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MAESTRÍA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA
(MEILE)

Creating Awareness of Communication Strategies amongst Upper Intermediate Students

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Chapter One: Introduction

In this day and age, citizens who lack the ability to speak English fluently give the impression of having fewer possibilities to access a better quality of life than those who manage to speak the language uninterruptedly. Consequently, people seem to be willing to enroll in courses where they can learn this language. English has become so important nowadays that it is now named a lingua franca in the 21st century. Davies and Fraenkl (2004) define lingua franca as an international language that is used around the world to talk about business, medical and technological breakthroughs. Therefore, people use English as a common linguistic code to share advances in their field with people from a different language community (Aguilar & Moreno, 2009). Similarly, people who speak this language have created speech communities where they are able to interact with others and express their ideas around the world, since people who communicate in English do not only do it for mere practice, but because they have an objective in mind (Davies & Pearse (2000). In sum, most of the societies in the world are forming a common and global society where the members can interact with each other for diverse purposes. However, this process is still in progress as not everybody has obtained the abilities to be part of this global village for several reasons. One of the crucial prerequisites to enter this village is, apparently, to be a fluent English speaker.

Nowadays, there are more non-native speakers trying to establish a conversation in English than natives (Davies & Fraenkl, 2004). To word it differently, the number of students who learn English as a foreign language is constantly growing. Consequently, there is a constant demand for courses that might assist learners to be proficient speakers of the language. In general, these students have diverse reasons to learn English; however, Davies and Pearse (2000) claim that in English courses students' main objective is to learn how to communicate in the target language. Nevertheless, although academic institutions know the relevance of learning English, it seems that teachers are not equipping students with genuine
tools that might help them become effective speakers. In most cases, learners apparently face a constraint when starting genuine conversations. Even though they might utter a well-structured sentence, the meaning and their fluency might not be adequate for the context. Jones (2007) sheds light on the fact that fluency does not mean speaking quickly without hesitating. It means having the ability to express oneself despite the gaps in knowledge, errors, and all the necessary vocabulary. That is, fluency means being a ‘smart speaker’; someone who knows how to take part in a conversation for the sake of communication.

To become a ‘smart speaker’, an English as a foreign language (EFL) learner requires proper guidance in the art of communication. It is believed that communication strategies (CSs) are the most effective tools that a student can learn how to use so as to become a competent user of English (Faucette, 2001; Oxford, 1990). Mendez (2007) states that, if one of the students’ objectives is to be communicatively competent, they need to use CSs to achieve this. However, it has been observed that although most academic institutions advocate the advantages of helping students to become communicatively competent, the learners’ exposure to CSs during the course is often limited. With this in mind, I decided to examine my own practice to discover if this were the case and if so, design, implement, and then evaluate an action plan, given that as Faucette (2001:10) states:

…if one of the goals of language teaching is to produce independent, skillful L2 strategy users, and if we think it is important for our learners to be able to participate in real communication outside the classroom, then how can we ignore communication strategies in our L2 lessons.

Therefore, training students about CSs frequently aims at creating awareness of these strategies so that learners may be able to make use of them and hopefully become ‘smart speakers’ of the language, as well as perhaps even become autonomous English users.
1. Rationale
The first impression that probably comes to our minds when we hear the word *communication* is an exchange of ideas between two people (Crystal 1992). In this process, there are four elements that are in constant interaction. These elements are: the speaker, the message, the medium and the hearer (Crystal 1992). It is imperative that these four factors are present at the moment communication occurs, otherwise if one element is not present or fails, the whole communicative act will be a failure (Crystal 1992). This is called a breakdown in communication, which may happen when the message is not the appropriate for the context, when the speaker fails at ordering the utterances; or when the listener is not able to decode the given message (Crystal 1992). These and other circumstances may cause both the speaker and the listener to interrupt the verbal or written interaction and eventually leave the conversation. To word it differently, this problem may arise as a result of a lack of communicative competence.

Şenel (2012:49) pinpoints that

> Communication is the transfer of emotions, thoughts and information to others by all possible means, so we can say that language is mainly for communication.

Even though there are various ways to communicate something, apparently oral communication is the most used in the 21st century in various domains of daily life, for the simple reason that speakers do not need any tool such as a: “pen, pencil, desk, paper, book, and radio” or preparation to speak during their daily routines (Şenel, 2012:49). However, when people from diverse parts of the world want to share their ideas, the language that is used to do so is usually a lingua franca. Hence, this implies that both the speaker and the listener share that common linguistic code. Nevertheless, as has been discovered, speaking a foreign language does not only mean knowing the rules of English, it also requires the use of language for communicative purposes (Şenel, 2012). In other words, English language users need to know how to improve their speaking abilities and overcome all, or at least most, of their speaking problems, such as turning to their
mother tongue excessively and speaking with interruptions. Nonetheless, recent studies have proved that learners are not being equipped with the necessary tools to speak in the EFL classroom (Şenel, 2012). As a case of point, Horwitz (2001) claims with his research on “anxious and non-anxious language learners’ reactions to their own oral performance” that:

…students with high anxiety have tendencies to fear their peers’ negative evaluation in communication since they think that this will cause them to seem foolish. As implied, students mostly fear of the feedback from their teachers and their classmates. This causes them feel greater anxiety in classroom activities which require speaking and listening.

(In Şenel, 2012:51)

It seems that school policies, the national language program, and the society demand EFL students to be communicatively competent because it is necessary for the learners’ future career. However, it gives the impression that they are not teaching the learner how to achieve this. The language programs and their contents, in many cases, do not appear to be congruent, since they expect the learners to speak without having been instructed on how to speak, or the strategies that they can use to help them express their ideas. Thus, apparently there is an urgent need for speaking workshops or courses that teach the students how to communicate uninterruptedly under the given circumstances.

2. Research Context

This research was carried out at a private English school located in Xalapa, Veracruz. In this academic institution, students are required to study six levels of the language ranking from basic, intermediate, pre-advanced, advanced, and a preparation course for the TOEFL test to obtain a certification diploma. Each level lasts four months. Thus, the total time that learners are expected to spend at this school is two years.

The academic environment at the aforementioned school was of great assistance for this research as the school was equipped with all the devices and sources
required to develop this research. It seems relevant to mention that in this context while I was observing my own practice, I realized that even though it seems that most teachers do their best to enhance the students’ fluency skills, most learners failed at developing this ability to speak continuously. Therefore, decisions were made to investigate the matter and propose a course of action that might be of help for both students and teachers for solving this problem.

3. Research Participants
The participants in this research were nine upper intermediate students who had been studying English for twelve months in the aforementioned school. They met four days a week for one hour. The group was integrated by two males and seven females. All of them were adults, who were from 18 to 44 years of age.

Before entering this academic institution, their prior experience learning English was limited. To word it differently, they had not selectively studied this language in the past, except for the instances when they had classes in secondary education. However, nowadays they have been exclusively learning the language for five months. Before enrolling in the course, they were asked their interests in the language. In the placement test, they claimed to be eager to take the course of English for several reasons, to mention some: to listen to music, to speak to foreigners, or to make more money in their jobs. Nevertheless, they pinpoint that the main motive for them to study English is to have a better job.

4. Description of the Problem
The problem that was identified amongst my upper intermediate class is that they do not manage to fill the gap between what they know and what they do not know when speaking. In other words, while the students in this research seemed to be grammatically competent, they, in most of the cases, failed when conversing. It was noticed that when they interacted with other students of the same or advanced levels, they did not manage to indicate that they intended to continue speaking and did not know how to express certain words. As a result, the other learners
constantly interrupted them or corrected them. This hindered these students’ ability to speak fluently and develop conversational skills.

5. Aim
The first objective was to carry out an initial research phase in order to verify that the problem existed, and to identify, as well as to understand, the characteristics and nature of this problem in my teaching practice. The following objective included reflecting and discovering the methods in order to design, and implement an action plan in an attempt to solve this problem.

6. Research Questions
In order to achieve the objectives, the following research questions were designed:

- How may I help my students to speak fluently?
- How may fostering my students’ awareness of CSs help them to become more fluent?

7. Map of Research Report
This map of the research report represents a brief description of the contents of this research paper in order to guide the reader through this investigation. In Chapter One, meaningful aspects of the study that explain the background of the research are discussed. These aspects are: the rational of topic investigation, research context, participants, aims and research questions. Chapter Two examines the literature related to the problem on which this paper is based. Chapter Three illustrates the methodology implemented in this research, as well as the design and implementation of an action plan in an attempt to provide a solution to the problem. Following, Chapter Four mentions the findings after the implementation of the plan of action, as well as the data collection techniques that were used to collect this information. Finally, Chapter Five provides a discussion and a reflection on the outcomes obtained. In this final stage, the implications and limitations are also mentioned.
Chapter Two: Communicative Competence

In order to understand and provide a panorama of the use of communication strategies, important issues are included within this chapter. To begin with, the term of communicative competence is discussed. This comprises its story and breakthrough in the EFL area, as well as relevant theorists in this domain including Hymes, Chomsky, and Brumfit amongst others who have contributed to this field of research. Finally, the development of learning strategies, in conjunction with communication strategies and their possible relationship are examined.

1. Communicative Competence

Some decades ago, competence was defined as mere possession of grammatical knowledge. This notion gave students limited opportunities to put into practice their linguistic repertoire. This, as a result, in most of the cases, led to a failure in communication. Chomsky was the person who introduced the term “competence” (in Brumfit, 1979: 3). He defines it as “the ideal speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language” (in Brumfit, 1979: 3). Here, the limited perception of competence and its tendency towards grammatical knowledge is visible. A response to Chomsky’s view of competence was provided by Hymes (1971). He states that there are some other factors apart from grammar to be taken into consideration for learners to become competent. He pinpoints that:

Being grammatically correct is not enough. Learners need to be aware of what is usually said in a given situation. In other words, they need to know “when to speak, when not, what to talk about with whom, when, where, and in what manner” (Hymes, 1971 in Davies & Fraenkl 2004:143)

To word it differently, Hymes (1971) suggests that the term communicative competence is an umbrella term that covers four other competences: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic (Canale & Swain, 1980). Canale and Swain (1980) highlight that a proficient speaker is able to emit utterances which are well-
structured, cohesive and coherent. In addition to that, the utterances are politically correct, and as such they are intelligible to the hearer(s). As a result, the message that the speaker sends is effective and the verbal interaction between the people is successful.

Although people have been giving a plethora of importance to the abovementioned competences, it seems that the use of strategies in the EFL classroom has been neglected (Aliakbari, N/Y). Therefore, it appears to be important to create more meaningful awareness of the relevance of strategies when learning a language and the vast benefits that these can provide learners with. Moreover, it also seems significant to differentiate the type of strategies that exist in order to understand them and their function.

2. Learning Strategies (LSs)
It has been observed that mere possession of grammatical knowledge does not guarantee success when speaking. This is one reason for assisting EFL learners to make use of strategies to make associations between what they know and what they desire to express. Similarly, Marín (2007:16) provides a chart with a chronological order of how the term strategy has been defined throughout the years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubin (1975:43)</td>
<td>By strategies I mean the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stern (1983:405)</td>
<td>In our view the term strategy is best reserved for general tendencies or over all characteristics of the approach used by the language learner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charmot (1987:71)</td>
<td>Learning strategies are deliberate techniques, approaches and deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate their learning, recall of both linguistic and content area information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubin (1987:23)</td>
<td>Language learning strategies are strategies that contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affects learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The term language strategy refers to language learning behaviors that learners actually engage in to learn and regulate their learning of a second language.

Learning strategies are viewed as learning processes which are consciously selected by the learners. The element of choice is important here because this is what gives a strategy its special character.

The special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to comprehend, learn or retain new information.

Although, none of the above definitions have been taken for granted, it is possible to see that they share similarities and that there are some descriptions that overlap in their meaning. For instance, Faucette (2001:3) pinpoints that language learning strategies are “specific actions, behaviors, and procedures involved in the process of learning”. This implies that the use of LSs is always present in the learning process, even after putting the new knowledge into practice.

The benefits of using LSs are numerous, since research has proved that effective language students are catalogued as competent users of strategies, who succeed at the moment of strategy choice. Therefore, it can be deduced that learners who make an appropriate use of strategies are more likely to be successful when learning English, while limited strategies users often fail (Faucette, 2001; Oxford, 1990). Hence, strategies are a vital complement for students to become communicatively competent. However, this gives the impression that their significance in the speaking field is not being instructed and that not many learners are exposed to the use of strategies. This is probably one of the reasons why some EFL students manage to do well on grammar tests, but fail when conversing.

3. Communication Strategies (CSs) and Learning Strategies (LSs)
It can be inferred that LSs is an umbrella term that covers diverse kinds of strategies, including CSs. LSs are learning tools that help learners retain new
knowledge, while CSs are linguistic tools that students use when having a verbal interaction with others. Similarly, Tarone (1980) points out that whereas the adoption of LSs is the students’ motivation to learn. However, the prime incentive of learners using CSs is to communicate. In addition to this, Færch and Kasper (1983b:2 in Faucette, 2001:4) pinpoint that:

...learning strategies contribute to the development of interlanguage systems, whereas communication strategies are used by a speaker when faced with some difficulty due to his communicative ends outrunning communicative means.

Hence, CSs are the types of strategies that students who are motivated to speak use to manage to communicate even though their linguistic repertoire is limited.

Further, communication strategies enhance the efficacy of communication and, although Hymes (1971) does not mention the term strategic competence in his definition of communicative competence, Canale and Swain (1980) do. According to Bachman (1990:107), strategic competence

...is seen as the capacity that relates language competence [...] to the language user’s knowledge structures and the features of the context in which communication takes place.

In other words, the use of strategies is what permits speakers to relate their linguistic repertoire to both grammar and sociolinguistic competence. In addition, Canale and Swain (1980:30) provide another definition of this strategic skill. They highlight that this competence refers to the:

...verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence.

That is to say, communication strategies are the joints of a speech corpus, and without the use of these devices the speaker might find some difficulties to get his/her message through. What is more, Aliakbari, (N/Y:1) claims that:
….It is a solid fact that no second language learner's, or even no native speaker's linguistic repertoire or control of language is perfect. Native as well as non-native speakers of a particular language sometimes struggle to find the appropriate expression or grammatical structure when they intend to get their meaning across.

Thus, if speakers pay closer attention to what they say and how they say it, they may realize that they constantly make use of CSs when speaking. However, it still seems that the idea of CSs is quite a “Cinderella” term (Aliakbari, N/Y: 2) that has not been given appropriate consideration in the EFL field. It is deduced that when Aliakbari (N/Y: 2) refers to Cinderella, he refers to the fact that almost nobody cares about these strategies because of the probable lack of knowledge and awareness of their existence and benefits.

Another reason for such a phenomenon might be related to the teachability of such strategies, as some researchers argue that the strategy use might be transferred from L1 to L2. Kellerman (1991) states that there is no need for a teacher to teach CSs to students, professors should only teach the language. Nevertheless, studies using an interlocutor and comparing actual L1 performance to L2 have found many differences between both of them and, as a result, the outcomes of their research lead to advocating the teaching of CSs (Dörnyei 1995; Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991, 1994; Tarone, 1984).

What is more, research in LSs instruction points out that CSs instruction may also facilitate English learning (Faucette, 2001). Therefore, CSs should not remain a silent and fixed term. It apparently should be given a lot more interest in the EFL field, as it might assist learners to develop strategic competence, which at the same time might motivate them to develop communicative competence.

Many authors have attempted to define what communication strategies are. Nonetheless, despite the existing definitions, none of the explanations have been totally recognized yet. Faucette (2001:1) describes CSs as
...the ways in which an individual speaker manages to compensate for this gap between what she wishes to communicate and her immediately available linguistic resources.

Similarly, Fernandez (N/Y) states that the term CSs refers to all those devices learners apply to overcome the linguistic difficulties encountered when trying to speak in a language. That is, CSs are linguistic tools that native and non-native speakers use to manage to communicate despite lacking some knowledge of the topic or the context in which they are speaking.

Although CSs have not been fully defined, their benefits have been demonstrated in the EFL field. For example, students who were empowered with CSs training developed a sense of autonomy and were more successful at the moment of strategic choice (Faucette, 2001; Oxford, 1990). In the same spirit, Færch and Kasper (1983a:56) argue that:

...by learning how to use communication strategies appropriately, learners will be more able to bridge the gap between pedagogic and non-pedagogic communicative situations.

Furthermore research that has taken place in EFL contexts has discovered that students who were exposed to CSs managed to do much better when speaking and they used more CSs than before the course (Maleki, 2007; Méndez, 2007; Nakatani, 2005; Naughton, 2006; Teng, 2012)

Owing to these benefits, Oxford (1990) claims that teachers should teach CSs explicitly to students, as well as how to transfer such strategies to their L2 learning. In addition, researchers should discuss the teachability of some strategies and how to create awareness of CSs amongst learners, as, apart from helping students become communicatively competent, these strategies may assist them to achieve autonomy. Faucette (2001) also supports this idea and highlights that self-direction can be thought of as the ability to bridge a gap between what the learners know and do not know. What is more, she (2001) also supports the idea that appropriate instruction can be the means to develop this ability.
Hence, emphasis must be placed on self-direction; students need to take the responsibility for their progress in the learning process. However, this may prove to be a difficult task as it has been observed that many students are not congruent in their actions and expectations. Although they constantly express the desire to become fluent speakers of the language, they often continue to turn to Spanish whenever they face a breakdown in communication as the result of unknown vocabulary or, even, when the teacher pretends not to pay attention to their conversations in the classroom. This paper does not attempt to demonize the use of Spanish within the classroom, as it is also a CS called “turning to the mother tongue” (Dornyei, 1995:58). Nonetheless, overuse of Spanish provides little opportunity for students to develop other, and more communicative, CSs.

It is believed that whether or not learners might already use CSs in the L1, they may not use them frequently enough or appropriately or effectively and spontaneously in the L2 (Faucette, 2001; Fernandez, N/Y). The fact that most people use CSs in their L1, does not guarantee that they will be able to transfer these strategies to their L2 (Faucette, 2001). Thus, it is considered that there is a need to train students to focus their attention on CSs. This might help them become more aware of a wider repertoire of CSs, including the ones that they might be already applying (Faucette, 2001). Therefore, in my teaching context it seems pertinent that investigations on the teaching domain with a pedagogical perspective focused on speaking should be conducted to provide possible solutions to this problem.

In sum, although some theorists have attempted to define the terms LSs or CSs, no definition has been accepted yet. However, the benefits of the use of LSs and CSs have been evidenced by various studies carried out worldwide. Some of these benefits include becoming a more fluent speaker and the ability to develop communicative competence. However all the evidence, still gives the impression that although CSs have proved their efficacy, they still remain a Cinderella term, given that not many people recognize them as meaningful linguistic devices in the speaking area.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter discusses the Action Research process that I carried out in my teaching context. First, an explanation as to why Action Research was necessary is presented. Then, the initial inquiry that was carried out in order to understand and verify the nature of the issues involved in the problem identified is briefly described. This is followed by an account of the implementation of an action plan that was designed in response to the problem; this includes the rationale for the action taken. Finally, the methods that were employed to collect and analyze the data in order to evaluate this Action Plan are presented.

1. Action Research Design

Mills (2003 in Donato 2003:1) provides the following definition of action research:

Action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers to gather information about the ways that their particular school operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn. The information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment and on educational practices in general, and improving student outcomes.

(Mills, 2003: 4)

Hence, this type of research is developed by teachers for teachers and it is aimed at localizing, developing and monitoring changes of the teaching practice (Donaldo, 2003). In the same spirit, Koshy (2005:18-19) states that:

...action research as an enquiry, undertaken with rigor and understanding so as to constantly refine practice; the emerging evidence-based outcomes will then contribute to the researching practitioner’s continuing professional development...

Carrying out action research permits the teacher/researcher a systematic understanding of a problem in the classroom. However, this knowledge must be verifiable and based on genuine outcomes in order for the teacher to concretely
establish the basis for new knowledge, which may be the base for future action plans and research.

It is also imperative to mention that there are various models to conduct action research. However, for this investigation O'Leary’s (2004: 141) model of action research was implemented:
One reason for applying this model is because in his model, O’ Leary (2004:141) “portrays action research as a cyclic process which takes shape as knowledge emerges” (Koshy, 2005:22). To word it differently, knowledge is created systematically and leads to a gradual understanding of the problem to be studied. Moreover, O’ Leary (2004) proposes an evaluative practice that includes the reflection stage and action. Another reason for implementing this model is because it searches for a systematic understanding of the new knowledge that may advance in future cycles. This may aid objectivity as the researcher is permitted to support his understanding and reflect on the matter. Similarly, Koshy (2005:15) pinpoints that “carrying out action research is all about developing the act of knowing through observation, listening, analyzing, questioning”. Taking this into consideration, appropriate data collection techniques were adopted and adapted in order to meet the requirements for this research.

2. Data Collection Techniques
As previously mentioned, the problem that I observed amongst my upper intermediate class was that they did not manage to fill the gap between what they know and what they do not know when speaking. In order to make an informed decision as to how to design and implement an action plan to ameliorate this aspect of their learning process, an initial inquiry was carried out to discover the nature of the issues of this problem. To this end I employed the following data collection techniques.

2.1 Observation
It was decided to make use of an observation sheet to collect data during class time for five lessons as, in the words of Hannan (2006:2), “observational techniques are an important aspect of many action research studies whether undertaken by participants or outsiders”. The observation sheet was adapted from Tarone’s (1977) taxonomy of CSs (APPENDIX A), since this taxonomy offered a more thorough and accessible classification of CSs. The objective of this observation grid was to realize what CSs students used and with what frequency
they used them during the lessons. The observations took place for a period of a week. In addition to this, another teacher was asked to observe the class and fill in the observation sheet for the sake of objectivity in this research, since according to Hannan (2006:2):

...in research we need to go beyond the subjective, we need to be aware of and, if possible, eliminate bias, we need to be systematic and open about our procedures so as to open them up for public scrutiny so that others may check the bases on which we reach conclusions...

2.2 A Conversational Task
Apart from the observations, a conversational task was also used to gather data (APPENDIX B), given that it is a strong means of both finding information and understanding a phenomenon (Hannan:2007). It is imperative to mention that this instrument was adapted from a similar investigation in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. This research was carried out by Fernandez (N/Y) with the intention of discovering the relationship between different-level students and how they use CSs. However, as the oral tasks in Fernandez’s (N/Y) study do not possess enough insight for this context, modification and adaptation of these tasks were needed to match the needs of this learning framework. Thus a conversational task with six questions was designed that aimed at obtaining a sample of oral interaction from learners in their L2. This sample of oral communication could be contemplated as a representation of a conceivably genuine communication in English.

It is pertinent to mention that the topics in the data collection instruments were miscellaneous, since according to Poulisse, et al. (1990) diverse elicitation activities might have a direct impact on learners and, as a result, affect CSs and their use. Moreover, students working in groups of three were recorded with the hope that they could construct an atmosphere of genuine communication in English. Similarly, another objective of this activity was to engage the learners in a conversation with the researcher (myself), leading to real conversations in which
we could discuss diverse topics as in authentic social interactions (Fernandez, N/Y).

### 2.3 A Picture Description Task
Apart from the oral task, a picture description (APPENDIX C) was used as a third method to elicit information from the participants. This activity was selected due to its efficacy to identify a speaker’s use of CSs, and because it is the most well-known instrument to assess the use of these strategies (Hyde, 1982; Poulissee et al., 1990; Tarone, 1977). The image that learners were required to describe was obtained from Nunan’s (1997) form-function relationships. It was decided to use this picture because Nunan (1997) offers an image where the students are supposed to make guesses about it. After that, the learners need to explain these guesses by using some information provided in the image. Therefore, the interviewees must make use of their cognitive and oral abilities to develop this task. In short, valuable information was expected to be obtained from the students.

These three methods were employed to triangulate the data and be as objective as possible. In order to conduct an impartial and non-biased investigation, the findings were verified. Morse, et al. (2002:9) defines verification of data as:

> …verification is the process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain. In qualitative research, verification refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and, thus, the rigor of a study.

In addition to this, Morse, et al. (2002:2) declare that “without rigor, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility. Therefore, a great deal of attention was paid to validate the findings. The strategy that was used was “triangulation of the information” (Shenton, 2004:5-6). In this respect, Shenton (204:3) states that:

> …triangulation may involve the use of different methods, especially observation, focus groups and individual interviews,
which form the major data collection strategies for much qualitative research.

Hence, for the sake of objectivity, the information obtained from the observations, and oral activities was transcribed and triangulated. It was done in order to verify that the data collected was systematically coherent with the observed phenomenon.

3. Data Analysis
To analyze and classify the CSs that were used by the interviewees in the oral tasks and during the observations, Tarone’s (1977) taxonomy of CSs (APPENDIX D) was used. This taxonomy was employed because it is the most widely used taxonomy in the CSs area (Fernandez, N/Y). What is more, this taxonomy seems to be the one which best fits the collected information. In Tarone’s (1977) taxonomy she identifies five clusters of CSs. She classifies them in: “topic avoidance, message abandonment, paraphrase, conscious transfer, appeal for assistance, and mime” (Tarone, 1977 in Fernandez, N/Y: 10-12). It is imperative to mention that within some strategies there are sub-strategies that refer to the main group.

4. Outcome of Initial Research
In the observation stage, the information obtained from the observation sheets suggests that the participants make little use of communication strategies. What is more, the students’ use of CSs is frequently repetitive. The CSs that the learners applied were mainly “Compensatory Strategies” such as changing to the mother tongue and “Time-gaining Strategies” like the use of fillers and hesitation (Dornyei, 1995:58).

   …uhmmmm…ermmm…it would be a…woman?
   …uhmmmm…because…uhmmmm..there is a lot of steam

After analyzing the recording of the oral interaction task, it was discovered that the students’ constantly turn to Spanish when they do not know how to express a word
or phrase. These findings are aligned with the results in the observation stage, as the CSs found in this task match the strategies observed.

Similarly, learners also change to their mother tongue to elicit information from the teacher or their peers to ask for help when they do not know the L2 equivalent for a word in their L1. What is more, it was observed that when the participants did not know how to express an idea, they did not use linguistic devices to help themselves. In other words, students use “appeal for help”, and “turn to their mother tongue”, and “use of non-linguistic means” (Dornyei, 1995:58); for instance:

...pajamas…or what is…uhmmm.?  
...here… in the… “no sé cómo se dice”  
...is a ….racket … so I can ......ermmmm... “afirmar”

The information obtained from the third instrument confirms that the students’ application of CSs is repetitive. During the picture description task, it was also observed that when the learners face a breakdown in communication, they often turn to Spanish to translate the words from Spanish to English. These final outcomes confirm the fact that the students’ use of CSs is limited and repetitive, since the information obtained at this stage is congruent with the data collected from the two previous instruments.

In general, the outcomes obtained from the applied instruments prove that the lack of fluency in the participants is related to a poor use of CSs, since the participants constantly turn to Spanish when they come across an unknown word. What is more, the strategies that the leaners apply are repetitive, as these strategies are limited to: “turning to the mother tongue”, appeal for help”, and “fillers and hesitation” (Dornyei, 1995:58).

Further, when the researcher provided the participants with the results of the used instruments, the students claimed not to be aware of the existence or use of communication strategies. They mentioned that at the moment of hearing the term, they had a vague idea of what they were. However, they were not familiarized with the use of these strategies or their importance when learning English.
5. Action Plan

What the participants in this research seemed to need in order to speak continuously was an awareness of, and practice in, the use of CSs that may help them speak uninterruptedly, that is fluently as “CSs are an immediate response to the break downs in communication” (Faucette, 2001:4). Moreover, Faucette (2001) states that if one of the objectives nowadays is to produce self-directed speakers who are able to participate in real conversations outside the schoolroom, teachers must not disregard communication strategies in their lessons. Thus, this plan of action is aimed at teaching them how to speak fluently so that in the future they can speak continuously on their own. Consequently, it was decided to implement training in the use of CSs in order to provide students with linguistic tools that may be of great assistance for them to overcome their lack of fluency when speaking in English.

In this Action Plan only the details of lesson plans were changed, not the overall plan of the curriculum in the school, where this study was developed (APPENDIX E). This action was decided because the content book Interchange 3 by Richards, Hull and Proctor (1991b) that the participants used, mentioned a CS in some activities (Interchange 3: p. 74-75, 114, 116). However, the CSs that are included within the book are limited. As a consequence, the strategies that were implemented in the plan were “circumlocutions and appeal for assistance” (Dornyei, 1995:58) for a number of reasons. To begin with, Chamot (1995 in Faucette, 2001:5) highlights that when developing a research on strategies, it is recommendable “to find out what strategies the students are already using and select a few strategies that appear underused”. Hence, it was decided to select the abovementioned strategies as by means of the initial inquiry it was identified that students appeared to underuse them. Furthermore, Færch and Kasper (1983a) argue that...

The only CSs useful for learning are those involving three aspects of language learning—hypothesis formation, hypothesis testing, and automatization. Therefore, recommended strategies to teach would be those requiring L2 production. These include the two
conceptual achievement strategies of approximation and circumlocution, appeal for assistance. (Faucette, 2001:15)

6. Description of the Implementation

In response to the lack of fluency among my students, training in communication strategies (CSs) was held for a one-month period, from June 9th to July 4th, 2014. It was necessary to divide this training into three stages: pre, while and post-training. This implied a change in routines, activities, materials, group organization, as well as resources and equipment within the three stages. The following figure illustrates the stages and activities during this period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Pre-training | 1) Presenting communication strategies  
|              | 2) Commenting on the two strategies that the course was based on           |
| While-training| 1) Showing CSs at work  
|              | 2) Similes  
|              | 3) Polite expressions  
|              | 4) Modeling how to use CSs                                                |
| Post-training| 5) Practicing CSs  
|              | 6) Using CSs in real tasks                                                 |

6.1 Pre-Training Stage

This stage consisted of a single class session in which the participants were instructed about some of the diverse CSs that exist and how they are employed in EFL conversations in order to speak fluently. This phase was intended to raise awareness of CSs use and to understand these strategies. In conjunction, the two
CSs (circumlocutions and appeal for assistance) that the training was based on were introduced at this stage. The didactic materials employed to illustrate the content of this phase was a power point presentation and a canon.

6.2 While-Training Stage

This phase consisted of four sessions. During this time, the following routine was followed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>→ Input of materials that showed some use of the CSs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>→ Discussion about the material presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>→ Modeling of the CSs and exemplification of their function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>→ Practice of CSs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In session number one, situations in which a problem emerged as the consequence of the lack of use of CSs were shown to the participants by means of some videos, audios (c.f. further links of the videos see APPENDIX E) and communication games. According to Færch and Kasper (1986 in Faucette, 2001:10) communication games are “role plays, monologues and analytic tasks where students can observe the factors that determine the use of communication strategies”.

In the second session, the students were asked to discuss the situations presented and comment to each other what they had noticed and/or heard that the people in the video clips or the audios did when facing a speaking problem. They sometimes worked in pairs or trios, depending on the number of learners present and on the type of tasks that the learners were asked to perform.

In the third lesson, the communication strategies were introduced as possible solutions to solve a speaking problem. At this point, the instructor modeled the strategies and the learners were required to deduce the CS that the teacher was employing (Chamot, 1995 in Faucette, 2001:5).
Finally, in session number four, opportunities for the students to practice the strategies were provided. This was achieved by providing the learners with activities that required the learners to communicate orally while the trainer monitored.

### 6.3 Post-Training Stage
This last stage consisted of three sessions. In these lessons, the learners were required to develop oral tasks and record them by using a recording device in all of the sessions. The oral tasks were the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Picture descriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>A presentation on the learners’ interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Spotting the difference and a conversation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For these activities, the participants worked in pairs or trios. Once the students developed their tasks, they listened to their own recordings and commented on their own performance. They also discussed how they felt when speaking and employing, if used, the CSs. The following figure illustrates the training process in this phase of the plan of action:
The feedback was given according to the use of CSs in tasks, and in the way the students had managed to perform the activities. This was intended to raise the awareness of others when speaking, since it was observed that most of the participants claimed to feel nervous when speaking because of their fear of committing mistakes. This aimed to help the learners understand that their classmates are also human beings who may feel threatened when speaking.

The tasks in this phase were developed during class time. However, in the last lesson minor changes were made in the sense that, on this occasion, the recordings were given to the teacher in order to be analyzed. After that, the trainer studied these recordings using Dornyei’s (1995) taxonomy of CSs (APPENDIX F). This last activity allowed the teacher to realize to what extent the participants managed to employ the two CSs which were promoted during the training sessions.

Apart from the new routines in the training, the activities that were used in the course were also different. There were some that fostered verbal interaction, such as description of images, discussions, description of situations etc.; (Faucette, 2001). Moreover, in this course, the tasks did not only require students to interact verbally, but also to use their cognitive abilities in conjunction to their oral skills while using CSs when performing activities such as: “communication games and monologues” (Færch & Kasper, 1986 in Faucette, 2001: 10).

The materials that were used in this training period were power point slides, images, videos, visuals, worksheets and audios. The selection of these materials was aimed at “activating strategy use and ‘real’ spoken English” (Mendelsohn, 1995 in Faucette, 2001:5). The purpose of working with these didactic materials was to highlight the relevance of CSs within verbal interactions.

The resources and equipment that were used were recording devices, such as computers or cell phones. In addition, the internet was also used for some activities, as well as a DVD player and a TV. Posters and stickers were also
employed as well as other academic materials that allowed the learners to interact verbally with each other.

Group organization occurred in different forms depending on the lesson and the planned activities. It was individualized, in pairs or trios because of the class size (9 students). This permitted the observer to monitor changes in the students’ performance in the classes during the training stage. In these observations, the observer took into consideration some factors such as the learners’ attitudes, the performance in their oral interactions, the effort they exerted in the use of the taught CSs, and their eagerness to practice the strategies after the instruction.

In sum, the initial research demonstrated that the participants were not fluent speakers who, in addition, turn to Spanish frequently during a conversation. This represented a problem for them, since they were not developing genuine conversational skills in English. As a result, a plan of action was designed that aimed to assist the learners speak uninterruptedly. In order to implement this plan of action, it was necessary to change some activities in the school program and some routines when giving classes.
Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter discusses the evaluation of the action plan that was orchestrated in my teaching context. First, the data collection techniques are presented. Then, the data analysis that is developed in order to scrutinize the information obtained, is concisely described. Finally, the outcomes achieved from the collected data are illustrated.

1. Evaluation of Action

According to Hanna and Dettmer (2004:1)

…evaluation is the process of gathering data. More specifically, it is the way instructors gather data about their teaching and their students’ learning and draw a judgment to determine the overall value of an outcome based on the collected data.

In other words, evaluation is an ongoing process that requires data collection and a thorough analysis of the information to give value to the outcome observed during a period of time. There are two types of evaluation: formative and summative (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2008). Nonetheless, to assess the plan of action in this research, it was decided to implement a formative mode of evaluation for several reasons. First of all, one of the premises of formative assessment is to offer feedback during the instructional process, while learning is occurring (Hanna & Dettmer, 2004), since evaluation is more than just discovering if the students managed to take part in the training, but to improve the activities along the way, as well (Hanna, 2007). Consequently, this proved to be a great asset in the present research, as it permitted the evaluation of the activities and their level of success amongst learners when using communication strategies (Chamot, 1995).

The formative modes of evaluation used in this inquiry were observations during in-class activities and talks between the instructor and student (at different points in the month) with the purpose of eliciting information from learners about possible
doubts. In addition, during in-class activities, where students informally presented oral tasks, their classmates provided feedback for their peers (Hanna & Dettmer, 2004). Thus the feedback in this training was not only provided by the teacher, but also by the participants’ peers, as well, since:

It is through language that we reflect our thoughts, identities and selves. In the dialogical exchange with others and with ourselves we interpret, gain insights, and modify our perspectives constructing meaning and understanding, in different contexts, at different times. Our culture and background (past-me), our project and perspectives (present - I), and the projection of ourselves (future-you) come into play when we connect to people, places and things and act in the world of which we are a part. And it is through this interaction, unfolding and intertwining of processes together with the friction that results from it, that we become more aware of our ambiguities and question our assumptions while learning a foreign language experientially.

(Dieu et al., 2005:5)

In other words, comments from classmates, who may be relevant people in the students’ lives, might be more enriching than those of their teacher. This idea echoes the findings of a research performed by Hirose (2003) with Japanese university studies that suggests that peer feedback promotes collaborative work and helps students improve their writing and communication skills. In addition, Lin (2010) claims that, during peer feedback, students can learn from each other and work together to achieve a common goal. What is more, students perceive their peers as “genuine collaborators and interested readers” of their work and not as external evaluators (Muncie, 2000, in Kulsirisawad 2012, p. 4). Therefore, simultaneous and mutual feedback, not only with the teacher, but with the participants’ peers may encourage them to pay attention to their performance and, as a result, lead them to discover new linguistic tools to find a solution to their speaking problem. There is a probability that this process takes place while conversing with their classmates, as according to Dieu et al. (2005) this gives them access to use, and practice, their available linguistic tools which were learnt during the training.
1.2 Data Collection Techniques and Verification
In order to collect data after the implementation of the training on CSs, different techniques were used to gather information. These techniques were employed because they have proved their efficacy when measuring CSs (Poulisse, 1990). In addition, their use was practical and congruent with the topic of the plan of action of this research, since this paper highlights the significance of CSs to develop fluency. Therefore, data collection techniques that measure oral interaction amongst the participants were necessary. One reason for this was to keep a record of the variation of the learners’ fluency. These techniques were:

1. Observations
2. A conversational task
3. A “spotting the difference” task
4. A semi-structured interview

Similar to the initial research, in this phase observation sheets (APPENDIX A), a conversational task (APPENDIX H), and a “spotting the difference task” (APPENDIX G) were employed. What is more, in this stage a semi-structured interview was held with the intention of obtaining deeper insights, attitudes and emotions towards the CSs training, since “semi-structure interviews are widely used because they are a powerful means of both obtaining information and gaining insights” (Hannan, 2007:2).

1.2.1 Semi-Structured Interview
A semi-structured interview (APPENDIX I) was carried out between the researcher and each participant. The object of this interview was to elicit from the interviewees their problems when speaking and how, and if, they managed to solve them after the implementation of CSs.

According to Hannan (2007:2) interviews “seek to elicit information about attitudes and opinions, perspectives and meanings”. When using a semi-structured interview
The researcher designs a set of key questions to be raised before the interview takes place, but builds in considerable flexibility about how and when these issues are raised and allows for a considerable amount of additional topics to be built in, in response to the dynamics of conversational exchange (Hannan, 2007:3).

In other words, the teacher-researcher moved from question to question depending on the interviewee’s reaction in order not to make the participant feel anxious or under threat. In this way, the learner was able to express his/her comments about the training with the freedom that a casual conversation has, since “semi-structured interviews have some pre-set questions, but allow more scope for open-ended answers” (p12).

The semi-structured interview used in this research consisted of 6 questions with sub-questions. All of these questions were based on eliciting both facts and attitudes about the course. After the interview took place, the data was combined with the information of the other techniques for the purpose of triangulation.

For the verification of the evidence, a triangulation of the data collection techniques was also employed to guarantee objectivity in the gathering of information and avoiding bias. For further information of this verification strategy refer to page: 21-23 of this paper.

In conjunction, Dornyei’s (1995) taxonomy of CSs was employed to recognize and scrutinize the CSs that the students used in their talks. By using this taxonomy, it was possible to categorize the strategies and discover their use after the plan of action took place.

2. Data Analysis
The data gathered from the applied instruments was both qualitative and quantitative. The data analysis was divided into three stages: analysis of the two oral tasks, categorization of the information from the semi-structured interview and
data triangulation. These phases of the analysis occurred chronologically in the way they are presented in following lines:

**Analysis of the Two Oral Tasks:** in this stage of the analysis, the oral and “spotting the difference” tasks were transcribed with the intention of measuring to what extent the participants managed to employ communication strategies (CSs) after the training period. The data obtained from the techniques used was analyzed using Dornyei’s (1995) taxonomy.

**Categorization of the Information from the Semi-Structured Interview:** in this phase of the study, the teacher categorized the information that emerged from the semi-structured interview into clusters of information.

**Triangulation of Facts from the Data Collection Techniques:** in this final step of the analysis, the teacher triangulated the data from the semi-structured interviews, the observations, and from the oral and “spotting the difference” tasks. The information was compared and contrasted amongst the different data collection techniques. This was intended to provide support to the final reflections of this research as well as to validate this analysis (Shenton, 2004).

3. Outcomes

The outcomes obtained from this study are grouped in answer to the research questions. The information that is portrayed as extracts are presented in the way the students uttered them originally.

**Question one:** How may I help my students to speak fluently?

The information obtained from the data collection techniques suggests in general that the implementation of the training on communication strategies (CSs) is a viable solution to assist students to speak fluently. Most of the students found the training on CSs useful and effective. This information was compared to the observations. As a result of the categorization of the data gathered from the semi-structured interview and the observations, it was possible to discover three
aspects: emotions about the course, awareness of CSs and the development of the students' listening comprehension.

3.1. Emotions about the Course

In this category, information about the feelings of the students during the course was found. Most of the participants stated that they felt happy and satisfied with the training regarding CSs because it helped them become more fluent speakers. They also claimed to feel “good” (S2) because they had more opportunity to practice with a focus on fluency, as the following quotation illustrates:

…well I felt really happy because I really love English and I really had the opportunity to practice my speaking skills much more than before

S4

However, two out of the nine students manifested having experienced negative emotions such as harmful anxiety and tiredness.

…when we were in the classroom the first sessions it was a bit tiring

S1

…I felt a little bit anxious because speaking for me is such a big challenge and I felt anxious and nervous because I didn’t want to make mistakes when I speak

S4

These two students explained that they felt tired because for them most of the activities about the subjects were repetitive. They also mentioned that they felt anxious because they were afraid of committing mistakes in front of the others when speaking.

The observations also provided a general panorama of the training impact on the learners. It was observed that at the beginning of the training most of the students seemed to be motivated to take part in the course. However, it was observed that towards the end of the intervention, a couple of participants gave the impression of
having lost interest. Nevertheless, the majority of the trainees seemed to be encouraged and happy to learn how to employ the two CSs to enhance their fluency.

The abovementioned extracts show a general panorama of how the students in this research felt during the implementation of the course on CSs. This provided the researcher with a deeper insight into the relationship that may have existed between the effectiveness of the training and the learners’ emotions regarding this course.

### 3.2 Awareness of CSs

During the semi-structured interview, students proved to have increased their awareness of CSs after the training. Now, they are conscious about the fact that being fluent involves the use of CSs in order to speak continuously. The chart below portrays some of the extracts from the participants in this category:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness of CSs</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I think it was very good for me because in the past, I speak much Spanish in the classes, but now I speak more English and when I don't know a word, I can use a circumlocution or I can ask for:::
  erm::::: I can ask for::: my classmates to help. S5 |
| Now when I don't know a word, I use a synonym that replaces it or I can describe it or use another word. And::: I don't' use Spanish very much now. Because I know the strategy that can help me when I don't know how to express. S5 |
| I understood that speaking fluently didn't mean to speak fast. I always thought that speaking in a fluent way meant speaking fast. It really means ermm::::: making appropriate pauses when speaking ermm:::::and also being able to communicate with other person without interrupting the communication. S4 |
| There are more communication strategies but in this course we only practiced circumlocutions and asking for help. S5 |
It is relevant to mention that the participants’ awareness of CSs apparently evolved significantly during the tasks that were used in the training. This represents a positive impact on the learners’ fluency and perspective of CSs. Thus, it seems that the main objective of the research was achieved given that the extracts above demonstrate an improvement in the students’ awareness of the use of CSs to develop fluency.

3.3 Development of Students’ Understanding
When categorizing the data, it was noticed that two out of the nine participants mentioned having developed another skill, apart from speaking. They claimed to have improved their understanding as the next table illustrates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability to understand</th>
<th>I can speak and understand more the people that speak in English now. S2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before this course, I didn’t understand that: some movies or some TV programs very well because I didn’t understand because I used to translate the words they express. For example, I used to translate the fillers, for example, when the actors or the actress said you what I mean, or you know?? Or similar expressions I usually thought that they were speaking in a literal way, and I didn’t understand what they really meant because it was difficult for me to know that they were just using those phrases to make a pauses in communication. Now I’m able to understand better. S4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apparently, the input of CSs allowed these students to realize that sometimes speakers use some phrases and/or fillers for gaining time to think while speaking. They also noticed that these fillers are not literally translatable to their mother tongue. In general, the learners claimed to have increased their ability to comprehend conversations or dialogues. This is related to the increase of awareness of CSs and how they function in real conversations.
**Question two:** How may fostering my students’ awareness of CSs help them to become more fluent?

The data gathered from the two oral tasks, the semi-structured interview and observations implies that the fact of fostering the learner’s awareness of CSs had a direct impact on their fluency. Similarly, within this phase, two categories were found: 1) the effectiveness of CSs for improving fluency and 2) a possible CSs transfer.

### 3.4 Effectiveness of CSs to Improve Fluency

Previously, in the stage of the verification of the problem, the data collection techniques provided an outcome that showed that 6 out of the 9 students spoke in Spanish during their tasks. In contrast to this, after the training in the use of CSs, only 1 student spoke in Spanish, on one single occasion: … *[Like popcorn, nachos, sodas, and ‘crepas??’]*…S3. This suggests a significant enhancement in the participants’ use of English, since they now appear to use CSs to cover the gap between the words that they know and do not know. Thus, it means that raising the learners’ awareness to CSs helped them, indeed, to speak English continuously without switching codes from their L2 to their L1.

### 4.5 Possible CSs Transfer

During the course, it was observed that the participants did not only use the 2 CSs that were highlighted (circumlocutions and asking for assistance), but they were also employing other CSs. These strategies were classified and ranked depending on how frequently they were used by the participants, as the upcoming table shows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Strategy</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Appeal for help</td>
<td>4. Topic avoidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fillers</td>
<td>5. Word coinage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Taking into account the information presented in the above table, it is noticeable that the participants used the two CSs that the training was based on, which were appeal for help and circumlocutions. In addition, the participants also employed four other untaught CSs. This may represent a possible CSs transfer from the students’ L1 to their L2. However, it is relevant to mention that these CSs were usually used by the same students. That is to say, each learner seems to have a preference for a particular strategy. This possibly indicates that the learners still require further guidance to discover new and possibly more meaningful CSs that may match their learning skills with a wider repertoire of strategies. In the same spirit, it gives the impression that these students might need training on how to transfer the CSs that they use in their L1 to their L2.

All things considered, formative evaluation permitted the creation of judgments about the impact of the CSs training on the participants. Moreover, the data collection techniques also assisted to gather information about the emotions, attitudes and response of the learners to the course. The verification strategy used was triangulation of methods. This was done with the intention to reduce possible bias at the moment of analyzing the data.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Reflections

In this final chapter, information related to the implications of the outcomes is described. This is followed by a report of the limitations of the inquiry during the implementation stage, and possible changes to the plan of action are mentioned. Next, the conclusion is presented, and last, but not least, a possible second cycle for further investigation of the subject matter is explored.

1. Review
The general objective of this research was to create awareness of communication strategies (CSs) in my students. To achieve this, an action plan was designed to train the learners in two strategies. However, during the training it was noticeable that apart from helping the participants speak without interruption, some of them also developed their understanding, possibly related to the continuous input of verbal language. To keep track of the main objective of this investigation, tasks were prepared in three stages for the students to provide continuity in training. In this process, the learners worked collaboratively during the implementation, mainly in the post-training stage, when they recorded each other to later listen to themselves and receive feedback from their peers. Apparently, most of the participants benefitted from the course on CSs, as they found the training enjoyable and effective. What is more, they claimed to have improved their fluency when speaking and the data collected supports this.

2. Implications
Having had analyzed the data, it was possible to conclude four major changes before and after the implementation of the plan of action: 1) increase in awareness of CSs, 2) improvement in the participants' fluency; 3) development of students' understanding and 4) limited CSs transfer.

These four changes in the learners' speaking behavior may imply that courses of this nature might be a viable solution to the students' speaking problems in
general. The fact that the learners were able to bring their attention to the use and existence of CSs had a domino effect on their own learning process. This suggests that training of these strategies might not only help them employ the strategies in the course, but to show them a variety of available CSs that the students can use in relation to their learning styles and interests.

The fact that the participants enhanced their fluency during the training advocates for a continuous training of CSs throughout the English courses. Teachers ought to implement these strategies in their lesson plans, as CSs might help the pupils become communicatively competent, which is an ambitious goal that most schools have. Nonetheless, it is meaningful to mention that being fluent clearly does not mean that the students are competent in the language, but that they are on their way to becoming so.

The trainees did not only develop their speaking skills, but some of them improved their understanding as well. Therefore, it gives the impression that becoming aware of the use of CSs permitted the learners to understand some of the time-stalling devices, which native speakers employ to gain time to think when speaking. Some of these devices are fillers and pre-fabricated phrases including “you know”, “you see my point?”, “you know what I mean”, etc. This caused them trouble, since most of the cases these time-stalling devices are not translatable from L2 to L1. It was observed that those students who tended to translate the fillers now claim to have enhanced their ability to understand them. As a result, these participants are now acquainted with some of these phrases and with their function in speech.

Finally, it was discovered that even though the students seemed to already use CSs unconsciously before the implementation, their repertoire was poor and, as a consequence, repetitive. Hence, the aforementioned shows that the students managed to transfer some strategies from their L1 to their L2. However, their transfer was ineffective, since the strategies that they used were always the same. This phenomenon may have occurred mainly for two reasons: 1) the students were poor CSs users in their L1 and/or 2) the participants did not know how to transfer their strategies from L1 to L2. Therefore, this suggests that training on CSs should
not only focus on bringing awareness of these type of strategies, but also to train the learners on how to transfer these CSs from Spanish to English.

3. Limitations
During the implementation of this action plan, two main limitations were discovered: 1) lack of time and 2) the nature of some of the activities. For instance, in the semi-structured interview some students mentioned that they considered not to have had enough time to continue improving their speaking, as the following extracts illustrate:

I told the teacher for example that probably we could use more time in the course (S5)

I think that we needed more time to practice the strategies (S4)

There were a couple of activities that were not done due to the lack of time at the end of the project. Even though this did not represent a significant problem for the outcomes of this research, it caused the students to feel that the time to conduct the action plan was not enough, as they mentioned that they needed more time to continue practicing.

There were also occasions when the tasks that the students performed did not match the trainees’ interests:

I think like more different class, but probably talking about, presentations or debates (S1)

…there was times when I didn’t like the activities because they were repetitions. I think we can use more conversations (S6)

Another limitation that was faced in this intervention was that there was an apparent use of repetitive tasks. This led some students to feel bored or less motivated to take part in the activities. Similarly, the employment of some written tasks such as the use of similes and requests (during the while-training stage)
apparently made some learners feel that they were not interacting verbally in a speaking course. As a consequence, they suggested the use of more presentations and debate tasks.

Apart from the abovementioned limitations, apparently there were no other constraints with any other feature of the investigation. It is significant to mention that even though the participants' English levels were different, no further problem at the moment of developing the tasks or when analyzing the data occurred.

4. Changes Next Time Around
As a consequence of the aforementioned limitations which were the time of the implementation and the nature of some activities, some changes seem to be pertinent.

A) Devote more time to the training and listening to the participants' voices concerning their interests before the implementation. I consider that implementation of courses of this nature require, as already verified, plenty of time for the participants to practice the tasks. As a consequence, they may feel less anxious during the course. Consequently, for future reference more time will be devoted to these types of courses, as this may imply a more meaningful impact from the trainees, and the study as well.

B) Another possible change could be to ask the students what kind of activities they consider of interest for learning and/or practicing during the training period. This can be achieved during the planning stage. Hence, the next time it is imperative to ask the learners to share what their likes or dislikes about activities are in order to formulate a lesson plan that may match their interests to the contents of the lessons.
5. Conclusions
As a possible solution to the lack of fluency that my students were facing, I observed, reflected on this phenomenon, designed and implemented a plan of action to provide the learners with an alternative to overcome their speaking constraints. The idea of training the participants in the use of communication strategies (CSs) sounded fair, since now most of the schools are expected to assist the students to become communicatively competent. However, the spectrum of distance from the idea to the actual praxis is far. There is much to overcome; from time management, scientific rigor, content and the participants' attitudes towards the course. Nevertheless, discovering whether the implementation was viable or not, is a rewarding experience and a strong asset in the formation of a teacher as a researcher. Hence, the usefulness of this study did not only impact the pedagogical side of education, but in developing the teacher's identity.

The usefulness of this paper in the speaking area is expected to be of help as a small contribution to the research in this field, since now the speaking problems that are related to the lack of fluency may be approached from a different angle of study. To help the learners speak, it is neither enough to ask them to do so nor demand them not to use Spanish and only English, as has been observed. This method might work for some learners but not for everybody. Thus, proper instruction on the HOW to do things may facilitate students the strategies that they need and even encourage them to speak, because their affective filter may not feel threatened.

My teaching practice was also affected by the results of this research in the sense that I am now more aware of the importance of teaching my students how to do the things on their own, instead of giving them the solutions. I have learnt that it is more feasible to guide students in their own learning process and only facilitate when necessary. What is more, I have also noticed the relevance of exemplifying the use of CSs within the lessons in order for the learners to notice the use of the strategies on a daily basis. In a way, it is training the students during the whole course, instead of only for one month.
All in all, having conducted this research provided me with different perceptions of the problem that was identified. In the same spirit, I was able to learn more about the nature of these types of problems and how to deal with them. The results of this study have also impacted my own teaching practice and, hopefully, the speaking area of study in my teaching atmosphere. Nevertheless, some constraints and limitations were faced during this process although these did not represent a major problem. However, from these, it was possible to identify weak points of this research in order to reinforce it and make it suitable and more effective in the case of a possible second action research cycle.

6. Ways Forward (possible 2nd AR cycle)
After analyzing the impact that this study had on my teaching practice and on my identity as a researcher, two possible ways forward derived from this research are being considered. In the following lines, these possibilities are discussed:

1) The fact that the participants gave the impression that they did not know how to transfer their CSs from L1 to L2, leads to a possible future research with a new angle of study and a new objective. I consider that it may be pertinent to carry out a second cycle of research to have a wider understanding of this speaking phenomenon in my context. This would include, a new plan of action that focuses not only on fostering the participants awareness of the CSs in English, but on training the students on how to transfer the CSs that they use in their mother tongue to the English language in order for them to develop fluency and become proficient English speakers.

2) Since this research was carried out in a private English school with a reduced number of students, it may be pertinent to employ this plan of action in a public school and with a larger number of students. In this way, it would be possible to observe the impact that courses of this nature might have on learners who might have had a more limited exposure to English than students who attend private academic institutions. However, even though our dreams to contribute to the EFL...
research may be vast, it is pertinent to say that we must be patient and move a step at a time in our path as future researchers.
REFERENCES


Morse, J; Barrett, M; Mayan, M; Olson, K; and Spiers, J. (2002). Verification Strategies for Establishing Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research. International Journal of Qualitative Methods 1 (2) Spring 2002


ON LINE REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Observation sheet on Communication strategies (CSs)

OBSERVER’S SIGNATURE: __________________________ DATE: ____________

Mark the number depending on the Communication strategy and the frequency it is used during the English lesson by the students. Tarone’s (1977) taxonomy was adapted as a guide to observe.

Adapted from: Strategy inventory for language learning skills (sill)

© Tarone 1977

1. Never or almost never true of them
2. Generally not true of them
3. Somewhat true of them
4. Generally true of them
5. Always or almost always true of them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never or almost true of me</td>
<td>Means that you do it on very rare instances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally not true of me</td>
<td>Means that you do it but less than half of the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat true of me</td>
<td>Means that you do what the statement says half of the time and sometimes you don’t. It is about equal frequency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally true of me</td>
<td>Means that you do what the statement says more than half of the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always or almost always true of me</td>
<td>True of me means that you do it in all or almost all the circumstances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>CS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Using linguistic clues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Using other clues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Switching to the mother tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Getting help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Literal translation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Approximating the message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Coining words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Using circumlocutions or synonyms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Using mime or gestures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Avoiding communication partially or totally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Conversational task adapted from Fernandez, A. (N/Y)

Conversation task

Good morning, afternoon, evening…

We are going to have a ten-minute conversation. Try to answer the questions you will be asked as completely as possible and feel free to interrupt your interlocutor, ask him questions or shift the original topic of discussion whenever you want.

Why are you studying English?

Have noticed any change in your English level or yourself?

Have you noticed any improvements in your English level?

Why did you not study English before?

What are your plans for the future?

Are you encouraging your family to study English or any other foreign language?

***What do you mean by.....?

Thanks so much for your valuable time. If you consider this information should not be included in this research, please feel free to tell the interviewer in order to omit it.
APPENDIX C

Picture Description Task

This task was adapted from Fernandez, A. (N/Y) and improved by utilizing Nunan’s (1997) form-function relationship.
APPENDIX D

Tarone’s (1977) Taxonomy of Communication Strategies

(In Fernandez, N/Y: 10-12)

1. a. **Topic avoidance.** The speaker, lacking the necessary vocabulary to refer to an object, action or idea, avoids any kind of reference to it.

   (1) “... the child is wearing a jacket and short trousers like a uniform ...”. (Tie).

1. b. **Message abandonment.** The speaker begins to talk about a concept but, feeling unable to continue, stops before reaching the communicative goal.

   (2) “... the old man is wearing his dressed dressed up with and the boy is ...”. (Tie).

2. **Paraphrase.** The speaker exploits his/ her resources in the target language to develop an alternative means to convey the original message. This can be achieved in at least three different ways:

2. a. **Approximation.** The speaker substitutes the desired unknown target language item with a new one which, although incorrect, is thought to share enough semantic features with it to be correctly interpreted.

   (2) “... and well he’s wearing a hat? ...”. (Cap).

2. b. **Word coinage.** The learner makes up a new word following the target language rules of derivation and composition.

   (3) “... houseshoes ...”. (Slippers).

2. c. **Circumlocution.** The learner describes an object or action instead of using the appropriate target language item.
“... it’s like ja- jacket without the::: the sleeves ...”  
(Waistcoat).

3. **Conscious transfer.** 3 The speaker can also communicate their intended meaning transferring items from their first language or any other language they know, and this can be done in two different ways:

   a. **Literal translation.** 4 The learner uses a first language item or structure modified in accordance with the features of the target language.

   “... but (1) I like (. ) periodism too (3) I don’t ...”. (Journalism).

   b. **Language switch.** The speaker uses a first language item with no modification at all.

   “... her (1) e:::h shirtsleeve is mm (2) remangada (*laugh*)
   I don’t know ...”. (Rolled up).

4. **Appeal for assistance.** 5 The learner asks the interlocutor for help.

5. **Mime.** The learner uses a gesture or any other paralinguistic form to refer to an object or event.
# APPENDIX E

## Plan of Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>BREAK DOWN</th>
<th>OBJECTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-training</td>
<td>Presenting communication strategies (CSs)</td>
<td>T shows a presentation about CSs in which SSs can see the definition of some of these strategies and examples of their use (Dornyei, 1995) APPENDIX H</td>
<td>To familiarize the students with CSs and their importance when learning English in order to become communicatively competent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T elicits what SSs may know about CSs.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T plays a recording in which a person does not manage to speak uninterruptedly</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T plays the same audio, but this time CSs are used as a response to a communication break down</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SSs listen and comment in pairs whether or not they have seen themselves or other people employ CSs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commenting on the two strategies that the course was based on</td>
<td>T Comments on the two CSs to be practiced in the course</td>
<td>To provide input relevant information concerning the two strategies to be highlighted in the course (“circumlocutions” and “appeal for help”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T gives SSs an information worksheet about the two CSs in the training</td>
<td>T Comments on the two CSs to be practiced in the course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SSs read the definitions of the two strategies and share if they have heard/used them before</td>
<td>T Comments on the two CSs to be practiced in the course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>While training</strong></td>
<td><strong>Showing CSs at work</strong></td>
<td><strong>Similes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Polite expressions</strong></td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T plays an audio or role play a situation where there is a communication breakdown. SSs pay attention to listen to what the people do when they have a communication problem. After the audio, T enquires about what SSs listened people did to solve the problems they had when speaking. SSs discuss what they listened in groups of three.</td>
<td>T gives SSs a worksheet where they could look for synonyms and antonyms of some words. SSs work individually while T monitors and facilitates.</td>
<td>T plays some videos related to asking for help: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-c48qhEHwA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-c48qhEHwA</a> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TrCsL_OqOuSq">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TrCsL_OqOuSq</a> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DZO2St2SmA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DZO2St2SmA</a> SSs listen and comment on the way they are used to asking for help when speaking English. T gives SSs a worksheet that requires SSs to ask for help (both formal or informal) depending on the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To illustrate the problems that speakers may have when speaking and how they solved them.</td>
<td>To help SSs widen their vocabulary so that they can use circumlocution s.</td>
<td>To assist learners develop social interaction skills and to help them practice a CSs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post-training</strong></td>
<td><strong>Modeling how to use CSs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Practicing CSs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Using CSs in real talks</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T</strong> provides SSs with some role play activities where SSs needed to employ a CS.</td>
<td><strong>With the help of a volunteer in the class, the T role plays a sketch where the speaker has a problem with communication and he uses one of the CSs that are highlighted in the course.</strong> SSs deduce which of the two strategies the T is modeling.</td>
<td><strong>T asks SSs to work in pairs and trios, depending on the size if the group.</strong> T gives SSs role play tasks where SSs need to speak and use CSs. SSs develop a conversation illustrating the use of one of the two CSs, and record their performance using a cell phone or a recording device. SSs work while the T monitors and facilitates.</td>
<td><strong>SSs share their recordings, and comment on their own and the other’s performances when speaking.</strong> T monitors and responds to SS’s doubts. T asks SSs to comment in pairs or trios whether or not they notice any improvement in their use of the two CSs when speaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SSs in pairs role play and use a CS to overcome a speaking problem.</strong> This activity lasts for the rest of the class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>To encourage learners to self-evaluate and discover their own weak and strong points.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>To provide students with examples of how to employ the strategies.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>To encourage students to employ the CSs seen in the training.</strong></td>
<td><strong>To give the participants real world tasks in which they are required to speak authentic English.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX F

Dornyei’s Taxonomy (1995:58)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoidance or reduction strategies</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Message abandonment</td>
<td>Leaving the message unfinished because of language difficulties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Topic avoidance</td>
<td>Avoiding topic areas or concepts which pose language difficulties</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement or compensatory strategies</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Circumlocutions</td>
<td>Describing or exemplifying the target object or action (e.g., the thing you open bottles with for corkscrew).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Approximation</td>
<td>using an alternative term which expresses the meaning of the target lexical item as closely as possible (e.g., ship for sail boat).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Use of all-purpose words</td>
<td>extending a general, empty lexical item to contexts where specific words are lacking (e.g., the overuse of thing, stuff, make, do, as well as using words like thingie, what-do-you-call-it).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Word coinage</td>
<td>creating a nonexisting L2 word based on a supposed rule (e.g., vegetarianist for vegetarian).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Use of non-linguistic means</td>
<td>mime, gesture, facial expression, or sound imitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Literal translation</td>
<td>translating literally a lexical item, an idiom, a compound word or structure from L1 to L2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Foreignizing</td>
<td>using a L1 word by adjusting it to L2 phonologically (i.e., with L2 pronunciation) and/or morphologically (e.g., adding to it a L2 suffix).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Code switching</td>
<td>using a L1 word with L1 pronunciation or a L3 word with L3 pronunciation in L2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Appeal for help</td>
<td>turning to the conversation partner for help either directly (e.g., What do you call . . . ?) or indirectly (e.g., rising intonation, pause, eye contact, puzzled expression).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stalling or time-gaining strategies</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. Use of fillers/ hesitation devices</td>
<td>using filling words or gambits to fill pauses and to gain time to think (e.g., well, now let me see, as a matter of fact)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G

“Spot the Difference” Task

APPENDIX H

Conversational Task

What was the last time you went to the movies?

→ What movie did you see?

Did you like it?

→ Why, why not?
→ What was it about?
→ What did you find interesting?
→ What did you find tedious?

Would you recommend it?

Where did you go to see it?

Did you eat any food or drink anything?

→ What did you eat or drink?
APPENDIX I

Semi-Structured Interview

Good morning, afternoon, evening…

We are going to have a short interview. Try to answer the questions you will be asked as completely as possible and feel free to interrupt your interlocutor, ask him questions or shift the original topic of discussion whenever you want.

A. How did you feel in the course during the activities?

B. Do you think it was worth taking?
   Why?
   Why not?

C. How much do you consider that you use Spanish now in relation to before the course?
   Why?
   Why not?

D. What is your opinion towards communication strategies?

E. How fluent you think you are now in relation to before the course?
   Why?
   Why not?

F. Is there anything that you would like to add to the course?

Thanks so much for your valuable time. If you consider this information should not be included in this investigation, please feel free to tell the interviewer in order to omit it.