in Spanish. A sample of this strategy is illustrated as follows:

(5) “Hace un mes conoci a chica de México y ella estudiaba económicas (…) Ella se gradúa en mayo (…) Cuando hablaba con ella, siempre era en español porque todas sus amigas y sus amigos hablaban en español aquí en UF y nunca se comunic… no sé cómo decirlo, ¿communicate? (…) en inglés” (C, 4039, M)

[A month ago I met a girl from Mexico and she studied economics (…) She is graduating in May (…) When I would talk with her, it was always in Spanish because all her friends would speak Spanish here at UF and she would never communicate… I don’t know how to say it, to communicate? in English]  
In the conversation, P1 demonstrated a lower use of non-verbal and literal translation strategies, but a similar usage of the paraphrase and avoidance categories.

On the other hand, P4 (female) showed a wide range of communication strategies and in this case they did not vary significantly between the two environments as happened in P1. That is, P4 employed a regular amount of strategies for both the photograph descriptions and in the face to face open conversation. Although P4 used various communication strategies, primary among them literal translations stood out. This was basically the case of the placement of a preposition at the end of a verb phrase – typical of the interlanguage of native speakers of English. In the following example, P4 was describing a picture of El Día de los Muertos in Mexico:

(6) “Esta figura que todos los americanos piensan en se llama catrina y es una de las figuras más populares en esta celebración. Si voy a México una vez en esta fecha, experimentar esta fiesta algo que yo sueño en (…)” (M, 2657, F)

[This character all Americans think about is catrinas and it represents one of the most popular figures in this celebration. If I ever went to Mexico at this time, experiencing this festivity is something I dream about (…) ]

These lines depict clearly the literal translation from L1 to L2, since P4 was following the exact word order from the L1. The correct way to have expressed the use of prepositional verbs is as follows:

(6.1) “Esta figura en la que todos los americanos piensan se llama catrinas (…) Si voy a México alguna vez en esta festividad, vivir esta celebración es algo en lo que yo sueño (…)”
Another strategy P4 most relied upon was language switch. P4 used to switch for single nouns or expressions, as in the following utterances:

(7) “Entonces, ¿los fines de semana ustedes siempre celebran un party, donde hay gente muy cool? (…) Mi profesor dice que la margarita de México es muy deliciosa and I love it.” (M, 5427, F)[Then, do you always have a party on the weekend, where there are very cool people? (…) My teacher says that Mexican margarita is delicious and I love it]

There were some examples of appeal for assistance and mime. One of the examples of mime corresponds to the description P4 was making of the gloves women wear during special religious occasions. For this description, since P4 could not remember the word “guantes”, P4 relied upon a physical prompt to get her point across and said that gloves, an item that consists of five parts for each finger, were apparently very typical for the penitents in this festivity because all of them were wearing those. Under the parading of avoidance, there were no speech acts that could be called topic avoidance or message abandonment.

In sum, while P1 relied upon the paraphrase in the photograph description and upon the borrowing in the open conversation, P4, on the contrary, maintained a regular use (except for the avoidance category) of the communication strategies both in the photograph description and the face to face open conversation.

5. Results

A total of 834 instances of communication strategies were identified in the oral production from the sample of six NNSs in both tasks: interview through photograph descriptions and interview through open conversations.

Table 1 shows the frequency of CS use in task through photograph descriptions, while Table 2 represents the frequency of CS use in task through open conversation. Whereas P1, P3, and P5 correspond to the male’s (M) data, P2, P4, and P6 show the communication strategies employed by the females (F). Table 3, on the other hand, displays the frequency of CS use for all students (males and females) in both tasks (photograph descriptions and open conversations).

In general terms, the main strategies used in the photograph description are circumlocution, language switch, and mime. These findings are stable for both males and females, so this implies that this may be a common phenomenon in the interlanguage process. That circumlocution, language switch, and mime outstand in this research is perceived as regular strategies that are also found in the classroom setting.

If compared to other strategies which are not put into practice in the classroom, such as topic avoidance or word coinage, these results show it. A regular aspect students in the mid-intermediate level are accustomed to doing in the classroom is describing the characteristics of the objects or action in place of using the appropriate target language (TL) item, since they have acquired the necessary tools to do so in their previous years.
As established by ACTFL guidelines, NNSs in the mid-intermediate level are able to create with the language by combining and recombining learned elements, are able to handle successfully most uncomplicated communicative tasks and social situations as well. Interviews also show some emerging evidence of connected discourse, particularly for simple narration and/or description.

As claimed by some researchers (Váradi, 1973; Tarone, 1977), these data show that the method based on photograph descriptions or picture-story narration tasks has made it possible to elicit extended samples of unplanned IL discourse and equally reliable as vernacular language if compared to the outcomes from the face-to-face open conversations.

Therefore, as Table 2 illustrates, the frequency of CS use in task through open conversation shows that circumlocution, language switch, and mime are again the most dependant ones in the learner’s oral interaction. These data display that the fact the students are exposed to different task orally does not mean that they are more likely to be more accurate in ones than in others.
That topics are introduced in a spontaneous way as if it were unstructured conversations has revealed that the samples of IL data obtained with these conversational tasks can be considered closer to naturally occurring interactions (Liskin-Gasparro, 1996). As the results show, these conversations with open topics are also found in the other task.

However, out of the three common strategies (i.e., circumlocution, language switch, and mime) in both tasks, language switch is much more relevant in the open topic conversation rather than in the picture description. While in the former task there are a total of 108 language switch strategies, in the latter task there are 54 cases instead. In terms of sex, there is a stable increase both in males and in females. I believe that the fact that the NNS uses the native language term without bothering to translate it into the L2 reflects an issue that appears not only in the IL development, but also in the vernacular language when dealing with unstructured conversations.

On the other hand, a salient aspect from both tasks that should be pointed out is the communication strategy of appeal for assistance. If the results from Table 1 are compared to the outcomes from Table 2, there is a wide difference in terms of frequency. In other words, while in the photograph description there are 32 cases, in the open conversation NNS have relied upon appeal for assistance 58 times. Although in terms of sex it has been found that females in this research are more prone than males to ask for the correct term, there is a stable frequency of this speech act for each sex in both tasks. That is, while male participants have a total of 11 and 21 occurrences in photograph description and open conversation respectively, female participants, on the other hand, employ this strategy 21 and 37 times.

In general terms, I understand that in open conversations NNSs feel more comfortable to ask for assistance rather than describing pictures. While the former task is freer in terms of topics, the latter one may restrict the vocabulary the learner have access to, which may guide the learner to express what s/he knows rather than appealing for assistance.

Finally, Table 3 displays the frequency of communication strategies use for all informants (males and females) in both tasks (photograph descriptions and open conversations). While the topic avoidance strategy (6.72 %) represented the lowest frequency, the language switch (19.42 %) was the strategy these participants relied upon heavily.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>[%]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paraphrase</td>
<td>Approximation</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>8.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Word coinage</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>9.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Circumlocution</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>14.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowing</td>
<td>Literal translation</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>9.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language switch</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>19.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appeal for assistance</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mime</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>11.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>Topic avoidance</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>6.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Message abandonment</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>9.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>834</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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That these participants show signs of spontaneity and, therefore, do not tend to have short falls of real autonomy of expression goes in correlation with this proficiency level, since this latter characteristic is typically found, according to ACTFL, in the novice-high level.

Moreover, that language switch is highly dependant in these data do not represent the IL expectations for this level, since this communication strategy is more likely to appear in intermediate-low NNS rather in intermediate-mid NNS.

6. Conclusions
In general terms, the methodology employed in this study permitted to analyze 4 hours approximately of oral production in Spanish involving 6 non-native speakers conversing with 2 native speakers and to identify and classify 834 communication strategies.

The ultimate aim was to identify CS used by learners of Spanish as a foreign language in interactional situations. Although the methodology presented certain limitations (involving only 8 informants), this study has yielded evidence of the existence and usage of communication strategies, as well as has noticed that communication strategies remain an important element in the learning of a foreign language. As far as the second research question is concerned, it has been noticed that there was not significant variance in the choice of specific communication strategies used amongst the interlocutors (i.e., NNS vs. NS / NNS vs. NNS).

Furthermore, the present study attempted to be expanded and built upon by interviewing the same participants two more times during their sojourn abroad during summer semester 2010 in Guanajuato, Mexico. Thus this second part of the study could elucidate if the instruction setting and the experience abroad would effect in the use of communication strategies. This contribution would be beneficial for the SLA field, with focus on the Study Abroad studies, since there is no empirical baseline that looks into the gains of communication strategies compared in two different instruction settings.

To sum up, as the ACTFL states, these participants were able to handle successfully the communicative tasks and social situations. They could talk about self and family members, as well as describe a series of situations in pictures. They could participate in conversations on topics beyond the most immediate needs. Besides, conversational strategies were often found, especially because the NNS struggles to create appropriate language forms.

However, surprisingly, there was strong interference from native language with the use of borrowing strategies, including language switch, mime, appeal for assistance, and literal translation. If this was unexpectedly is mainly because this strategy was more common in intermediate-low NNS rather in intermediate-mid NNS. Therefore I would suggest that communicative classroom tasks aimed at eliciting communication strategies should be employed. Thus, students would be offered the opportunity to acquire and practice the more problematic patterns in their language.
7. References

ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages http://www.actfl.org


