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**“The developmental sequence of communication  
strategies: An investigation into CLIL classrooms”**

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>CLIL</b>	Content and language integrated learning
<b>CPs</b>	compensatory strategy
<b>CS</b>	communication strategy
<b>CSs</b>	communication strategies
<b>EA</b>	error analysis
<b>EFL</b>	English foreign language
<b>ELT</b>	English language teaching
<b>IL</b>	interlanguage
<b>L1</b>	first language
<b>L2</b>	second language
<b>LL</b>	language learner
<b>LS</b>	learning strategy
<b>NNS</b>	non-native speaker
<b>NS</b>	native speaker
<b>S1/2/3/...</b>	student 1/2/3/...
<b>SL</b>	source language
<b>SLA</b>	second language acquisition
<b>SN</b>	student N
<b>Ss</b>	students
<b>T</b>	teacher
<b>T1/2/..</b>	teacher 1/2/..
<b>TL</b>	target language

In order to not prefer one gender over the other the third person singular pronouns *he* and *she* will both be used interchangeably as generic pronouns.

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# 1. Introduction

The research project illustrated in the pages to come will address what Elaine Bialystok (1990: vii) once referred to as a “very simple problem”: How do foreign language learners communicate in spite of their incompletely developed target language competence?

The answer to this question might appear relatively simple on first glance: Foreign language learners employ a certain set of *strategies* to make up for their ‘deficiencies’ and thus succeed in communication. Due to the fact that the term ‘strategy’ is frequently used in numerous disciplines such as business or sports and therefore commonly surfaces in everyday conversations, the majority of language users might, at least, have a vague idea of what underlying concept is covered by this particular term. For example: CEOs of multinational companies spend a considerable amount of time thinking of various strategies that would make their companies market leader in a certain niche. Trainers of football teams all around the world, on the other hand, will come up with various defence strategies to prevent the other team from scoring a goal. Bearing these two exemplifications in mind, one can generally define the term ‘strategy’ as ‘intentional action’, or, to be more precise, as a consciously devised plan to achieve a certain goal. This is, of course and as indicated above, a very broad definition and might need some further adaptations in order to be applicable to those strategies that are used by foreign language learners when they try to communicate in the target language. It is however a good starting point.

Researcher investigating the precise mechanisms behind second language acquisition and use continuously attempt to find a definition of second language strategies, to describe their exact nature and to find out about the different types, forms and functions they may take as well as their development over time.

A first academic interest in the strategies people use when they learn and communicate in a foreign language arose in the late 70s of the last century when SLA research underwent a paradigm shift. Early foreign language acquisition research saw the learner as ‘deficient communicator’<sup>1</sup> (cf. Firth and Wagner 1997) and thus mainly focussed on the mechanisms behind language acquisition and learning, learner mistakes and deficiencies, i.e. what they cannot do because of their limited TL competence. More recent methodologies, alternatively, focus on what learners can actually do in spite of these limitations or deficiencies. One of the key papers in this area was written by Swain and Canale (1980), who broadened the concept of ‘communicative competence’ first introduced by Hymes (1973) and Campbell and Wales (1970). These researchers introduced their respective concepts of ‘communicative competence’ in order to enhance the Chomskyan (1965) distinction between competence and performance. Noam Chomsky maintained a distinction between competence and performance where the former term relates to knowledge about a language the individual has in his or her mind, while the latter refers to language production in actual situations. Hymes (1973) suggested not using language competence in a narrow sense that would involve grammatical rules and structures only, but to broaden the concept and incorporate further socio-cultural and context dependent factors such as appropriateness. Aiming to adopt this model of ‘communicative competence’ for their research purposes Canale and Swain (1980) split the general concept into three main competencies which were identified as grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Grammatical and sociolinguistic competence include, among others, knowledge of the lexical items, sentence grammar, morphological rules and rules about discourse and the interpretation of utterances in different social contexts, respectively. Their third competency – strategic competence – embraces the following:

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<sup>1</sup> Firth and Wagner (1997: 295f) argue that SLA tends to perceive of the foreign language learner as a deficient or not defect communicator who struggles “to overcome an underdeveloped L2 competence, striving to reach the "target" competence of an idealized native speaker (NS).



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” (Canale and Swain 1980: 30)

When Canale and Swain first introduced their concept they quoted communication strategies as one of the key phenomena in this particular language competence. They, however, explicitly stated that they knew of little work in this area (Canale and Swain 1980). Since then the situation has changed drastically. Numerous research projects have been carried out to investigate the exact nature and structure of the language phenomenon in question. Not only have researchers analysed the different forms communication strategies may take, they have also tried to embed the phenomenon in broader theories of language production and looked at the various factors that are assumed to have an influence on the selection of individual communication strategies.

This paper will now follow this longstanding tradition and set out to investigate one particular aspect of communication strategies which is: how do learners who are at different stages in their respective interlanguage development make use of communication strategies? In order to do so, Austrian English foreign language learners, at different stages in their interlanguage development, have been recorded and their language output was analysed according to a specially designed framework of communication strategies.

Towards the very beginning of this section, I tried to offer a, what can be called, ‘everyday life’ conceptualisation of the term *strategy*. This definition is, of course, very broad and, as such, far from being compulsive and complete. A complete and precise definition of strategy is, however, essential to this paper and Chapter 2 will therefore offer a very detailed theoretical examination of what strategy actually means in the field of second language acquisition and learning, the factors differentiating strategies from other events of language learning and use as well as the different types of strategies learners of foreign languages have at their disposal.

In Chapter 3 then, I will take a closer look at one particular type of strategy, i.e. the communication strategies, which is the very scope of this paper. In the course of this chapter different cognitive and sociolinguistic models in which theories of communication strategies have been embedded will be illustrated. Furthermore different models of how to catalogue and classify communication strategies will also be discussed.

Following this theoretical examination of the phenomena, I will introduce and illustrate my research project more closely. In the course of chapter 4 and 5 my findings will be presented and illustrated with examples taken from the corpus. In chapter 6 my findings will be summarised and a conclusion will be given.

## 2. Strategies

To render a comprehensive account of what communication strategies actually are, it is first of all necessary, to define the term *strategy* and thus set it apart from other events that occur in (second) language acquisition and use.

This chapter will first attempt to distinguish the concept *strategy* from other events that are involved and observable in language production. Following this an overview of different strategy types will be given.

The term ‘strategy’ is relatively common and hence widely used in numerous disciplines such as sports, business or the military. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, the expression ‘strategy’, as such, denotes “a plan that is intended to achieve a particular purpose” (2000: 1284). This definition is, indeed, a very general one and thus only marginally applicable to (second) language acquisition. Acknowledging this fact, researchers in the field have continuously attempted to find a more precise description of the term in question. One of the many definitions that is used in SLA research is suggested by Ellis (2006: 529), who defines second language learner strategies as a “mental or behavioural activity related to some specific stage in the overall process of language acquisition or language use.” A further, more detailed account is offered by Cohen (1998: 4), who states that “language learning and language use strategies can be defined as those processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning or use of a second or foreign language.”

One can clearly observe that in the above stated definitions the term ‘*strategy*’ is juxtaposed with the term ‘*process*.’ Ellis’ (2006) definition, on the one hand, implies that processes and strategies are different level phenomena. Cohen (1998), on the other, defines them as constituting events

on the same level of language which can only be distinguished by one of them being conscious, while the other one is not.

This controversy implicit in the aforementioned accounts clearly illustrates the insecurity that prevails about the true nature of strategies, their particular role in language production and acquisition, as well as their relation to other events occurring in L2 production and learning. Additionally, the fact that the distinction between strategies and other phenomena, especially processes, is not always maintained may cause further confusion. To overcome these problems, various criteria have been suggested that may assist in setting strategies apart from other events involved in language use and learning.

## **2.1. Distinguishing strategies from other events**

Both of the previously stated descriptions (Ellis 2006; Cohen 1998) put forth the idea that a strategy constitutes an event that the individual employs actively or intentionally. Language production, however, is mostly accounted of as a process that is fairly automatised; i.e. language is mostly produced without the individual consciously interfering. It is thus necessary to find out about the precise events that control (foreign) language production and in how far they are employed consciously or subconsciously.

If the concept of strategies has any special meaning, then the distinction between strategic and nonstrategic language use must be determined. [...] A distinction between these two types of systems must be defended by demonstrating the way in which strategic language proceeds differently from nonstrategic language use. [...] What is in control of language when it is *not* strategic (Bialystok 1990: 14f)

In more familiar terms, in order to arrive at a valid definition of what a strategy is, it is necessary to distinguish the concept *strategy*, and hence strategic language use, from language use that is not strategic, i.e. to find out what is in control of language production in the absence of a strategy.

As noted above, the term *strategy* is frequently juxtaposed with the term process. Processes are accounted of as subconscious phenomena involved in

speech production, or “the mental steps taken to carry out a cognitive activity” (Bialystok 1990: 15), while strategies are frequently referred to as being “those processes which are consciously selected by learners” (Cohen 1998: 4).

Bialystok (1990), furthermore, distinguishes between those processes that are completely subconscious and those that are more under the control of the individual, i.e. less subconscious. The former type is inaccessible to the individual; for example, forming a sentence according to grammatical rules of a particular language. The latter describes the mental steps that can be monitored and altered by the individual, such as discourse planning or the content of the utterance. It therefore appears to be in all probability that in the absence of a strategy, a process is in control of language production or learning.

As already mentioned, researchers frequently ignore the terminological and conceptual distinction between these two events and tend to employ them synonymously. In order to avoid misunderstandings resulting from using the two terms interchangeably, different criteria were proposed to distinguish the two concepts from each other which are: a) temporality b) optionality c) consciousness.

The variable *temporality* to set processes apart from strategies was introduced by Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1983). The aforementioned researchers define strategies as “the way the learner arrives at a certain usage at a specific point in time” (Blum-Kulka & Levenston 1983: 125). In other words, a strategy is regarded to be an isolated occurrence and as such restricted to one particular instance only. A process, on the other hand, is a “systematic series of steps by which the learner arrives at the same usage over time” (Blum-Kulka & Levenston 1983: 125). For example, a language learner may, because he is lacking the precise term, use the super-ordinate term *flower* to refer to the concept of *rose*. If this was a single occurrence, at one particular point in time, it would be defined as the *strategy of simplification*. However, if this strategy turns into a habit, i.e. the LL uses *flower* every time he intends to refer to *rose*, this behaviour can trigger a

change in the internal representation of the target language. In more familiar terms, the word flower is incorporated into the learners IL system as the usual word to refer to *rose*. A phenomenon like the latter would hence be defined as process. (Bialystok 1990)

The above stated definitions of the respective terms, consequently lead Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1978) to distinguish between two kinds of strategies; those that are situation bound and those that might initiate process. The former type describes those strategies which, after having served their purposes, i.e. compensating for a problem, ultimately disappear. Alternatively, if a particular strategy is used repetitively, it might consequently be incorporated into the IL system by the corresponding process (process initiating strategies). In other words, if the learner uses the strategy of simplification repetitively his target language knowledge might be simplified as well. The above quoted exemplifications indicate that Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1983) regard processes and strategies as distinct yet interrelated phenomena.

Ellen Bialystok (1990) observes that considering the two phenomena as being interlinked to the extent that one phenomenon can trigger the other one, might, for various reasons, be extremely problematic. The first weakness she identifies in Blum-Kulka's and Levenston's (1983) conceptualisation is the absence of clear boundaries concerning the necessary amount of time that has to pass for a certain event to be considered as either a strategy or a process. A further controversial issue concerns the perspective which performance data may be analysed from. Using the criteria of temporality alone, the same performance could be classified as being either a process or a strategy depending on whether it is observed at only one point in time or over a period of time. In other words, it is very likely that the same utterance may be classified as either phenomena depending on whether it is looked at synchronically (strategy) or diachronically (process). Distinguishing the two concepts taking only the variable of time into consideration, would, thus, only reflect a difference in the analysis but not necessarily in actual language production and use.

In order to overcome the weaknesses identified above, Bialystok (1990) proposes a further criterion on behalf of which processes can be distinguished from strategies, which is optionality.

In language production there are certain processes which are carried out “by a mental executive (some control structure) that oversees all performance in response to the problem under the constraints of the system“ (Bialystok 1990:19) and are as such carried out automatically and thus unavoidable. When the individual produces language processes are initiated that are generally carried out without the individual’s conscious interference. If the individual, however, intervenes into the ordinary production process, the behaviour is not automatic but intentional. Hence, following the definition of process, the event cannot be classified as such. The term strategy is therefore used to describe those “supplementary activities that the learner can impose on the autonomous system to expedite achieving a goal” (Bialystok 1990: 19)

In other words, a process is an automatic procedure over which the language learner has no direct control. The term ‘strategy’, on the other hand, describes the individual consciously intervening in this otherwise automatic process. According to Bialystok (1990) it is observable in the surface form of an utterance whether it is the result of a strategy or a process. The actual nature of the difference between products that result from language production under control of a strategy and products that are the result of strategies is, however, not clarified.



**Figure 1:** automatic vs. strategic language production (Bialystok (1990: 19))

The crucial difference between Blum-Kulka and Levinston (1983) and Bialystok's (1990) respective conceptualisations of processes and strategies lies in the perspective the individual researchers take. While the former researchers adopt a top-down approach and thus claim that it is certain types of behaviour that can trigger either a process or a strategy, Bialystok's (1990) conceptualisation is entirely different. She states that it is not the type of behaviour that triggers internal events, but that it is vice versa. From her point of view, it is a certain type of cognitive phenomenon that results in a particular, clearly identifiable kind of behaviour, i.e. utterance, and thus adopts a perspective that is clearly bottom-up.

Stating that

[i]f the behavior is so unconscious that the learners are not able to identify any strategies associated with it, then the behavior would simply be referred to as process, not a strategy

Cohen (1998: 11) identifies consciousness as the central criterion that distinguishes *processes* from *strategies*. He states that in order to classify a certain phenomenon as a strategy the learner has to be able to report on the strategy after having used it (Ellis 2006) and that a strategy is therefore always within the individual's attention (Schmidt 1994). If strategies are automatised over time, i.e. if the learner is not conscious of employing them and cannot report on, or describe having used them, they can no longer be classified as strategies.

Faerch and Kasper (1983) also identify consciousness as the central criterion when it comes to distinguishing processes from strategies. Their conceptualisation of the two terms in question is, however, a completely different one.

While the researchers mentioned above regard strategies and processes as same level phenomena, Faerch and Kasper (1983) define them as events occurring on different levels in the overall language production process.



Both strategies and processes are seen as integral parts of a certain model of speech production (cf. Chapter 3). This model discriminates between the planning and execution phase which account for the construction of a plan and its execution, respectively. Both phases involve various processes. In the planning phase, “normally subconscious and highly automatic processes” (Faerch & Kasper 1983: 25) are responsible for the construction of the message, i.e. the selection of the appropriate words and rules. The execution phase is governed by neurological processes which put the message into actual speech.

As already mentioned, the goal of the planning phase is the creation of a plan. However, if the learner experiences a problem while creating a plan, he has to think of an alternative. This alternative plan which is made up in order to overcome a difficulty, is according to Faerch and Kasper (1983), a strategy. Put simply, a strategy is accounted of as the conscious intervention by the individual to deal with a problem and is thus a particular subclass of a plan.

According to this highly hierarchical model, processes and strategies are regarded as events in speech production that operate on different levels. On a higher level, there are subconscious processes, responsible for the construction and the execution of the message, while strategies and plans are seen as resulting from processes, and are hence situated on a lower level.

It is, however, implicit in their definitions that processes and strategies, despite the fact that they are seen as different level phenomena, are still accounted for as subconscious and conscious events respectively. Faerch and Kasper (1983) indicate that processes, selecting “rules and items [...] for establishing a plan” (Faerch&Kasper 1983: 25) when creating, or “control over the speech organs” during the execution phase, are subconscious, i.e. not under the control of the individual. On the other hand, strategies and plans appear to be at least “potentially conscious ” (Faerch&Kasper 1983: 36).

When synthesising the approaches illustrated above, one cannot help but realise that there is one crucial difference concerning the paths taken by the individual researchers. Those employing the criteria of temporality to distinguish processes from strategies assume that different types of behaviour directed towards a problem trigger different internal phenomena, i.e. either a process or a strategy. Those adopting the criteria of optionality or consciousness, on the other hand, state that different phenomena lead to different surface manifestations. Put simply, in the case of the latter, an utterance will be realised in different ways, depending on whether it is the result of a process or the result of a strategy. In the case of the former, there will be no such difference; a learner will produce the same utterance, irrespective of the underlying cognitive phenomena. To illustrate this more clearly using Blum-Kulka's and Levenston's (1983) example, the learner will use the term *flower* to refer to *rose*, irrespective of whether this phenomenon is due to an underlying process or an underlying strategy.

The above explanations neatly illustrate the different criteria used by various researchers to distinguish between processes and strategies and that “[t]he concept of strategy is somewhat a fuzzy one” (Ellis 2006: 529).

In order to render a complete account of opinions and ideas that circulate in SLA research about the nature of strategies, it must be mentioned that some researchers do not only oppose strategies to processes but also maintain a distinction between strategies and tactics (Long 1983; Seliger 1984) or techniques (Stern 1983). These distinctions mainly result from the observation that “[t]he term strategy has, in fact, been used to refer both to general approaches and to specific actions or techniques used to learn a second language” (Cohen 1998: 9).

Tactics and techniques are seen as short-term responses that help to solve immediate problems whereas strategies are defined as more general and deliberate. Seliger (1984), however, uses a different criterion to differentiate between tactics and strategies stating that the crucial point that distinguishes the aforementioned concepts is consciousness. Strategies, as he sees them,

are subconscious whereas tactics are conscious responses to a certain task or problem. It is obvious, that Seliger's account defines strategies in those terms which most theories reserve for processes.

It is not particularly difficult to realise that the way in which strategies and tactics and techniques are distinguished, seems to broadly reflect the criteria proposed to set strategies apart from processes, namely temporality and consciousness. Seliger (1984) defines tactics, similar to Blum-Kulka's and Levenston's (1983) account of strategies which suggests that processes or strategies can be differentiated from their respective opposed concept by taking the variable of time into account (Bialystok 1990: 18).

As illustrated by the many controversial views on the topic of strategies, it must be mentioned that there is still a lot of research to be carried out on these particular phenomena. As for this paper, considering the above exemplifications and definitions it appears that the distinction of processes and strategies on behalf of consciousness is most plausible. I will therefore adopt the perspective that processes and strategies are same level phenomena that are only distinguished by the fact that strategies are employed consciously, i.e. with the individual intentionally intervening into the language production process. Strategies, furthermore, most likely result from the speaker experiencing a certain obstacle when producing language which requires him to switch from 'automatic' to 'manual' language production. While I do share Bialystok's (1990) opinion that strategies and processes result in clearly different surface manifestation, I do not agree that language produced under the constraints of a strategy is always clearly recognisable because, as we know today, native speakers also employ strategies. Put simply, when it comes to native speakers a message that was produced under the constraints of a strategy does not necessarily have to be clearly recognisable as such because the native speaker has a large repertoire of alternative expressions at his disposal. An outsider might thus not always notice whether the utterance was produced automatically or strategically.

To sum this up, what distinguishes strategic language production from language that is produced automatically is the fact that the speaker would in the former case be able to report on having intervened in language production, while with regard to the latter this would not be the case.

## **2.2. Distinguishing different types of strategies**

In order to offer a comprehensive account of strategies, it is not only important to set them apart from other events that are involved in (second) language learning and production but also to distinguish between the different types of strategies that are employed by language learners and language users.

Selinker (1972) in his groundbreaking paper “Interlanguage” distinguishes between five central process that lead to IL fossilisation<sup>2</sup>, two of which were identified as *strategies of second language communication* and *strategies of second language learning*. Since then, numerous attempts have been made in order to classify those strategies and put them into order.

Cohen (1998), for example, discriminates between strategies of language use, on the one hand, and strategies of language learning on the other. In general terms, the former term is applicable when the strategy is due to the individual’s attempt to use and produce language, while the latter is used to refer to “strategies which contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly” (Rubin 1987 referred to in Ellis 2006: 531). Both of the aforementioned strategies can be summarised under the heading of second language learner strategies and as such “constitute the steps or actions consciously selected by the learners either to improve the learning of a second language, the use of it, or

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<sup>2</sup> The term fossilisation was coined by Larry Selinker (1972), who used it to describe the not fully developed IL system of foreign language learners. Fossilised items in the learner’s interlanguage are those items which despite the fact that they have not been fully acquired, from a certain point do not develop any further.

both.” (Cohen 1998: 5). Further strategies that have so far been described, however, in less detail, are receptive strategies (Corder 1983, Tarone 1983; Bates et al. 1984) and social strategies (O’Malley&Chamot 1987, Filmore 1979).

### **2.2.1. Strategies of second language use**

As already mentioned strategies of second language use are, as the name already implies, those strategies that result from the learner’s using the target language. Various subtypes of language use strategies have been identified: retrieval strategies, cover strategies, communication strategies, rehearsal strategies as well as production strategies. (cf. Cohen 1998)

*Retrieval strategies* are those strategies that are employed by the learner to “call up language material from storage” (Cohen 1998: 6). In more familiar terms, the learner uses several techniques to retrieve a certain item from his memory. These techniques may, among others include using keyword mnemonic or linking similar sounding words. Faerch and Kasper (1983), however, regard retrieval strategies not as distinct group of strategy but rather as a possible realisation of communication strategies.

A different type of strategy that is frequently employed when learners use a foreign language is the *cover strategy*. This term refers to any attempt by the learner to “create the impression that they have control over the material when they do not” (Cohen 1998: 6). For example, language learners may rely on memorised phrases, which have not been fully analysed, hence are not fully understood, in order to appear prepared and thus keep face. Furthermore, cover strategies may also constitute an attempt to “keep the action going” (Cohen 1998: 6).

Cover strategies appear to be similar to *communication strategies* which are those strategies that are employed by the learner in order to prevent a breakdown when communicating with another person. The attempts to

define communication strategies are numerous and manifold, however, no definition that is universally agreed on could be formulated thus far. A more detailed account of communication strategies will be given in Chapter 3.

*Rehearsal strategies* constitute the fourth subset of language use strategies and embrace any attempt by the learner to practice target language material with the clear intention of actually using those TL structures in a particular situation. Cohen (1998) states that it is difficult to draw a clear boarder between rehearsal strategies and learning strategies. Memorising a certain phrase, for example, can be a learning strategy, when considering only the action of memorising. However, as soon as the memorised phrase is employed in a real communicative exchange, the event would be classified as a rehearsal strategy (Bialystok 1990).

A problem with Cohen's (1998) framework is that, especially when it comes to second language use strategies, the individual strategies within that field are extremely difficult to set apart. For example, Faerch and Kasper (1983), as already mentioned, see retrieval strategies not as a distinct type of strategies but as mere subset of communication strategies. Furthermore Cohen (1998) states that it is not always possible to draw a clear line between strategies of language learning and strategies of language use. A rehearsal strategy is, for example, only defined as a strategy of language use, when it is rehearsed with the clear intention of using it in a real communicative situation and otherwise functions as learning strategy. The crucial problem about this is that it might first of all be problematic to trace the actual intention of the language learner. In addition, I would also like to raise the question, if not every language item is rehearsed with the intention to use them in a real life situation.

A different inventory of second language learner strategies is proposed by Tarone (1983). Similar to Cohen (1998) she also distinguishes between strategies of language use and strategies of language learning. However, according to her, the former group only contains two sub-strategies; production strategies on the one hand and communication strategies on the

other. Unlike communication strategies, which are used in order to prevent a breakdown in communication, production strategies according to Tarone (1983:66) are “an attempt to use one’s linguistic system efficiently and clearly, with a minimum of effort”. They are distinct from communication strategies to the extent that “they lack the interactional focus on the negotiation of meaning” (Tarone 1983: 66). In more familiar terms, while communication strategies are employed to overcome a problem, production strategies are solely aimed at facilitating speech in a particular situation. Her account of learning strategies on the other hand, is similar to Cohen’s (1998) as she also defines them as “as an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language.”

### **2.2.2. Second language learning strategies**

Generally speaking, learning strategies are defined as any means employed by learners in order to improve foreign language learning. Despite the fact that numerous attempts have been made to define the topic in question, thus far no universally accepted definition has been proposed.

Language learning strategies are **behaviours** or **actions** which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable. (Oxford 1989 referred to in Ellis 2006: 531 emphasis mine)

[...] the special **thoughts** or **behaviours** that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information (O’Malley&Chamot 1990: 1 emphasis mine)

The above stated citations neatly illustrate one of the controversies that arise when consulting different definitions of learning strategies. Researchers appear to have different at times conflicting opinions on whether learning strategies are entirely behavioural, entirely mental or both at the same time. While one group of researchers regards learning strategies as exclusively behavioural and thus observable events, others (O’Malley&Chamot 1990) describe them as both mental and behavioural. Cook’s definition (1996: 103) of LS as “a choice that the learners makes”, however, might imply that learning strategies are an entirely mental process. It is in fact not a

particularly easy endeavour to find out whether learning strategies are of a mental or behavioural nature. Oxford (1990), therefore, tentatively suggests that they may not always be an observable phenomenon.

Considering the various definitions and classifications of learning strategies (cf. for example Ellis 2006: 529ff) it is impossible to consider them as either entirely mental or entirely behavioural because most language learning strategies incorporate both a mental and a behavioural component. For example, learners frequently adopt a certain type of behaviour which triggers certain internal events which may then lead to learning. It would thus not be plausible to claim that they are either strictly mental, or exclusively behavioural. If the learner, for example, repeats a certain phrase in order to be able to memorise it, he displays a certain type of behaviour, this behaviour may then again result in certain cognitive processes that trigger mental processes which might then lead to learning. These two phenomena, hence simply represent different sides of the same cognitive activity. Ellis (2006) conceptualisation stands in line with what Blum-Kulka and Levinston observed about processes (cf. page 11ff). A process, according to the aforementioned researchers, has the potential to alter the individual's interlanguage. For example, if a particular language item is practiced and repeated consistently and over a certain amount of time, it will be incorporated into the learners (foreign) language competence. It is thus in all probability that language learning strategies incorporate both, a mental and a behavioural side.

A further controversial issue is concerned with the question of what phenomena should actually be included in the realm of second language learning strategies. While some researchers regard learning strategies in broad terms, namely as a certain type of behaviour or different actions that governs or influences the selection of conversational partners (Scarcella&Oxford 1992), i.e. as a general principle that is employed with the intention of easing conversation and thus improve learning success, others support a more narrow definition when classifying learning strategies.



[Learning strategies are] steps or mental operations used in learning or problem-solving that require direct analysis, transformation, or synthesis of learning materials in order to store, retrieve, and use knowledge. (Wenden 1986:10)

Based on this disagreement, Stern (1983) distinguishes between strategies and tactics. He uses the former term to describe more general approaches towards learning, while the latter is conceptualised as being of a more 'local' nature, i.e. used in particular areas of language, such as vocabulary learning. Despite the fact that the above concepts are frequently used in SLA research, they are not regarded as being universally valid, since they are used either in the way Stern (1983) intended or vice versa. As repetitively illustrated in the course of this chapter, the actual nature of strategies and other related cognitive events appear to be an extremely controversial issue. Researchers are relatively certain that these phenomena exist, that they are related and they also have certain perceptions about the shape these phenomena might take; they, however, display a continuous inconsistency when it comes to the terminologies used to denote these events. Since expanding any further into that matter would by far exceed the scope of this paper, I would, finally, like to mention that in my opinion it appears to be most plausible that learning strategies embrace any kind of behaviour or mental activity that is used in order to facilitate learning, irrespective of that action being of a general nature or targeted at a specific item.

A third problematic issue concerns the effect of learning strategies. Researchers appear to be certain that LS have a certain effect; they do, however, disagree whether that effect is direct or indirect. While Rubin (1987: 23) explicitly states that learning strategies "affect learning directly", others are reluctant about stating the effect of learning strategies on the learning process. Ellis, hence, states that there are some strategies that may directly contribute to learning while others may do so indirectly (Ellis 2006).

A further problem that emerges when comparing the numerous definitions on LS concerns the learner's motivation. While, for example Tarone (1983: 67) states that "[t]he basic motivating force behind learning strategies is not the desire to communicate meaning, but the desire to learn the target language", Oxford (1989) also takes into account that learning strategies may be employed to improve learning success and thus make learning more enjoyable. Put simply, Tarone (1983) thinks that learning strategies are not the result of the desire to communicate but instead resulting from the urge to learn the target language. The question is, however, what motivates language learning if not the desire to communicate with other speakers of that language. I, personally, think it is not a question of what motivates language learning strategies, but what motivates language learning in general. It seems to be relatively clear that different types of learners have different factors that might urge them to learn, once one has found out about these factors, one will also find out about the forces behind the use of learning strategies.

The fifth and probably most important controversy is caused by the question of whether LS are a conscious or a subconscious phenomenon. While Bialystok (1985: 258) and Oxford and Green (1995: 262) define learning strategies "conscious or not" or "often intentionally", respectively, other definitions, refrain from including an explicit statement on the consciousness of learning strategies, or only subliminally refer to the topic in questions. Cook (1996: 103) and Chamot (1987: 71), for example, refrain from an explicit statement about the intentionality of learning strategies as and merely describe them as "a choice" or "deliberate actions". The terms "choice" or "deliberate action" that are used in their respective definitions, however, imply that they also regard these events as a conscious phenomenon.

It is inevitable to notice that the degree of consciousness is a problematic issue when it comes to the definition of strategies in general. It is thus important to mention that whether learning strategies are regarded as

conscious or subconscious, is for the most part dependent on the definition of strategies in general that is adopted by the researcher.

After having considered all the controversial issues that prevent researchers from finding a universally accepted definition of learning strategies, I will now suggest my own account of the topic in question. Learning strategies as I see them are consciously used by language learners with the intention of improving their knowledge of the target language. They may be targeted at a specific item, for example, learning phrases or vocabulary and thus have a direct effect on language learning. They may, however, also affect learning indirectly, in thus far that by employing the various strategies learners may develop a (subconscious) intuition about the language they are setting out to learn.

### **2.2.3. Receptive strategies**

All the strategies identified thus far are strategies used by the learner in order to learn and produce language. Corder (1983) and Tarone (1983), however, also mention ‘receptive strategies’. While Tarone (1983) defines communication strategies, learning strategies and production strategies as being entirely different phenomena, Corder (1983) summarises them under the superordinate term of ‘productive strategies’, which he then juxtaposes with receptive strategies. However, research on these receptive strategies is scarce, however, Bates et al. (1984) in their study of differences in language processing found that Italian and American children adopt different strategies when interpreting the meaning of sentences.

### **2.2.4. Social strategies**

Despite the fact that social strategies are frequently quoted as being embraced by language learning strategies (O’Mally and Chamot 1987), Filmore (1979) identifies them as a clearly distinct strategy type. According to her, the crucial problem in second language acquisition is to master a set of social rules that are necessary to get in touch with more proficient

speakers and which would then lead to TL input. On behalf of this observation, she identifies three social strategies that facilitate contact as well as learning: a) join a group and act as if you understand what's going on, even if you do not b) give the impression – with a few well-chosen words- that you can speak the language c) count on your friends for help.

Alternative to classifying them as an independent group of strategies, O'Malley and Chamot (1987) embed social strategies, or affective strategies, as they call them, into the realm of language learning strategies. They do so based on the assumption that they are primarily used to get in touch with presumably more proficient speakers of the language which may then facilitate learning the language.

### 3. Communication Strategies

Despite the fact that the concept *communication strategy* is widely known and used in SLA research, researchers have, thus far, failed to provide a universally accepted definition of the phenomenon in question. This disagreement has fostered a vast number of different definitions circulating around the community.

The numerous conceptualisations of communication strategies proposed so far, despite appearing relatively similar on the surface, contradict each other in various points. While, for example, one group of researchers (Faerch and Kasper 1983; Bialystok 1990 a.o.) define the event as being of an entirely cognitive nature, others (Tarone 1983b a.o.) consider it to emerge only in the course of an interaction with a fellow speaker.

Further problematic and controversial issues include (a) the exact defining criteria of communication strategies or (b) the question whether communication strategies are considered to be a learner specific or a more general language phenomena.

The three controversies, illustrated above, will be addressed in the first part of this chapter before turning to the different taxonomies that have been proposed and eventually reviewing research on what factors might actually influence strategy choice.

#### 3.1. CSs as a learner specific phenomenon

Defining them as

a systematic attempt **by the learner** to express or decode meaning in the target language, in situations where the appropriate systematic target language rules have not been formed.

Tarone, Cohen and Dumas (1983: 5; emphasis added) adopt a clearly learner centred approach towards the conceptualisation of communication strategies. From their point of view, it is only the language learner (LL) who

needs to resort to this kind of strategy in order to make up for difficulties that result from an incomplete target language (TL) competence. The crucial point inherent in their account is the concept of ‘non-nativeness’. Communication strategies (CS) are, as they define them, a strictly non-native phenomenon. In other words, CSs are events that are observable in language produced by foreign language learners exclusively. A further point implicit in this definition of CSs is the idea that an utterance resulting from a communication strategy must be clearly distinct from problem free language production and thus easily identifiable. According to Tarone et. al (1983) CSs do not take the surface form of utterances that would be produced by a native speaker in a given situation; i.e. they do not follow the rules of the TL.

There is, however, one crucial problem with this particular account of CSs and its resulting taxonomy, namely that both appear to put forth the idea that every learner utterance is incorrect with respect to prescriptive<sup>3</sup> and/or descriptive<sup>4</sup> grammar rules of the TL and thus needs to be classified as a communication strategy.

Tarone, Cohen and Dumas (1983) were, however, not the only ones to adopt this learner centred view. The assumption that employing a communication strategy is always strictly tied to foreign language use is furthermore shared by Varadi (1983). Varadi (1983) found that Hungarian learners of English at times resort to what he called ‘adjustment phenomena’ when producing messages in a foreign language. These adjustment phenomena are defined as the various steps a learner takes in order “to communicate what he wanted to say” (Varadi 1983: 80). In language production, an NS and an NNS take two completely different routes: A native speaker, on the one hand, can pick from a complete language system, those forms and rules that

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3 The prescriptive approach views “grammar as a set of rules for the ‘proper’ use of a language” (Yule 2002: 91). This set of rules which is based on traditional Latin grammars and, until today; most frequently used in EFL, was to its main part introduced by English grammarians in the 17 century.

4 The descriptive, other than the prescriptive, approach tries to describe language not “according to some view of how it should be used” (Yule 2002: 92) but by collecting samples and describing regular structures and patterns that are found in these samples. Put simply, prescriptive grammar tells you what to do while descriptive grammar investigates into what can be, or what is done when people speak a certain language.

are most appropriate in a given situation. The learner on the other hand, faces problems producing a TL form and selects forms and messages on the belief that they communicate his thoughts in a TL form that is understandable. There is, however, not only a divergence concerning the routes that the respective speakers take but also with regard to the outcome. While native speakers produce a correct and appropriate (target) language utterance, the language learner produces a *deviant message*. This deviant message results from the learner's impoverished target language system, which requires him to form his messages according to the means at his disposal, i.e. to adjust them. This adjustment can be done in two distinct ways, the learner can either adjust meaning or adjust form, and within these two general principles a number of distinct communication strategies are possible. (Varadi 1983) Ignoring the fact that the term 'communication strategy' is only used once in Varadi's (1983) entire paper, it can, nevertheless, be assumed that what he termed 'adjustment phenomena' is today widely known as communication strategy.

This focus on the language learner and his errors that dominated the research landscape in the 1970s appears to be a 'child of its time' and can be explained quite easily by taking into account the prevailing SLA research methodology which was Error Analysis (EA). Error analysis has been described as "the study of errors that learners make in their speech and writing. (Ellis and Barkhuizen 2005: 51). In more precise terms, EA attempted to, through the thorough study and assessment of foreign language learner errors, draw conclusions about how their interlanguages developed (ibid). This research terminology that, as already mentioned, dominated the L2 acquisition field until the late 1970s is very much reflected in those two accounts of communication strategies stated above: Both of them obviously consider communication strategies as a mere manifestation of certain type of foreign language learner error.

From today's perspective, numerous weaknesses inherent in these learner centred approaches can be identified. First of all, they state that communication strategies can be easily identified since they do not

correspond to native standards<sup>5</sup>. Researchers (cf. for example Tarone et al. 1983; Varadi 1983), however, fail to render a comprehensive account of this non-nativeness as a concept, as well as what it might include and exclude. Furthermore some researchers holding this view (Tarone et al. 1983) correctly identify various problems that might crop up when analysing language with regard to this particular conceptualisation. An utterance such as *he goed*, for example, would, if it was produced by a foreign language learner, be categorised as a communication strategy. If the same construction was, however, produced by an L1-dialect speaker of English, it would not be classified as such. Ignoring the fact that this example is valid in its own terms, namely that these two utterances irrespective of their surface manifestation are the products of two entire different cognitive processes, it cannot be used to illustrate their claim for various reasons. Dialects are systems that are, in fact, similar to languages (i.e. have their own grammar, vocabulary, etc) and thus can also be treated as such. The previously mentioned utterance would therefore, with regard to the English dialect it stems from, not be incorrect, but correct. The language learner, however, aiming to produce a correct standard TL utterance would have failed to do so, because within the constraints of Standard English a form such as *he goed* is grammatically erroneous. Put simply, Tarone's statement is true, her example, however does not support the point she set out to make. A much better example to illustrate the observation that CSs are not a learner specific phenomenon was given by Bialystok (1990), some years later. She states that when adopting a learner centred approach towards communication strategies, only the learner's, but not the native speaker's attempt to refer to a *roundabout* by describing it as a "thing where a lot of streets come together" would be classified as a CS.

Other than in Taron's example (*he goed*) the circumlocution of *roundabout* produced by both speakers is the result of the same internal phenomena. In the case of the learner, the description is most likely to be produced due to a lack of the appropriate TL item. The NS, on the other hand, might produce this message because he is insecure about his interlocutor's ability to

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<sup>5</sup> The standard language is one particular language variety that is used in the media (print/broadcast) and education and foreign language teaching. (Yule 2002)



understand the term *roundabout*. The trigger may be a different one in the respective cases; the event however, is the same: both speakers attempt to prevent a breakdown in conversation and thus make use of a communication strategy. Defining CSs as events that are produced by NNSs and are at the same time non-native-like, would disqualify both the native speaker's and the non-native speaker's utterance, because they actually are grammatically correct with regard to English standards. Furthermore, the native speaker's message would not be classified as a CS solely based on the fact that a native speaker produced it. It is thus not possible to define CS as phenomena that have to be non-native as well as non-native-like, because this would in numerous cases lead to a controversial, if not wrong, classification of utterances.

A further weakness inherent in those accounts is that they implicitly postulate that native speakers of a particular language have, at all times, perfect command of their mother tongue. This is, however, not the case since the native speaker is, as May (1981: 73 referred to in Firth and Wagner 1997) puts it, not the „uncrowned king of linguistics“ but an individual that may make mistakes or might, at particular instances or for various reasons, have to resort to the one or the other strategy to make himself understood. (cf. Faerch and Kasper 1983)

Due to the numerous deficiencies in a conceptualisation of CSs that would define them as learner specific phenomena, researchers today generally acknowledge the fact that „all language users adopt [communication] strategies“ (Corder 1983: 15) but that they are more easily observable in the speech of foreign language learners.

## **3.2. Intraindividual vs. interindividual approaches towards CSs**

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, a further controversy that tends to reappear in CS literature is concerned with whether communication strategies are ought to be defined as intraindividual or interindividual events. Researchers who define CS with reference to the former line of thought define the phenomena as being of a cognitive nature. On the other hand, researchers following the latter, regard CSs as sociolinguistic phenomena. Put simply, intraindividual accounts view CSs as events that are located in the individual's mind, whereas the interindividual approach considers them instead as events that emerge in the course of a conversation. Both conceptualisations do not, however, form particularly homogeneous and comprehensive fields. They, on the contrary, embrace various interrelated, yet distinct individual theories about the true nature of communication strategies.

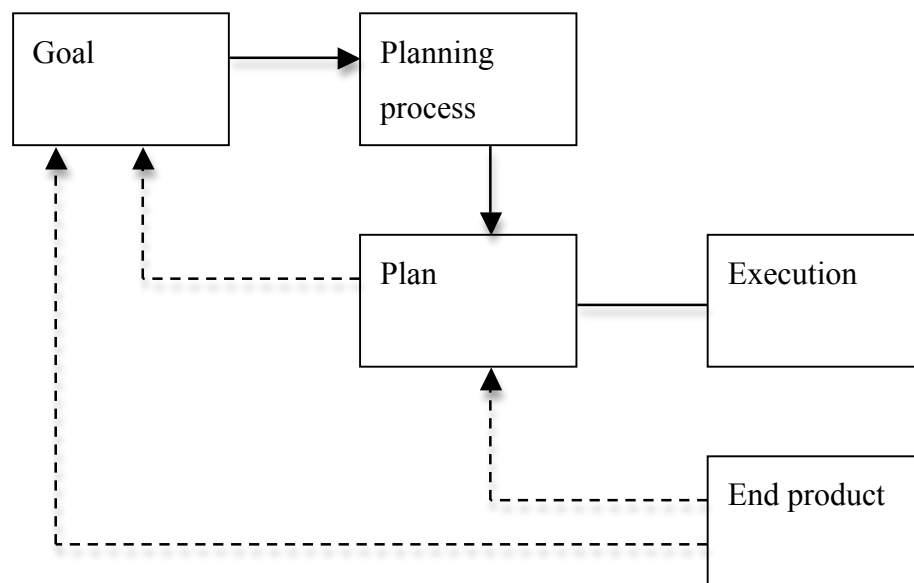
With regard to the intraindividual camp various sub-groupings are formed depending on what analysts consider to be the actual cognitive mechanism involved in CS production and use. Traditional research in this particular field, represented by Faerch and Kasper (1983), is, for example, concerned with the location of communication strategies, i.e. where they are located and what types of behaviour they involve as well as the language source the individual strategies are based on. More recent theories focus on the processes and types of knowledge involved in the production of communication strategies, instead (Bialystok 1990, Poulisse 1991, etc.). The following section will offer a small insight into the most prominent descriptions and conceptualisations of communication strategies.

### **3.2.1. Intraindividual conceptualisations of communication strategies**

Since it was one of the first and has, until today, remained one of the most frequently quoted conceptualisations of CS, we will first investigate into

how Klaus Faerch and Gabriele Kasper (1983) define communication strategies.

The aforementioned researchers postulate that CSs constitute events that occur while the individual generates and executes messages. To locate them with reference to these particular cognitive phenomena, they merge and adopt two models of behaviour and speech production proposed by Leont'Ve (1975) and Clark and Clark (1977), respectively. This particular scheme, then, distinguishes between two central phases involved in the generation of actual speech: the planning phase and the execution phase. The first phase, as the name might already indicate, is responsible for the construction of a plan to fit the communicative goal<sup>6</sup>. The creation of such a plan is, however, not an easy thing to do since it involves a thorough assessment of the communicative situation, one's own knowledge as well as the linguistic and content knowledge of the interlocutor. Once the plan is constructed, it takes control over the execution phase, in the course of which the plan is turned into actual speech by various physiological processes.



**Figure 2:** A model of speech production (cf. Faerch and Kasper (1983: 25))

<sup>6</sup> Communicative goal in Faerch and Kasper's (1983) conceptualisation are those goals that relate "to the activity of engaging in communicative events." Communicative events can furthermore have a global goal (what the speaker want to achieve) and local goals, i.e. a series of smaller goals with assist in reaching the overall global goal.

To put the above graph into writing: The language learner when entering into conversation decides on a goal, i.e. what he would like to achieve with this message. He then constructs a plan that would allow him to reach this goal. After the plan is constructed, it is put into action; i.e. actual speech, by various neurolinguistic processes.

Speech production is, however, not always as simple as illustrated above since speakers can encounter problems at various stages during this process.

According to Faerch and Kasper (1983), the majority of problems emerge during the planning phase of the utterance. The speaker, when creating a plan, can for various reasons experience a gap in his linguistic knowledge - the lack of certain lexical items, for example. Due to this problem the original plan cannot be executed and a different one is required. This newly created plan which is then executed alternatively to the original one, is what Faerch and Kasper (1983) consider a *communication strategy*.

As stated above, the majority of problems encountered in language production occur while planning an utterance. Other difficulties might, alternatively, be noticed long before actual language production process had been initiated. For example, the individual, well aware of the fact that he is not able to generate a certain speech act, may decide not to enter into a conversation that would require him to produce one of these acts. In such a case the speech production process is repressed from the very beginning because the learner does not set himself a goal. However, according to Faerch and Kasper (1983), this strategic avoidance of a conversation can also be classified as communication strategy, because it is based on the potentially conscious decision of the individual not to enter into conversation. Not communicating thus can be considered as an alternative plan, made up to overcome a difficulty and hence also be classified as a communication strategy.

A third point in the speech production process at which possible problems can arise is while executing the message. This type of problem-management

is different from those stated above because, as the name might imply, the learner only becomes aware of the obstacle, once the execution has already been initiated. Unlike problems that crop up during or before the planning phase, those that appear in the execution phase can not be avoided, or dealt with by means of different strategies but “are there and have to be solved”. (Faerch&Kasper 1983: 35). According to Faerch and Kasper (1983) problems of this kind are mostly about retrieving a particular item that is needed in order to execute the already conceived plan (e.g. tip-of-the-tongue phenomena). Ignoring the fact that these problems are obvious in communication, they can nonetheless be dealt with by means of a communication strategy; how this is done is, however, not fully clarified.

Based on their conceptualisation of CS Faerch and Kasper (1983) propose an extremely detailed taxonomy which distinguishes between two general types of behaviour each of which results in a general type of communication strategy which then again embrace a vast number of distinct communication strategies, respectively (see later).

The conceptualisation of CSs illustrated above as well as its resulting classification scheme, have not only found numerous supporters but have also been subject to severe criticism (Bialystok 1990, Poulisse 1991, etc). One of the many points that have been criticised about their work is that Faerch and Kasper (1983) fail to acknowledge that there is no clear indication as to why one should distinguish between the planning and the execution phase as most processes involved in speech production are carried out simultaneously (Bialystok 1990). Furthermore, Bialystok (1990) claims that concepts such as “plan”, “strategy” and “process” were ill-defined in their conceptualisation and that they can therefore not be used to give a valid account of the subject matter. (cf. also Chapter 2: different definitions of the concept ‘strategies’ offered by Faerch and Kasper (1983) and Bialystok (1990), respectively.)

To overcome the weaknesses inherent in this particular account more recent research projects have approached the topic in different ways.

Up to this point, the most comprehensive research on CSs was carried out collectively by a group of researchers at the university of Nijmegen: Bongearts, Kellerman and Poulisse (1987), among others. This group of researchers will henceforward be referred to as the Nijmegen group/project.

While their definition of CSs as

strategies which a language user employs in order to achieve his intended meaning on becoming aware of problems arising during the planning phase of an utterance due to (his own) linguistic shortcomings (Poulisse 1990: 88)

is relatively similar to the one proposed by Faerch and Kasper (1983), they take an entirely different path towards conceptualising the phenomenon. Several features distinguish the two accounts; the most prominent of which is the fact that while Faerch and Kasper (1983) are concerned with the location of communication strategies in language production, the Nijmegen project tries to investigate the actual cognitive mechanisms or processes that trigger or are involved in CS use.

According to the Nijmegen group “[t]he speaker who opts for the use of CpS [compensatory strategies] has two knowledge sources at his disposal” which he can draw information from (Poulisse 1989: 58). One of these knowledge sources is conceptual and “(presumably) constitutes part of the encyclopaedia.” (Poulisse 1989: 58). This encyclopaedic knowledge contains information about the concept’s properties (i.e. semantic features) and its relationship to other concepts. This allows the individual to analyse a particular construct in terms of its integral parts, or define them via their relationship to related terms. This kind of knowledge thus allows the speaker to refer to a particular item in terms of distinctive features or its relationship to other concepts.

The other source of knowledge identified by the researchers stated above is knowledge about the language. This kind of knowledge embraces all the morphological, syntactic, phonological rules about every language the individual has ever learnt or acquired. Furthermore, possible

correspondences between these rules and languages are also represented in this particular faculty of the mind. The observation that a speaker does not necessarily have to resort to a certain language to express his thoughts has lead researchers to reconsider the label for this type of knowledge (Kellermann 1987). This rephrasing of the term used to describe the concept is based on the observation that the individual can not only choose from the various languages he knows but also from a variety of codes that are not necessarily linguistic, to get his message across. The term code, thus, appears to be more adequate because the concept of 'code', other than the conceptualisation of 'language', does not only include spoken languages but furthermore incorporates mime and gestures which are also extensively used in everyday communication. Additionally, the term 'code strategy', would also account for the use of further predominantly extra-linguistic systems such as the use pictures or objects. Since all of the previously stated codes represent concepts in the same way as language does it is necessary to include them in a conceptualisation of this kind. (Kellerman 1987)

As illustrated above, the Nijmegen Project regards communication strategies as being the result of an individual drawing from two distinct knowledge sources in order to be able to communicate in situations of difficulty. As a result of this conceptualisation, they propose a binary taxonomy which only distinguishes between only two communication strategies: knowledge based strategy and code based strategy (see later).

Ellen Bialystok (1990) criticises traditional classifications of communication strategies (cf. Tarone et. al 1983, Faerch and Kasper 1983) for failing to incorporate the phenomenon into a comprehensive model of cognitive processing which then necessarily leads to a misconception of the event in question.

Stating that there is no reason for why language should not work like any other cognitive process, she presents her own conceptualisation of CSs, which is embedded in an overall model of knowledge acquisition.

Drawing on her findings from first language acquisition research, she concludes that language learning and use must involve the same cognitive processes as any other intellectual accomplishment. On behalf of this observation she introduces a model of language proficiency which distinguishes between two major language processing components: *the analysis of linguistic knowledge* and *the control over linguistic processing*. A communication strategy, she states, is always an enhancement of one these components. (Bialystok 1990)

Her first component, the analysis of linguistic knowledge, is defined as „the process by which mental representations are increasingly structured“ (Bialystok & Kellerman 1997: 32). In other words, through the process of analysis the individual turns „contextually embedded meanings of words“ (Bialystok & Kellerman 1997: 32) into a more abstract structure. This analysis works on two distinct levels: the level of meaning and the level of language. The former may, for example, relate concepts such as *dog*, *cat*, or *collie* to each other because all of them share various semantic features or properties. On the language level the aforementioned terms may, alternatively, be linked because each of them is a representative of the same grammatical category, i.e. all of them are nouns (Bialystok & Kellerman 1997). Once knowledge has been analysed it exists independently of language which allows the individual to access this knowledge irrespective of the code she is communicating in.

The second processing component identified is *control of processing* also called *selective attention*. In regular everyday interactions, an individual is confronted with a vast amount of information. Control of processing, now, as the name already implies, allows one to select, from all the information given, those pieces that might appear to be most relevant in a particular situation. For example, in conversations involving only native speakers of a given language, the individual parties involved usually focus on communicating meaning only. In NS/NNS conversations, however, attention may be redirected to incorporate form, i.e. lexical devices, as well (Bialystok 1990). Put simply, in NS only interactions, the speaker simply



concentrates on the message he is aiming to get across (on *what* to say), while if the speaker is communicating in a language other than his mother tongue, he additionally has to concentrate on *how* to formulate his messages.

Communication strategies, according to Bialystok (1990), are enhancements of respective processing components stated above. When experiencing a problem, the learner thus has two options: He can either use his analysed knowledge and alter the form of the message or take control over the means she uses to communicate. The individual communication strategies that are produced as a result of these processes will be considered later in this chapter.

Bialystok's definition of communication strategies actually appears to be based on the same criterion she uses to distinguish processes from strategies: 'optionality' (see Chapter 2). It appears that the processing components are obligatory, i.e. knowledge formation and analysis work by the very same principles in every human being. Strategies, alternatively, are optional enhancements of these processes which the individual can resort to but which do not necessarily have to be employed.

Bialystok (1990) explicitly states that processes and strategies are same level phenomena which can only be differentiated by the former being obligatory while the latter is optional. Looking at her account of communication strategies, however, there is one crucial question to be raised: If one considers communication strategies to be "enhancements" would that not necessarily make them a subclass of these particular processes? At least, one could read her exemplification to the extent that the two processing components, the analysis of knowledge and the control over linguistic processing constitute one level, while the optional enhancements represent and function on a lower level.

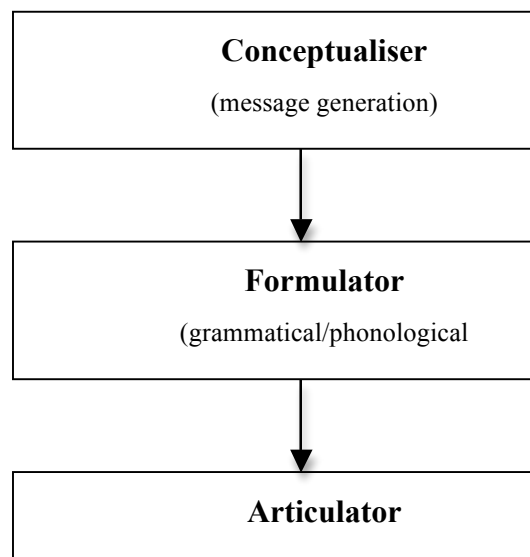
It is undeniable that there are obvious similarities between Bialystok's (1990) model and the model proposed by the Nijmegen group. Both

distinguish between two general types of knowledge involved in strategy use: On the one hand there is knowledge about the concept while on the other it is knowledge about the code. Bialystok's (1990) definition is simply more elaborate in that it is closely tied to a general model of knowledge acquisition.

Before turning to interindividual conceptions and definitions of communication strategies I would like to illustrate one further cognitive approach towards the topic in question.

Breaking with her earlier work as a member of the Nijmegen Project (1989), Poulisse (1993) proposes an entirely different model of communication strategies which, similar to Faerch and Kasper's (1983), suggests that communication strategies are embedded in a comprehensive model of speech production.

Based on an L1-model of speech production offered by Levelt (1989) Poulisse (1988) distinguishes between three distinct components involved in speech production: *the conceptualizer*, *the formulator* and *the articulator*. These components are responsible for the generation of the message, the selection of the appropriate lexical items and their placement within an appropriate grammatical structure, and the eventual articulation of the message as actual speech, respectively.



**Figure 3:** A model of speech production (cf. Poulisse (1993: 174) or Levelt (1989: 9))

Bearing this framework in mind Poulisse (1993) recalls

that CS are used when the speaker is confronted with a lexical problem. Lexical problems arise when the speaker has set up a preverbal message containing chunks of conceptual, grammatical and language information and then finds that he cannot access the lexical item to match all of the specifications for a particular chunk. (Poulisse 1993: 178)

In contrast to Faerch and Kasper (1983), who identify three points in the course of the speech production process where problems can crop up (see above), Poulisse (1993) only finds two: The speaker can either encounter difficulties while generating his message, i.e. in the conceptualiser or while encoding it, i.e. in the formulator.

In the first scenario the speaker, while planning an utterance, realises that a certain lexical item is not stored in his mental lexicon, yet makes up a different plan to compensate for this missing item. On the contrary, the observation that CSs are frequently accompanied by hesitation phenomena<sup>7</sup> would imply that the lexical problem is realised only “after the grammatical encoding has started (sic!)“ (Poulisse 1993: 179); i.e. in the formulator.

Faced with the inability to encode his message, the speaker, according to Poulisse (1990) has three options: a) He can abandon his message; i.e. give up his intended message and hope for his interlocutor to resume the conversation. b) He can opt to appeal for the interlocutor’s help, either implicitly or explicitly or c) He can employ a compensatory strategy/communication strategy.

Based on this model Poulisse (1993) identifies three distinct communication strategies: substitution, substitution plus and reconceptualisation strategies each of which will be discussed at a later point in this chapter.

Summing up, it can be stated that the CS definitions illustrated above do in fact show various inevitable similarities, however, the different ideas about

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<sup>7</sup> Hesitation phenomena are events that frequently occur in language production. The speaker makes use of certain events such as filled pauses (ums and ers), automatisms (sort of, at the end of the day), repetitions and reformulations in order to gain more time while producing a message.

where to actually locate them within the individual's frame of mind differ significantly. Faerch and Kasper (1983) as well as Poulisse (1983) locate them within a certain model of speech production while Ellen Bialystok (1990) and earlier research carried out by the Nijmegen project focus particularly on the different types of knowledge involved in CS production and more or less ignore the actual speech production process. Furthermore, and this will be dealt with later in this chapter in greater detail, the previously explained theories vary considerably concerning what the basic concept of communication strategy, i.e. which events representations of CSs and which are not. Faerch and Kasper (1983), for example, roughly consider any consciously chosen alternative plan used to overcome a problem in communication a communication strategy and as such even consider consciously choosing not to communicate as particular realisation thereof. More recent theories (Nijmegen Project, Bialystok), on the other hand, only take those strategies that lead to actual language production into consideration. They do so because their main point of interest is what the learner does in order to communicate and not how he avoids communicating. But this, as already mentioned, will be dealt with at another point in this chapter.

### **3.2.2. Interindividual conceptualisations of communication strategies**

In her article "Some thoughts on the notion of 'communication strategies'" Tarone states that „the interactional function of CS has unfortunately been overlooked in [her own] research to date" because it was „easy to forget that language is not an object which is used, but part of communication - a living organism created by both speakers and hearer" (1983: 64) This insight lead to her defining the term communication strategy not as a cognitive phenomena but alternatively as

a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared. [...] Communication strategies, viewed from this perspective, may be seen as attempts to bridge the gap between the linguistic knowledge of the second language learner, and the linguistic knowledge of the target language interlocutor in real communication situations. (Tarone 1983: 64)

Communication strategies, Tarone (1983) states, are a joint endeavour, a „shared enterprise“ (Cook 1993: 120) and as such involve both parties that participate in a conversation. She suggests three major criteria on behalf of which a communication strategy may be identified: a) A speaker intends to communicate meaning X to his interlocutor, however, b) finds himself lacking the appropriate (linguistic and/or social) structure to communicate this meaning. Facing this gap in his knowledge, c) the speaker can then either refrain from communicating or „attempt [to] alternate means to communicate meaning X“ (Tarone 1983: 65). These continuous attempts to communicate only stop when “it seems clear to the speaker that there is shared meaning.“ (Tarone 1983: 65).

Tarone’s interactional interpretation has always been subject to severe criticism. Faerch and Kasper (1984), in particular, identify two major weaknesses in her work: Firstly, they state, Tarone (1983) takes over a classification of CS proposed in her earlier work without further reconsideration. The major problem with the recycled conceptualisation is that in these early studies she described communication strategies as a cognitive phenomenon. Additionally, she fails to provide a comprehensive account of what the interactional nature of CS actually is. These shortcomings inherent in Tarone’s conceptualisation of CSs lead Faerch and Kasper (1984) to interpret her work in their own terms.

Stating that there were two possible ways in which her work could be interpreted they consequently identify a weak and a strong interactional claim.

The *weak interactional claim* puts forth the idea that the speaker might use a communication strategy in order to get a certain response, i.e. feedback, from his interlocutor which may then assist in solving a particular problem. There are, however, two major problems with interpreting interactiveness in this way: Firstly it „does not single out communication strategies from other procedures underlying verbal behaviour“ (Faerch & Kasper 1984: 53), i.e. the listener always gives immediate feedback to a mere surface manifestation, independent of the processes underlying it. In other words,

the learner's interlocutor would give immediate feedback irrespective of whether or not the utterance was the result of a communication strategy or any other process that would lead to the production of actual speech. Secondly, reading interactivness in this way would indicate that CSs cannot be used in situations where no immediate feedback is possible, e.g. in written communication other forms of face-to-face interaction such as lectures. Furthermore this view would in fact not define communication strategies in an interactive fashion because the learner would still be the only one who was aware of the problem and would thus simply use the feedback offered by his interlocutor to overcome any conversational obstacle.

The *strong interactional claim*, on the other hand, accounts of communication strategies as being „truly cooperative in nature“. (Faerch & Kasper 1984: 54) This interpretation puts forth the idea that it is not only the speaker (cf. weak interactional claim) but both interlocutors who become aware of the problem, and therefore attempt to solve it together. People engaging in conversation can realise these obstacles in two ways: either *directly* through appeals for assistance, or *indirectly* through, for example, failed attempts to arrive at a solution which then elicit the interlocutor's cooperation.

The crucial shortcoming in Tarone's interactional definition, which has partly been identified by Faerch and Kasper (1984) (cf. weak interactional claim), is that her account obviously ignores the fact that it the conversational obstacle is still with only *one* of the interlocutors. It may surface in communication and be solved together, but the nature of the problem is still cognitive, only the solving of the problem once it surfaces in conversation is interactional. The point I am aiming to make is that the difficulty the individual is faced with appears while planning or producing an utterance. The native speaker, for example, may be faced with a foreign language learner in a NS/NNS conversation, or with a tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon in an NS/NS conversation, and resort to a communication strategy. The foreign language learner, on the other hand, may face

difficulties in language production because of his not fully developed target language competence. The problem, despite the fact that it may be solved jointly, is of a cognitive nature, originating in the mind of the individual.

### **3.3. Defining criteria of CS**

A third controversy that frequently surfaces when discussing communication strategies are the criteria with regard to which they ought to be defined.

Through investigating the accounts stated above, in greater detail, it appears that it is not the definition of communication strategies *per se* that differs, but the way in which the individual researchers, or groups of researchers take account of various processes or events involved in communication strategy formation.

Taking a closer look at the numerous definitions, there are two central concepts or ideas that tend to reappear continuously: problematicity (or problem-orientedness) on the one hand, and consciousness on the other.

#### **3.3.1. Problematicity**

The idea that communication strategies are inseparably tied to a problem in conversation seems to be widely spread among researchers. On thoroughly investigating the numerous descriptions of CSs, one is frequently confronted with terms such as *problem, gap, obstacle, crises, breakdown, deficit or limitation*. Cook (1993: 119) therefore rightly observes that

[m]ost L2 research has limited the term ‘communication strategy’ to strategies employed when things go wrong rather than applying them to the process of problem-free conversation.

The issue of problematicity as a defining criterion for CSs has been highly debated in the field of SLA. While some researchers restrict the use of CSs to situations of difficulty, others acknowledge the fact that they may as well be employed in irrespective of presence of a communicative problem (Cook 1993).

The inseparability of communication strategies and problems dominates the work of numerous researchers in the field. Elaine Tarone, for example, states that communication strategies are employed whenever “requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared” (Tarone 1983: 72). While problemativeness is only implicitly included in her definition, her fellow researchers tend to be more precise. Pit Corder (1983: 16), for example, explicitly restricts the use of communication strategies to the learner experiencing “some difficulty”.

Similar to their contemporaries, Faerch and Kasper (1983) also regard problem-orientedness as crucial to the definition of communication strategies. Stating that “[c]ommunication strategies are potentially conscious plans for solving [...] a problem [...]” (Faerch & Kasper 1983: 36) they consequently adopt problemativeness as their primary defining criterion of communication strategies; their secondary defining criterion being consciousness (see later).

Acknowledging the fact that their conceptualisation of CS also requires a precise definition of the term problem, Faerch and Kasper (1983) follow Klaus and Buhr (1976) and refer to it as the language learner’s recognition of „the insufficiency of his [...] existing knowledge to reach a goal and of the consequent need for expanding this knowledge.“ (Klaus and Buhr: 1976: 974 quoted in Faerch and Kasper 1983: 32)

This definition of problem, however, shows at least one considerable weakness, which is that it cannot account for those communication strategies used by native speakers of a certain language. Faerch and Kasper (1983) rightly point out that given certain physiological or social circumstances e.g. fatigue, anxiety or talking to people whose language competence is yet not fully developed (caretaker talk), respectively, a NS may also resort to using communication strategies. This usage, however, is not due to insufficient knowledge, as it is stated in Klaus and Buhr’s (1976) problem-definition, but rather to “insufficient means which can be



reasonably put to use under the prevailing situational conditions.” (Faerch&Kasper 1983: 33).

As illustrated above, the account of ‘problem’ put forth by Faerch and Kasper proves to be extremely narrow. Various researchers (Dörnyei & Scott 1995, Dörnyei & Scott 1997, Tarone 1980; Tarone & Yule 1987; Canale 1993 among others), have therefore, suggested to consequently widen the definition of the term to include the following three types as well a) own performance problems b) other performance problems as well as c) processing time pressure. Defining ‘problem’ according to these criteria would then extend conceptualisations of communication strategies to include the speech of native speakers as well and furthermore also cover communication strategies that are used to overcome problems in language comprehension.

While Faerch and Kasper (1983) state that CSs are in any case related to some sort of problem and that the term in one way or another should be included in any definition of communication strategies, Bialystok (1990) strongly defies the excessive use of the term when it comes to defining the phenomena. From her point of view, the strong focus on “problem” when it comes to defining CSs, has lead to researchers ignoring the possibility that these events can also appear in the absence of difficulties. She, therefore, claims that including probematicity in these definitions, can lead to a mal-classification of utterances because it does not account for native speakers using communication strategies. To exemplify her claim, she states that if a native speaker produced a description instead of calling an object by its name, this would not be considered a CS. On the other hand, in cases of NNSs describing a certain term the product would be classified as communication strategy. What Bialystok (1990) seems to ignore here is that it is not a question of whether to include probematicity or not but a question of how the term “problem” is in fact conceptualised. We have already seen that Blum and Kulka’s account of ‘problem’ is by far too narrow to be applied to CS research. If we, however, widened the concept of ‘problem’ (as suggested by Dörnyei and Scott (1997)) to include various distinct

aspects such as one's own performance problems, the other person's performance as well as difficulties in comprehension, it would easily be applicable to CS research.

Furthermore, if we consider strategies in general to be distinct from processes due to the fact that the former is conscious while the other one is not, we also have to acknowledge that there has to be a certain 'trigger'. A trigger could for example be a particular event that makes the individual switch from automatic to manual language production. In my opinion, this trigger most certainly is some sort of problem.

After a thorough review of what might speak for and what speaks against problematization as defining criterion of CS, I may conclude that problem-orientedness is a valid criterion for conceptualising communication strategies. If we consider language production to be a fairly automatic process and strategies to be conscious or manual interferences into this subconscious process there has to be 'something' to actually trigger this strategic language production; this 'something' is most certainly a problem or an obstacle that prevents the speaker from producing language automatically.

For the purpose of illustrating my claim more precisely I would like to once more consider the 'roundabout example' mentioned earlier in this chapter. Both the native and the non-native speaker mentioned, use a communication strategy due to various distinct reasons. Firstly, it can be assumed that the language learner does not know the exact term for the concept in the TL and therefore employs a circumlocution. The native speaker on the other hand, makes use of the very same strategy because the precise term might just not come to mind in that very moment (tip-of-the-tongue-phenomena) or because he is talking to a NNS and thus assumes the term "roundabout" to be problematic, or as Bialystok (1990) originally states, he is talking to a fellow NS from a different cultural background who is not familiar with the concept of roundabouts. Irrespective of the different backgrounds of the speakers involved in the individual scenarios, all of them are dealing with a problem of some sort which makes them switch from 'automatic' to 'manual', i.e. strategic language production. It is thus, in my opinion, not

necessary to criticise or rethink the role of the “problem” in communication strategy production but simply to widen the concept in question. Problems that trigger communication strategies can thus be: a) own production problem, i.e. the speaker cannot produce a certain form. b) One interlocutor expects his fellow interlocutor to be not in a position to understand a certain utterance and therefore resorts to a strategy c) One of the interlocutors cannot understand. (Dörnyei and Scott 1997)

These problems that surface in the course of conversation do, however, not necessarily have to be a real problems, i.e. something that really manifests itself, in most cases it is just something that one of the interlocutors assumes or expects to cause a problem and thus avoids it altogether.

### **3.3.2. Consciousness**

After having reviewed the various aspects of why to include the variable problematicity into definitions of communication strategies, we will now turn to what Faerch and Kasper (1983) consider their secondary defining criterion of CS.

The idea that they are always employed consciously is, at least, implicitly included in the most prominent conceptualizations of communication strategies offered thus far. Numerous definitions refer to the phenomena as “potentially **conscious** techniques” (Faerch & Kasper 1983: 36; emphasis mine); “[...] the **conscious** employment by verbal or nonverbal mechanism for communicating and idea” (Brown 1987 quoted in Khanji 1996: 144; emphasis mine) or as “[...] a **conscious** attempt to communicate the learner’s thought (Varadi 1973 quoted in Tarone 1977: 195; emphasis mine).

These frequent listings of the term ‘consciousness’ in the most commonly used definitions, however, has not prevented it from being strongly debated and criticized. This criticism primarily results from the failure of most researchers to provide a valid account of what the term in question might actually include. Based on this observation, Dörnyei & Scott (1997: 185),

for example, identify five distinct ways in which the term consciousness is being used in CSs research:

- a) The speaker is conscious about there being a language problem.
- b) The speaker is conscious about the attempt to solve this problem.
- c) The speaker is conscious about the means at this disposal.
- d) The speaker is conscious about the way in which a CS may achieve its effect.
- e) The speaker is conscious about the alternative plan.

In order to overcome the difficulties that arise from this unspecified use of the concept *consciousness* as a defining criterion, Dörnyei and Scott (1997) following Schmidt (1994) further suggest a deconstruction of the term into the following three aspects: consciousness as awareness of a problem; consciousness as intentionality and consciousness as awareness of strategic language use. The idea of splitting up the concept has also been put forth by Bialystok (1990), who also differentiates between consciousness and intentionality.

The fuzziness of the term, however, is not the only problem resulting from identify 'consciousness' as a defining element of CS. Faerch and Kasper (1983: 35), immediately after adopting 'consciousness' as their secondary defining criterion, identify one potential weakness within the concept stating that consciousness "is rather a matter of degree than of either-or". In other words, what is actually conscious may vary individually and also change in the course of time, e.g. what starts out as conscious may, as time passes by, become automatised and thus subconscious (cf. Blum and Kulka 1983). Furthermore acknowledging that "it is probably the exception rather the rule, that consciousness refers to a complete plan" (Faerch & Kasper 1983: 35) they consequently suggest that CSs are "potentially conscious plans" (Faerch & Kasper 1983: 36) and thus may refer to both plans which are always consciously employed and plans which are sometimes consciously employed.

Bialystok (1990) also strongly questions the legitimacy of adopting consciousness as a defining criterion of CS, stating that “if communication strategies are truly conscious events of language use, then it follows that speakers who employ them are aware [...] of having done so.” (1990: 4). Drawing on her earlier research, Bialystok (1990) observes that a definition of CS which includes “consciousness” would, for example, not account for children using them because they are cognitively not in a position to reflect on their decisions. “Yet much of the language used by children appears to make use of the same strategies as does the speech of adult second-language learners.” (Bialystok 1990: 4f)

In other words, adult foreign language learners, similar to children learning their L1, are often confronted with situations that demand a communication strategy. Including consciousness as defining criteria for CS, would, however, restrict the use to the latter only, because it is only for adults that “conscious reflection is possible” (1990: 4).

After having summarised the many attempts made by researchers to define communication strategies we will now investigate the numerous taxonomies that result from these definitions.

### **3.4. Taxonomies and classifications of communication strategies**

Poulisse (1989) states that the numerous attempts to develop a scheme according to which communication strategies can be classified have not yet yielded a universally accepted taxonomy but rather made it difficult “to see the wood for the trees” (Poulisse, Bongaerts and Kellerman 1989: 28). This chapter will now give an overview of the most frequently used categories according to which these phenomena are organised.

### **3.4.1. Achievement vs. Reduction**

According to Faerch and Kasper (1983) foreign language learners, when facing a communicative problem, can resort to two different types of behaviour: They can either reduce, i.e. change, their communicative goal (avoidance behaviour) or stick to the original goal but expand their means to execute their original plan (achievement behaviour). Each of these two options available ultimately guides this learner towards using a particular type of communication strategy: reduction strategies or achievement strategies.

Within the category of 'reduction strategies' two general types of reduction have to be distinguished: formal and functional reduction. The former describes any attempt by the learner to communicate by means of a reduced IL system. This reduction can affect every level of language: phonology, morphology, the lexicon as well as the syntax. The major causes for adopting this strategy, as identified by Faerch and Kasper (1983), are, on the one hand the fear of making mistakes and the desire to communicate fluently on the other. The learner, due to either one or both of the aforementioned reasons, tries to avoid the trouble spot by relying on well automatised IL items.

Formal reduction due to error avoidance and formal reduction resulting from concerns about fluency do not only differ with regard to the problem but also with regard to the outcome. It has been observed (Faerch and Kasper 1983) that the former frequently results in what the learner perceives as correct language whereas the latter, leads to utterances which the learner knows are incorrect, however, are considered as being appropriate to reach his communicative goals.

As already mentioned, it is most likely that the decision to communicate by means of a formally reduced system is made before entering into a conversation. Functional reduction, on the other hand, represents a certain way of dealing with problems that crop up in the course of a conversation. In other words, functional reduction strategies are defined as a solution to a

linguistic problem that learners may encounter while planning their utterance and if, in that particular the situation, “their behaviour [...] is one of avoidance rather than achievement” (Faerch&Kasper 1983: 43). Put simply, functional reduction is resorted to whenever a learner comes across a problem while planning his message and due to limited resources decides to changes his communicative goal.

Nearly every element<sup>8</sup> of the communicative goal can be reduced, however, most commonly, it is the propositional content that is affected. This alternation of take various shapes: a) certain topics can be avoided b) problematic messages may be abandoned or c) or a particular meaning is replaced by a more general one. The means used to carry out these alterations are termed functional reduction strategies which form a continuum ranging from the total refusal, over the attempt to communicate but giving up, to the replacement of a precise message with a more general one.

Similar to functional reduction strategies, achievement strategies are also used to overcome obstacles that crop up during the planning phase of an utterance. However, when employing this type of strategy, the learner tries to expand the linguistic resources at his disposal, rather than change his communicative goal. Achievement strategies, like reduction strategies, are subdivided into two general classes: compensatory strategies and retrieval strategies.

The main difference between these two classes is that compensatory strategies, henceforward abbreviated as Cps, are strategies that are used to resolve problems that occur in the planning phase, whereas retrieval strategies are concerned with problems that occur in the execution phase of an utterance.

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<sup>8</sup> The elements of a communicative goal are: actional, modal and propositional content. (Faerch and Kasper 1983)

The category ‘compensatory strategy’ embraces various distinct strategies which Faerch and Kasper (1983) classify according to the linguistic source the learner draws the information from. There is hence a distinction between L1- and L2-based strategies as well as strategies which draw on the learner’s L1 and L2 simultaneously. L1 based strategies, as the name implies, are strategies that are based on the learner’s native language, or any other language the learner might be familiar with. The most common strategies within this category are code-switching (transfer), literal translation and foreignisation. The learner can, however, not only draw on a language other than the source language but also on his knowledge about the target language (L2-based/IL-based strategies). Individual strategies within this category are paraphrase, word coinage and generalisation and restructuring.

“Especially in situations in which the learner considers the L2 formally similar to his L2, strategies of inter-/intralingual transfer may be applied” (Faerch&Kasper 1983: 47). One of the strategies which are based on both languages at the same time is the generalisation of an IL rule which is influenced by patterns of the learners native language. A language learner may thus generalise past tense formation to TL items according to how they are used in his native language.

Summing this up, Faerch and Kasper identify twelve distinct strategies that are used to overcome difficulties in conversation. Three of these strategies are used when a lack of linguistic resources demands the reduction of the linguistic goal, while the rest of them are used to expand the resources at the learner’s disposal and communicate their original intention despite a limited target language competence.

### **3.4.2. Concept vs. Code**

Stating that

- (a) there has been a tendency to confuse the linguistic realisation of the referential strategy with the strategy itself, and (b) the strategy has been confused with the properties of the referent (Kellerman 1991: 5)



the researchers participating in Nijmegen Project identify two crucial weaknesses in Faerch and Kasper's (1983) work and consequently propose their own organisational scheme for communication strategies.

This scheme contradicts the one proposed by Faerch and Kasper (1983) in numerous points. First of all, the Nijmegen group only takes into account those strategies that were identified as compensatory strategies by Faerch and Kasper (1983), because, as they explicitly state, their main point of interest was what learners do in order to communicate and not how they avoid communicating.

From their point of view, the learner, when facing a problem in communication, can resort to one of only two strategies. He can either manipulate *the concept* in such a way that it fits his linguistic resources or *the code*, i.e. the language. The former strategy results in conceptual strategies, the latter one in code strategies.

The term conceptual strategy embraces three different approaches: holistic, analytical and linear. Employing a holistic conceptual strategy, the learner uses a single word to substitute the missing referent. An analytical conceptual strategy, then, would be a longer description of the concept in question. A linear strategy is used whenever the learner tries to produce instructions on what one would have to do to assemble or recreate the item in question. Various strategies that have been identified as distinct, in this framework are then summarised in the same category. Paraphrase, generalisation, description, word coinage among others, are, for example, not regarded as individual strategies but as different realisations of the one particular communication strategy.

Whereas conceptual strategies work on the semantic features of the item in question, code strategies, as the name already indicates, focus on the language. This adjustment on the linguistic level can be achieved in various ways, from using a different language to using paralinguistic means, such as ostensive definition. Whereas ostensive definition is quoted among code

strategies, mime is identified as a conceptual strategy because mime “tends to convey important features and functions while ostensive simply points, much in the way that switching a language does” (Bialystok 1990: 111). She therefore concludes that the binary taxonomy introduced by the Nijmegen Project is an interesting alternative to traditional (cf. Faerch&Kasper 1983) classification schemes because it limits the possibilities which these learner language phenomena can be assigned to and will thus lead to more valid results in future CS research.

### **3.4.3. Analysis vs. Control**

Similar to the Nijmegen Project, Bialystok (1990) proposes a different taxonomy embracing only two communication strategies which are seen as the respective enhancement of two central processes underlying language production, the analysis of knowledge and the control over linguistic processing.

Bialystok, drawing on her findings from children’s first language acquisition, states that when knowledge is acquired, it passes through different stages, from being completely implicit initially before eventually turning into explicit knowledge. Knowledge becomes explicit by being analysed. A child, when learning the term *horse*, in the beginning only uses it implicitly. As time goes by, his knowledge of the term *horse* becomes more and more explicit which means that the manifold properties of the term *horse* are available to him: an animal, a noun, has four legs etc. This knowledge exists independent of language and can thus be transferred to any other linguistic code. Analysis-based strategies, work as an enhancement of this process of analysis. Whenever a learner subconsciously or consciously uses a selection of defining features of the referent, to compensate for the lack of it, he thus employs an analysis-based strategy, or as Bialystok states “[t]he analysis-based strategy is an attempt to convey the structure of the intended concept by making explicit the relational defining features” (Bialystok 1990: 133).

Another option available to the language learner is to express the missing referent through the manipulation of its linguistic form. In other words, the learner sticks to his original intention and simply uses another code. The most common source in this case is another language, however, gestures, pointing at objects or symbols are also frequently used to serve this purpose. Furthermore, Bialystok states, appealing to the interlocutor as well as using dictionaries can be incorporated into the realm of control-based strategies, since they “rely on the control processes for directing attention”. (Bialystok 1990: 133)

#### **3.4.4. Substitution, Substitution Plus and Reconceptualization**

Poulisse (1993) identifies various weaknesses in the Nijmegen Project’s taxonomy. Firstly, she states that one can never be absolutely certain whether a strategy is the result of the learner drawing on his linguistic or conceptual knowledge. Secondly, she argues analytic and holistic conceptual strategies cannot be classified as resulting from the same kind of knowledge, since the former involves the complete reorganisation of an utterance whereas the latter merely substitutes one linguistic item with another one. It is therefore illogical to put these two phenomena in the same category.

Due to the shortcomings of the Nijmegen Project’s taxonomy stated above, Poulisse (1993) proposes her own model which embraces three distinct strategies: substitution, substitution plus and reconceptualization.

A substitution strategy is used whenever the learner solves a problem in communication by replacing the item he is lacking with another one. This replacement may either be the corresponding L1 item, or a related L2 concept. Previous taxonomies have referred to the former one as language switch or transfer while the latter one has been termed generalisation or approximation. Poulisse (1993), however, states that they are in fact different realisations of the same underlying processes. This claim is based on her own research (1993) which indicates that that accessing a L1 lexical

item is not different from accessing an L2 lexical item. The two events stated above are thus only realisations of the same communication strategy and not different strategies *per se*.

Not only can a learner replace the missing referent with another single item but he can also apply certain rules of L2 morphology or phonology to this particular substitute. This strategy is termed 'substitution plus' because it does always co-occur with a substitution strategy. In other words, the learner not only chooses to replace the missing referent with an L1 or L2 item but also applies target language rules to this particular item. This strategy may result in what in other CS taxonomies has been termed a) foreignisation or b) overgeneralisation. In the case of a) the learner applies L2 phonology to a source language item, whereas b) describes the learner's creative, i.e. out of the ordinary, application of L2 rules to target language items that would normally not be covered by that particular rule.

Where both substitution strategies manipulate one or two features of the intended referent, a reconceptualisation strategy involves a more drastic change, i.e. „a change in the preverbal message involving more than one single chunk“ (Poulisse 1993: 181). A 'reconceptualisation' thus involves a complete change of plan. This means that the learner has to restructure his message for being able to actually execute it. Strategies of that kind can take various shapes, including the learner explicitly stating the defining features of the concept in question, creating a new compound based on properties of the referent, or describing situations in which this particular item may be used. Mime and gesture are also classified as reconceptualisation strategies because they also represent a different realisation of changes in the preverbal message.

### **3.5. Factors influencing the choice of CS**

Having illustrated the different conceptualisations and taxonomies of communication strategies that have been proposed so far, we will now turn

to the various factors that have an influence on the selection of communication strategies. Some of these factors that have been identified thus far are: task, internal factors, such as the foreign language learner's attitude and motivation, the learner's L1 as well as the learner's foreign language proficiency. We will first briefly investigate the effects of the task, first language and learner attitude on communication strategies. Then we will turn to the effects of the learners' foreign language proficiency has on the selection of communication strategies.

### **3.5.1. Task**

Since it was and still is extremely difficult to investigate and analyse naturally occurring language, most of the research on CSs has been conducted in extremely clinical settings, via specifically designed elicitation tasks.

A large number of tasks were and still are being employed to elicit communication strategies from study foreign language learners. Early research usually used only one task, such as picture description (Bialystok and Fröhlich 1980), sentence completion (Blum-Kulka and Levenston 1983), conversations (Haastrup and Phillipson 1983), narration (Dechert 1983) or instruction (Wagner 1983) to elicit communication strategies from the individual study participants. These studies were, however, later subject to severe criticism. The critique was based on the observation that investigating only one task is not sufficient to discover the true nature of communication strategy use and usage. To overcome this weakness, the Nijmegen group in their projects, used a collection of three tasks. The learners had to 1) describe concrete objects or abstract shapes to a listener, 2) enter into an interview with a native speaker and 3) retell a story that they had previously been told.

Tasks related factors have been found to influence strategy selection in two different ways: with respect to their number and their type.

The number of communication strategies is influenced in such a way that especially with object description tasks, when the participants had to describe, for example, 20 images or shapes this usually resulted in them using 20 distinct communication strategies. This is, of course, extremely problematic because if researchers set out to analyse the differences concerning the number of communication strategies used by different groups of learners, using this kind of task based research would now yield significant results.

As mentioned above, the task may not only influence the number of communication strategies used but also their type. Poulisse and Schils (1989), who set out to investigate the influence of task and proficiency factors on L2 communication strategy use found “that task is a [...] dominant factor [...] in determining the choice of CpS” (Poulisse and Schils 1989: 34). Their findings revealed that the number of analytical compensatory strategies is greater in picture description tasks, while holistic Cps surfaced more frequently in story retelling tasks and in the native speaker interview. These findings now indicate that the type of knowledge the language learner draws on is to a large extent influenced by the task he has to accomplish. Bialystok also assumes that “learners will adjust the way in which they approach a problem according to their perception of what is relevant” (1990: 52).

While I assume certain tasks to be valuable tools when it comes to the elicitation of a particular kind of communication strategy, I do also think that in naturally occurring language use and production, the task only plays a marginal role. People do not attempt to solve tasks but rather set themselves goals which they would like to reach. One could thus also consider investigating the influence of the communicative goal on the number and selection of communication strategies.

### **3.5.2. Influence of the first language**

The influence of the first language is also frequently mentioned among those factors that might influence communication strategy selection (Bialystok 1990). Tarone (1977), however, investigating three different learner groups from three different learner backgrounds found no evidence to support that claim. Bialystok (1990) furthermore states that no large-scale research projects have been carried out to investigate this particular relationship in greater detail and it is therefore extremely difficult to draw general conclusions.

What might also have to be considered under this heading is probably not the influence of the first language on communication strategies but the influence of the language environment in which the speakers find themselves. If, for instance, language production in German EFL lessons were observed one would definitely find different communication strategies than in EFL lesson in an English-speaking environment.

### **3.5.3. The learner's attitude**

One factor that has received very little attention but, in my opinion, is a very crucial one is the influence that the learner's attitude or motivation has on the selection of communication strategies. Corder (1983), for example, states that the learners' personality may influence whether he adopts achievement or avoidance behaviour. Littlemore (2003) also distinguishes between two learner types, ectenic and synoptic, and observed that

ectenic learners, who need conscious control of what they are learning, seemed to communicate meanings of words to judges better than the synoptics, who fell freer to rely on their intuition and pre-conscious processing, but also tend to use more novel and therefore less readily comprehensible figures of speech. (Littlemore 2003: 1)

Summing up, it is most likely that the selection of communication strategies is not dependent on one factor alone but always on a number of factors which are at work at the same time.

### **3.5.4. Foreign language proficiency**

Investigating the relationship between language proficiency and language output has a long-standing tradition in the field of SLA. Researchers (cf. Ellis 1997) observed that all foreign language learners appear follow the same route of acquisition irrespective of their first language, age or whether or not they have received formal training in the foreign language. For most foreign language learners of English, for example, it seems to be true that they acquire progressive *-ing*, auxiliary *be* as well as plural *-s* first, while past and the third person *-s*, acquired relatively late in the majority of cases.

Since it appears that grammatical competence develops in a certain chronological order or sequence it would only be logical to assume that strategic competence does so as well.

Tarone (1977) aiming to investigate the influx of L1 on CS-choice, accidentally discovered a relationship between the learners' proficiency level and the type of communication strategies being used. Since then numerous studies have been conducted in this field offering to some extent contradicting insight into the subject matter: While some researchers found, a) an inverse relationship between the number of CSs used and the learner's proficiency, others stated that b) learner's at different proficiency level do not employ CS less or more often but merely favour different CS types, or that, c) advanced learners use their strategies more efficiently than beginning learners.

One of the first studies in the field was conducted by Parikibaht (1984). After having investigated two groups of 20 Persian learners of English as well as a control group consisting of 20 native speakers of English, she concluded that there was no significant quantitative difference concerning CSs use. However, the frequency with which the individual groups employed certain types of strategies considerably varied, i.e. beginning learners seemed to draw more on their world and paralinguistic knowledge than the more advanced learners did.



Bialystok in her study also found that there “were no differences among the three groups in their quantitative use of strategies” (Bialystok 1983: 108), however, her subjects displayed a significant difference in the type of strategies that were used. While beginning learners seemed to rely more often on resources from their source language (language switch, literal translation, foreignisation), advanced learners more frequently draw on the target language means at their disposal (semantic contiguity, description).

There is, however, one crucial problem concerning the aforementioned studies, namely that both only used one type of task (picture reconstruction) to elicit CSs. The major disadvantage of this task is that it is not representative of a real-life communicative situation and thus makes it difficult generalise the results of their studies.

Other projects, therefore, tried to overcome this disadvantage by letting their participants fulfil a variety of tasks. Researches at the University of Nijmegen (Poulisse 1990, Poulisse and Schils 1989), for example, used up to four different tasks to elicit CSs from their participants. These tasks were as follows: a story retelling task, an object naming task, a description task as well as an interview or a conversation with a native speaker of English to elicit communication strategies from their participants. By having their participants fulfil a variety of tasks, the researchers aimed to, firstly, render a more comprehensive picture on the subject matter and, secondly, yield conclusions that can be generalised. In a nutshell, these studies concluded that there was not only a relative difference in the different types of strategies used but also that there was a significant difference in the absolute number of communication strategies used (Poulisse and Schils 1989, Poulisse 1990). According to their data, less proficient subjects used a larger number of literal translation whereas their more advanced subjects used more holistic strategies<sup>9</sup>, i.e. to use Faerch and Kasper’s (1983) terminology here, beginning learners used more L1 based strategies, while advanced learners employed L2 based strategies with a higher frequency.

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<sup>9</sup> Holistic strategies are knowledge based strategies. (see Nijmegen Group)

More recent projects, contrary to earlier studies in the field, only place minimal focus on the distinct types of communication strategies that are used by learners at different proficiency level. Instead, they are more interested in how effective the strategies used are.

Chen (1990), for example, found that strategies such as circumlocution or approximation which are mostly employed by high proficiency learners, are more efficient, than the knowledge-based strategies (e.g. cultural characteristics, examples, paralinguistic devices) used by low-proficiency learners. A similar finding was obtained by Rossiter (2005), who concluded that language learners traverse through a CS continuum ranging from least effective strategies (code-switching), to most effective strategies (circumlocution). The learner starts at the lower end of the continuum and as his target language proficiency increases, the strategy types he employs become increasingly efficient. In other words, the more advanced a learner is in his language development, the more likely he is to succeed when using communication strategies.

## **4. The research Project**

As illustrated in the course of the previous chapter, communication strategies are those events in language use that are employed when a learner experiences a problem while producing a message; i.e. he cannot express himself in the way he would actually like to. Foreign language learners as well as native speakers have a large inventory of these strategies at their disposal.

It has also been explained that the type and the number of strategies employed appears to depend on a variety of factors, such as the learner's personality, their motivation, the task as well as the learner's foreign language proficiency.

This paper will now follow a long-standing tradition and attempt to investigate the relationship between the learner's foreign language proficiency and its influence on the selection of communication strategies. The following sections will describe the research project, its set-up, the data and the methods used to elicit and analyse the various communication strategies.

### **4.1. Research questions**

As illustrated towards the end of the previous chapter, numerous studies of the influence foreign language proficiency has on communication strategy use have been conducted over the last few decades. While most of these studies often exclusively focus on one particular aspect of this use (differences in number, type or efficiency of CSs). In my research project, would like to address three distinct issues

- a) Differences concerning the quality of CSs used by high and low proficiency groups

- b) Differences concerning the quantity of CSs used by high and low proficiency groups
- c) Differences regarding *how* the individual strategies are used by the respective learner groups.

My general hypothesis is that more advanced learners do not only use a smaller number of communication strategies than beginning learners but furthermore employ different types of communication strategies.

## **4.2. Data**

The dataset investigated embraces sixteen, fifty minutes CLIL sessions which are divided equally between the two proficiency groups: initial learners and advanced learners of English (8 sessions each). For reasons of simplicity I will, henceforth, refer to the former as “low proficiency data (set)” and the latter as “high proficiency data (set)”.

The low proficiency dataset consists of audio-recorded classroom interactions from first and second forms of different Viennese Grammar Schools (year 5, year 6). The pupils in the individual classrooms were between 10 and 12 years old. The number of pupils present in each session ranged from 20 to 25. The subjects taught were biology, mathematics and geography.

The advanced learner data was recorded in fifth form (year 13) CLIL lessons held at Berufsbildenden Höheren Schulen (HTL, HAK) in Austria (vocational schools focusing on various occupational areas). The average student age is 19 years and there were 15 to 28 pupils participating in each of the lessons. The subject taught was history.

In Austria, English is taught from primary school onwards. Intensive English foreign language (EFL) teaching starts in year 5, with three to four

lessons per week. It can therefore be assumed that the low- and high-proficiency group have received between at least one and eight years of intense EFL training, respectively. The comparatively large age gap between the two groups was chosen because some of the findings recorded by previous research (Poulisse and Schils 1989) indicate that a smaller gap between the individual age groups may lead to unclear findings. To be more precise, the aforementioned researchers compared the communication strategy use of three learner groups that were at different stages in their interlanguage development. Their findings revealed that the two groups that were closer to each other in terms of language proficiency (beginners and more advanced beginners) did not show significant differences when it came to their respective communication strategy use. Only comparing the most advanced to the beginner group yielded significant results.

Previous studies were conducted in a highly experimental setting. The study subjects had to fulfil certain tasks to trigger CS use. These tasks included picture description or retelling a story in English that they had previously been told in their mother tongue. The aforementioned assignments are, however, far from natural language use. A further disadvantage of this study methodology is that the number of strategies used will be predetermined by the number of tasks the subject has to fulfil. If, for example, a participant has to name twenty objects she is not familiar with, this will inevitably be reflected in the number of strategies she will use. In cases like these, it is more likely that the task, rather than the learner's foreign language proficiency, influences the number of communication strategies.

A further weakness inherent in previous research is that speakers in those experimental settings tend to be more aware of their language output and may thus use a different number or different type of communication strategy than they would have naturally used (cf. "observer's paradox" (Labov 1972)).

To overcome these disadvantages, researches have started to additionally include "more natural" tasks such as LL/NS interviews, or LL/NS conversations as into their studies (Poulisse 1990, Poulisse and Schils

1989). Irrespective of the fact that these tasks do not influence the number of strategies used *per se*, it will nevertheless result in language that is produced with more care. Put simply, the subjects are still aware of their foreign language production being observed and may therefore watch their language output more carefully.

William Labov (1972: 209) identifies “the aim of linguistic research in the community” as the quest “to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed”. Bearing this in mind, I tried to find a study setting that is as natural as possible and found a suitable environment in CLIL (Content and language integrated learning) classrooms. These immersion classrooms suit this purpose due to various reasons: a) CLIL classrooms are different from typical EFL classrooms since English is not the content of the interaction but solely functions as the medium through which certain content is transported (Dalton-Puffer 2003). b) In a CLIL environment, language production is not ought to be assessed. This unique setting facilitates more natural language use. The learner, in a CLIL classroom is at ease because she can chose to talk about concepts without the fear of her linguistic output being assessed. This special environment encourages the use of communication strategies as learners who do not have the linguistically perfect answer ready, may chose to communicate and thus employ various means at their disposal.

### **4.3. Method**

As a first step, the sixteen lessons had to be recorded and transcribed. Fourteen out of these sixteen lessons were taken from a pre-existing corpus while two (low proficiency) lessons were recorded and transcribed by myself.

Secondly, a framework for the analysis had to be created. After a thorough review of the various taxonomies used by well-known researchers and a first glimpse into the dataset, I decided to use an adaptation of the framework used by Bialystok in her 1983 study (see later). This particular

taxonomy was chosen do to various reasons. Firstly, Bialystok used the framework in a similar study project (1983). Secondly, it lends itself perfectly to analysing written transcripts because it embraces a number of well-defined categories.

Bearing this framework in mind, the transcripts were looked through and all instances of communication strategies were marked. They were then extracted, catalogued and more carefully analysed. In the course of the analysis of communication strategies most instances appeared to be very clear-cut and could be assigned to their respective categories relatively easily. However, some of the communication strategies found in the data could not be assigned to the individual communication strategy classes so easily. Those ‘borderline’ cases were put aside and reconsidered individually at a later point after the literature and theoretical background had been consulted again. Those problematic instances that could not be assigned to one particular category after further consultation will be explicitly mentioned in the section on results when discussion individual strategy examples.

It is of course not an easy endeavour to identify and classify communication strategies. Therefore, various criteria have to be met for an utterance to be classified as communication strategy.

#### **4.3.1. Identification of communication strategies**

Communication strategies are the result of communicative problems. Due to the nature of the data-set, which is exclusively made up of transcripts capturing oral conversations, it is at times difficult to decide whether a certain figure of speech is the result of a communicative problem or due to another event involved in language production or acquisition. Hence when investigating into this kind of data, it can be relatively problematic to distinguish strategies from other phenomena of language use. To overcome this, a very precise and evaluated scheme must be designed.

Although the medium of instruction and interaction in CLIL lessons is supposed to be English it is relatively common that pupils switch to their native language. However, not every switch to German is the result of a communication strategy at work. Furthermore, a TL utterance that initially presents itself in the form of a CS is not necessarily the result of an alternative plan but is in fact due to some other process of learning or acquisition. Put simply, the learner, unaware that the adjective *pretty* does not collocate with the noun *man*, may produce the expression *a pretty man*. An instance like this cannot be classified as a communication strategy (literal translation) because it does not result from an alternative plan but is due instead to insufficient target language knowledge.

In order to distinguish phenomena that are the result of a CS from those that are not, they have to meet the following criteria: a) CSs have to appear in continuous stretches of learner speech or in IRF-Cycles. b) Only instances that are accompanied by certain performance features will be considered.

IRF-sequences were identified as the centrepiece of classroom discourse (Sinclair and Coulter 1975) and usually consist of three individual moves: initiation which constitutes the introduction of a topic and tries to elicit an appropriate response from the student and the student's response which will then be evaluated by the teacher. This particular criterion was selected to ensure that learner utterances that feature communication strategies do in fact occur in actual communication, i.e. in interaction with a fellow interlocutor and not in isolated learner utterances. The aforementioned is particularly important when distinguishing language switches from other instances in which learners use their L1 (see later). Criterion b) was introduced based on the assumption that since CS are due to problems in the planning phase of an utterance, there must be certain *markers* or signals of uncertainty that point towards these problems. The performance features considered will be: pauses, repetitions or hesitation markers. According to



Faerch, Haastrup and Phillipson (1984) these signals implicitly indicate that the speaker is experiencing a problem.

### **4.3.2. Classification of communication strategies: The taxonomy used**

This paper in general, adopts an intraindividual approach towards the definition of communication strategy, defining them as phenomena that are used by the individual to overcome a crisis in communication. Following Faerch and Kasper (1983) communication strategies will, once they are identified, be classified as either reduction or achievement strategies.

<b>reduction strategies</b>	<b>achievement strategies</b>
topic avoidance	<b>a) L1 based strategies</b>
message abandonment	code switching
omission	literal translation
	foreignisation
	<b>b) L2 based strategies</b>
	generalisation/approximation
	word coinage
	paraphrase
	restructuring

**Table 1:** CSs classification scheme used in this research project

#### **4.3.2.1. Reduction strategies**

Ignoring the tendency of most researchers (Bialystok 1990; Nijmegen Project, a.o.) to focus on compensatory strategies<sup>10</sup> only, I decided to also include reduction strategies, in particular those that were termed *functional reduction strategies* by Faerch & Kasper (1983). Reduction, as I see it, does not necessarily mean that the learner stops communicating but generally refers to those strategies that involve a change of the original plan. Reduction, as mentioned in preceding chapter, comes in scales, ranging

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<sup>10</sup> On employing compensatory strategies the learner tries to overcome a problem by making use of the TL means at his disposal. (cf. Chapter 3)

from topic avoidance to the omission of individual words or phrases. The most drastic form reduction can take is *topic avoidance*. By means of this strategy the learner, because he experiences problems in language production, refuses to talk about a certain topic. Topic avoidance will, however, not be considered in this paper due to the following reasons: It is first of all extremely difficult to trace an utterance to either the learner experiencing difficulties producing a certain linguistic form, or the learner's unfamiliarity with the content of the utterance. Furthermore it is assumed that learners in a CLIL classroom will prefer a language switch to complete topic avoidance in situations where they see themselves unable to produce an appropriate TL form.

A different form of reduction is message abandonment. While when resorting to topic avoidance, some learners provoke a change of topic by simply not speaking. Other learners, alternatively, attempt to communicate but, mostly in mid-sentence, realise that they cannot reach their original communicative goal. This inability to execute their original plan then forces the learner to abandon his message, i.e. stop communicating once the problem has surfaced.

The least drastic form of reduction is what Long (1983) has termed omission. Language learners who realise that they are lacking a certain lexical item, however, do not want to abandon their complete message, sometimes simply leave a gap where the missing item should be and finish their original message as planned.

#### 4.3.2.2. Achievement strategies

'Achievement strategies' is an umbrella term embracing various distinct types of communication strategies. Other than reduction strategies, which lead to an alteration, i.e. reduction, of the learner's original communicative goal, using achievement strategies prompts the learner to expand her resources. In other words the foreign language learner tries to use the means at her disposal most effectively. The achievement strategies found in the dataset will be classified with regard to the linguistic resources the learner draws on.

### **a) L1 based strategies**

One of the options a foreign language learner has upon being faced with a communicative problem is to draw on his L1 resources. The L1 based strategies analysed will be: code switching, foreignisation and literal translation.

#### *i) code-switching*

A code-switching strategy, as the term may already indicate, describes the learner employing a language other than the target language when faced with a problem in conversation. Independent of the fact that a learner can use any language at her disposal it is most likely that she switches to her native language. The switch can range from the insertion of a single item which is also referred to as borrowing (Corder 1983), to whole turns that are produced in a language other than the target language.

The extent to which code-switching is done always depends on the learner's assessment of the communicative situation. If learners think they can convey their original message by switching to German he may frequently do so. Thus, as Faerch and Kasper (1983) rightly observe, this particular strategy tends to be extensively used in EFL classrooms merely due to the fact that the interlocutors share one common language - a switch to this common denominator might hence assure the learner that he will be understood.

#### *ii) Foreignisation*

While learners who employ code-switching strategies completely ignore the target language code, foreignisation is one of those L1 based strategies that result in a combination of source and target language. The learner 'foreignises' an item when she applies English phonology to a German lexical item. It must be considered that the CS 'foreignisation' only refers the application of TL phonology to an L1 item; applying other TL rules to source language items falls into a different category of CSs.

### *iii) Literal translation*

While foreignisation denotes the application of L2 phonology to an L1 item, literal translation refers to adjustments on the lexical or syntactic language level. In other words the learner directly translates certain words, phrases or expressions into the target language, an example of this would be an utterance such as “*They shout each other an*”, which is a literal translation of the German phrase “*Sie schreien einander an*” (cf. Example 13)

## **b) L2 based strategies**

As illustrated above, the learner has various possibilities for coping with problems or gaps in his interlanguage by using his source language resources. He can, however, utilise his existing TL resources by, for example, using items that share certain features with the missing referent, coining new words, paraphrasing missing referents or restructuring his messages.

### *i) Generalisation/approximation*

“By generalization learners solve problems in the planning phase by filling ‘gaps’ in their plans with IL items which they would not normally use in such contexts.” (Faerch and Kasper 1983:47). In other words, the learner replaces the missing item with a term that shares certain semantic features. Generalisations can take many different shapes. The learner can, for example, use a synonym, a hyponym, an all-purpose word (e.g. *stuff/thing*) or a superordinate term. By using these more general terms the learner assumes that he can communicate his original intention by selecting a term that shares enough semantic elements with the missing referent for the message to be understood.

Generalisation which is also referred to as ‘semantic contingency’ (Bialystok 1983), or ‘approximation’ (Rossiter 2005), has to be held apart from the strategy of ‘overgeneralisation’ which denotes the application of already automatised L2 rules to items which are not affected by these rules.

An example that is frequently used to illustrate overgeneralisation is the application of the past tense marker *-ed* to verbs with form an irregular past tense form which results in forms such as *drived* or *goed*. In other words, generalisation/approximation and overgeneralisation operate on different language levels. The latter apparently is a strategy that is used when learning TL grammar, while generalisation instead works on a semantic level. While ‘overgeneralisation’ is explicitly mentioned in early typologies of communication strategies (Tarone et al. 1983), it will not be considered in this paper because in the majority of cases it is not the result of a communication strategy at work, but due to a wrongly acquired or learned target language form, or simply indicates the state of the learner’s grammatical competence and/or interlanguage development.

*ii) Word coinage*

As the term already implies, the learner uses a *word coinage strategy* when he creatively constructs a new item which does not exist in the target language. The most frequently quoted example to illustrate this particular strategy stems from Váradi (1983), who observed one of his study subjects coining the word *airball* to refer to balloon.

*iii) Paraphrase*

Any action taken by the learner to “solve a problem in the planning phase by filling the ‘gap’ in his plan with a construction which is well-formed according to his IL system” (Faerch and Kasper 1983: 49), will henceforward be referred to as ‘paraphrase’. ‘Paraphrase’ is an umbrella term embracing various sub-strategies such as description, exemplification and comparison. In other words, the learner has various options to actually paraphrase his intended concept. He can either focus on the characteristic properties or functions of the object, use examples, hyponymic terms (using a well known-brand) or compare it to an item she assumes the interlocutor to be familiar with.

#### *iv) Restructuring*

When faced with a problem in communication, learners have one further option. They can restructure their messages and so execute their original plan. Restructuring is a relatively frequent phenomenon in native as well as non-native speaker interactions and basically denotes a reformulation of the message while still holding on to the originally set goal.

#### 4.3.2.3. Appeals

Although this study peruses a psycholinguistic view of communication strategies, appeals, despite being interactive in nature, will be included in the analysis. They are considered because they are also attempts by the learner to solve *her* problem. They are therefore similar to achievement strategies, because they represent an alternative resource by means of which the learner can overcome a gap in his knowledge. There are two distinct types of appeals; direct and indirect ones. The category of direct appeals, as the name implies, summarises all attempts by the learner to directly elicit a certain item from her interlocutor. This is mainly done in the form of direct questions concerning the missing referent. Indirect appeals, on the other hand are more sublime. The learner, without directly asking tries to involve the interlocutor. These indirect appeals are most often supplemented by a second communication strategy. (Faerch and Kasper 1983)

Having illustrated the study project and its setup, the next section will be dedicated to the results and conclusions of my research.

## 5. Results

After having illustrated the theoretical background and the setup of this particular research project, this section will now present its results. The following chapter will be divided into two major parts: the qualitative analysis and the quantitative analysis. In the course of the former, some examples of the individual strategies found in the dataset will be illustrated and analysed. Additionally, differences concerning the way in which the individual strategies are used by the respective learner groups will also be outlined. This will then be followed by the quantitative analysis of the results where the two proficiency groups will be compared in terms of the number of communication strategies they use.

### 5.1. Qualitative Analysis

#### **5.1.1. Examples of Communications Strategies used**

In this section various examples of communication strategies found in the dataset will be given. The findings will be classified according to the taxonomy illustrated in the previous chapter.

##### *5.1.1.1. Reduction strategies*

When communicating, the learner sets himself a goal, i.e. what he would like to achieve with a certain message. If he is, however, not able to produce a TL message that would allow him to reach this predetermined goal, he is forced to change it. Since this alteration involves, in a majority of cases, a reduction of the original goal, i.e. the formulation of a less elaborated message, these strategies have been termed reduction strategies (cf. section 3.5.1/ section 4.4. for a detailed illustration). Two distinct forms of reduction were found in the dataset: message abandonment and omission

**[Example 1]** *low proficiency*

T: a little bit later on ... .. okay and they don't keep the reptiles warm  
alena do you know anything about their body temperature ... is there a  
difference to birds and mammals?  
Alena: yes  
T: yes which one?  
Alena: **ahm... .. the temperature from the ahm...**

Example 1 is a typical realisation of the strategy termed *message abandonment*. The learner, while executing her message, realises that her linguistic means are insufficient to express what she originally intended to; i.e. she cannot form a structure that allows her to communicate that mammals and birds have different body temperatures. She, thus, abandons her message, i.e. stops communicating.

A possible explanation can be offered by taking into account that Alena's abandoning the message results from a lack of linguistic resources rather than content knowledge. This assumption is based on the fact that at the very beginning of this exchange she answers the teacher's question of whether or not she knew the answer with a clear 'yes'.

Message abandonment can be due to various reasons. While it appears to result from the inability to reproduce a certain TL form in example 1; example 2 illustrates a further reason for why certain messages are, at times, not completed but abandoned.

**[Example 2]** *low proficiency*

Natalie: there are over three **thousand spe ...**  
T1: species

In this particular case the learner gives up on executing her message because she sees herself to be not in a position to pronounce the word *species*. The message abandonment is hence due to the learner's not being able to produce the 'correct' TL pronunciation of a particular word.

In rare cases learners may also comment on their inability to produce a certain message.



**[Example 3]** *high proficiency*

mr schöller: (XXX) in our school for ...ah for the most of our ...**i don't know**

In the above stated exchange the learner, while conveying his message, realises that this IL resources do not suffice to express what he intended to. This inability is made explicit by the learner's terminating his message in the middle of his turn as well as commenting explicitly on his abandonment ('I don't know').

Alternatively to terminating an utterance in mid-sentence, learners do not necessarily have to abandon their message completely when facing a problem. A further possibility available to them is to simply omit the missing referent (a word or phrase) and carry on as if it had been said.

**[Example 4]** *high proficiency*

S: yes ah was leader in this race because they got the first man in the space but on the moon the americans were first because the sowjet union had problems with the rockets because they built **the** ... so huge one that they couldn't ah calabrate (?) the ah antrieb?

**[Example 5]** *high proficiency*

mr schöller: there is there was a boom aso books were written **and** ... but now it's over.

In both cases, the foreign language learners, apparently ignore their lacking a certain term, but leave a gap instead and carry on with their individual turns as if this particular item had been incorporated into their messages. Micheal Long (referred to in Dörnyei&Scott 1997) identified events like those stated above as omission. Omission, as already mentioned, constitutes a less drastic form of message abandonment, which does not involve the complete termination of a message.

Contrary to omission and message abandonment, both of which describe attempts made by the learner to actually, despite difficulties communicate their messages; topic avoidance constitutes a more drastic form of reduction.

While the above examples illustrate how EFL learners avoid problematic items by either terminating their message or leaving gaps, the learner in the following examples, deals with a problematic situation in a slightly different fashion.

**[Example 6]** *low proficiency*

- T2: so they divide well done okay do we have a name for these one celled with these false feet?  
T1: amöben. amöba  
S1: **ich weiß nicht wie das in englisch heißt**  
T1: amöben  
T2: it's the same word amoeba just pronounced slightly differently... okay.. you've seen any other cells?

The learner in the above extract, for example, chooses to explicitly comment on his insufficient target language knowledge ('ich weiß nicht wie das in englisch heißt' – 'I don't know what it is called in English!'). The teacher (T2) obviously interprets the learner's comment on his inability to produce the English form as an indirect appeal (see later) because he immediately offers the English term. The fact that the learner utterance is missing the rising intonation pattern, nevertheless, points towards the learner commenting on his lack of vocabulary rather than asking for help.

5.1.1.2. Achievement Strategies

Alternatively to reduction strategies, which involve an alteration of the communicative goal due to a problem in communication, achievement strategies are those strategies that do not involve changing the communicative goal. Instead, the learner expands his linguistic resources, i.e. he makes use of the forms and rules at his disposal in order to convey his messages. Following Bialystok (1983) and Faerch and Kasper (1983), achievement strategies will be distinguished according to whether they result from the learner's native language (L1 based strategies) or the target language (L2 based strategies).

### **a) L1 based strategies**

L1 based strategies were identified by Faerch and Kasper (1983) as those strategies, which draw information from the learner's native language and thus allow him to reach his pre-determined goal. The following L1 based strategies were found in the dataset and will thus be discussed: foreignisation, literal translation and code-switching.

#### *Foreignisation*

Foreignisation strategies are those strategies by means of which a source-language-form is phonologically or morphologically adjusted to the target language. Put simply, the ELF learner tries to make a German word sound English.

#### **[Example 7]** *low proficiency*

T2: so let's see who let us know, billiana  
Billiana: **a kreis (= english pronunciation)**  
T2: a what?  
T1: it's not called kreis (= english pronunciation) but I'm sure you ...  
Ss: xxxxx  
T2: yes so... correct  
T1: it's called a circle.

#### **[Example 8]** *low proficiency*

Tm: o.k...and the sphinx is in front of which famous buildings?  
Ss: ah wie heißen die... pyramiden... **pyra- ah [pairamids]**  
Tm: in front of the pyramids. I think.

The strategy of foreignisation is, throughout the data, realised according to the same pattern. The individual learners use the source language form of the linguistic item they appear to have problems with and apply what is perceived as correct TL phonology to that particular item. In other words, they try to pronounce the German word according to English rules.

As illustrated above, realisations of this strategy can be more (example 8, *Pyramiden/pyramids*) or less successful (example 7, *Kreis/circle*). The success or how effective the strategy is, in most cases dependent on the particular source language word that is being foreignised. Unlike *Kreis* and

*circle*, the English term *pyramids* and the German word *Pyramiden* are very similar in orthography as well as phonology. Pronouncing the German noun *Pyramiden* in an English fashion is therefore very likely to be understood by the interlocutor.

As illustrated above, the application of *foreingnisation* to cognates; i.e. words that are similar in both the source and the target languages, can lead to communicative success. However, words that appear to be similar in both languages can also be used to denote completely different concepts. Foreignising one of these terms might hence lead to confusion rather than communicative success.

**[Example 9]** *high proficiency*

mr steinbauer:           so ...ah for a very long time gusen was a ah camp where only men were brought to because they assumed that only men could work so hard but ah in autumn ninety forty-four they brought very much women there because there was ah a big building for the ss people and because ah they were very often bored of ah **the fabrics** and what they had to do there, they wanted to build a bordell?

The learner in example 9, attempts to make the German word ‘*Fabriken*’ (*factories*) sound English which results in the English noun ‘*fabrics*’. Despite the fact that both terms resemble each other in orthography, they denote completely different concepts; *factory/Fabriken* is the term for a building, whereas *fabrics* and its German equivalent *Stoffe* denote a certain type of material. Due to the use of hesitation markers immediately before *fabrics*, it is safe to assume that the learner’s using the term *fabrics* here is the result of a communication strategy and does not constitute a case of an inaccurately acquired or learned item of vocabulary.

It is important to mention here that these unsuccessful foreingisations are, despite the fact that strictly speaking they are incorrect with regard to the message the learner wanted to communicate, still understood by the

learner's interlocutors. This is, of course, due to the fact that the learner's interlocutors are, in the majority of cases, other native speakers of German. If the individual learners had spoken to native speakers of English the outcome may have been different.

### *Literal translation*

As previously stated, foreignisation describes the application of phonological or morphological rules to a target language item. Literal translation, on the other hand, refers to adjustment on the lexical or syntactic language level. In other words, when employing this strategy, the learner directly translates an idiom, a certain expression or a certain syntactic structure into the target language without further modification.

### **[Example 10]** *low proficiency*

T2: okay but what are the purple dots in there?  
S1: they're **chlorophylkörner**  
T2: they are?  
S1: chlorophylkörner  
T2: ok  
T1: do you know the name?  
S1: **chlorophyl** ahm **seeds**?

The learner in the above example is apparently not familiar with the English term for *Chlorophyllkörner* (*chloroplast*). He hence opts to directly translate the German term into the target language which ends in the creation of the non-existent compound *chlorophylseeds*. The formulation of this particular TL compound results from the learner translating the integral parts of the missing referent's German equivalent, namely *Chlorophyll* and *Körner*, directly into English (*Chlorophyll/chlorophyll*; *Körner/seeds*). Since, the learner, by using this strategy, coins a new lexeme, this example could also be interpreted as word coinage (see later).

While the above example illustrates the literal translation of an individual word into the target language, the learner in the following directly translates a German phrase into English.

**[Example 11]** *high proficiency*

mr schöller: during the war **ah the whole people** i don't think that they knew it so my my ah grand ...mum ah from klein ah they did not know what happened in the concentration camps. they know that there were some camps

The learner, here, is trying to communicate that '*nobody knew what was happening*'. He, however, seems not to be in a position to produce the appropriate target language structure. In order to overcome this problem, he directly translates the colloquial German phrase *die ganzen Leute* ('*all the people*') into English. Since *ganz* translates to *whole* his final version of the message is *the whole people*.

Learners not only directly translate individual words or phrases into the target language, the data also showed occurrences of whole turns or sentences being literally translated from the source into the target language.

**[Example 12]** *low proficiency*

(*talking about Changing of the Guards*)

Desiree: **ah they.. brüllen sich gegens, die brüllen sich gegenseitig an**  
Tm: in english  
Desiree: na das kann ich nicht auf englisch  
Tm: they are shouting=  
Desiree: =**each other an ah...(xxxxxx)**  
[...]  
Desiree: **they shout each other an ah**  
Tf: what? they shout to each other?  
Desiree: yes.  
Tf: yes, they shout to each other. what do they shout?

The learner in this example obviously faces some problems in executing her original plan, namely that the guards at Buckingham Palace *shout to each other*. She tries to resolve this problem by first switching to German ('ah they .. brüllen sich gegens. [...]'). After this first attempt has turned out to be unsuccessful, she explicitly states that she cannot express herself in English ('na das kann ich nicht auf englisch' – 'no, I cannot do this in English').

With her teacher's assistance she then tries to formulate her message in English, resulting in the following message: "*they shout each other an*".

This utterance in fact constitutes a combination of two strategies since it embraces a) a literal translation of a German sentence structure into English that also contains b) a language switch towards its end.

The learner in this case appears to be familiar with the target language version of the respective words, however, cannot put them into a target language order. She hence structures her utterance in a way that resembles the source language.

Similar to foreignisation (example 9), literal translation can, in particular cases, also result in the learner employing certain words or phrases that already exist in the target language, however, denote different concepts than the ones the learner actually tries to communicate.

**[Example 13]** *low proficiency*

S: There are celebrations and ...is ...**it's in it like wiener stadthalle**  
T1: it's like the?  
S: vienn ...  
T1: stadthalle yeah we can say that  
S1: **city hall ...city hall**  
T1: pshht ...anything else?

In the above example, the learner literally translates *Wiener Stadthalle* (a location for social events) into English resulting in the term *city hall* (city=Stadt; hall = Halle). Similar to example 9, the divergence in meaning resulting from this literal translation did not, in this particular case and setting, lead to a misunderstanding. It, however, might have lead to a misunderstanding, if the learner would have been talking to a native speaker of English.

*Code Switch*

In their conversations with more proficient speakers, learners frequently resort to code switching strategies. This switching between different codes can take various shapes such as the insertion of a single L1 item into an otherwise target language utterance to complete turns in a language other than the target language.

Not only can a code switching strategy be realised in different ways but it can also fulfil various distinct functions. Language learners, for example, frequently tend to replace missing TL items with their source language equivalent and pronounce it in a question-like fashion, in order to appeal to their interlocutors and ask for help (see appeals).

As an alternative to indirectly appealing to the interlocutor, learners can also use a source language expression to stand in for the missing target language referent.

**[Example 14]** *high proficiency*

Sfx: Und jetzt kommt italien. First they used tanks but the tanks were **often kaputt**  
Sf: : damaged  
Sfx: damaged, and then they used aeroplanes and they supported the tanks and then they used only aeroplanes and they

In learner in example 13 appears to have difficulties producing the verb *damaged*. She therefore substitutes the missing referent with its German equivalent *kaputt*. Since only one L1 item is inserted into an otherwise TL utterance, this strategy is also frequently referred to as *borrowing*. (Dörnyei and Scott 1997)

A further reason for switching to a different code will be illustrated by the following example.

**[Example 15]** *high proficiency*

Marion: Germany wants Russia to to (xxx) to quit them off, and they, **naja, wie hat der geheissen?** (xxx) And this caused the revolution. This was one of the reasons the revolution broke out. **And, jo, na, aber die haben dann eh mit Russland dann (xxx) gekämpft, die haben dann keine Ostfront mehr gehabt, oder?**

In this short extract, the learner uses a different code at two instances.

The first switch to German ‘*naja wie hat der geheissen?*’ (*well, what’s his name?*) is presumably due to a lack in content knowledge (the learner cannot remember a certain name). It appears that the language switch in this



particular case functions as a stalling strategy, to gain some time that is necessary to retrieve the missing referent.

One possible explanation for why the learner does in fact switch to German may be that this particular question is uttered due to an impulse, i.e. it was not originally planned and thus formulated in that language that requires less planning time. Ellis (2006) states that L2 variability research came to the conclusion that while “L1 production is largely automatic, L2 production is often not”. This observation indicates that it takes up a larger amount of time to plan and formulate an utterance in the foreign language than it does in one’s native language.

In this particular case, taking Faerch and Kasper’s (1983) speech production model into account, we can thus assume that the learner encountered a retrieval problem during the execution phase of the message. Since planning and executing a strategy in English would have taken up too much time, she simply inserted a rhetorical question in German, her native language.

Another way to interpret this phenomenon is to assume that this particular German question is not necessary for the interlocutor to understand the message. It can thus be interpreted as the speaker’s thoughts put into actual speech. The information rendered is additional and there is no need for the interlocutor to understand this particular piece of information in order to comprehend the message because the communicative goal can be reached irrespectively.

The latter account may also function as a valid explanation for the second language switch in example 15 where the learner also switches to German to render additional information. A further interesting fact about this language switch is that the learner appears to be insecure about the information she gives, because she finishes her message with an *oder? (isn’t it?)*.

One may thus argue that learners not only switch to German because a lack of linguistic resources demands them to but also to render additional information for which would require too much effort to phrase in the English language.

Another example that might support the claim that language switches frequently result from an impulse is the following.

**[Example 16]** *low proficiency*

T: the bazaar yes we visited a bazaar yes this is a special kind of bazaar they offer  
[...]  
T: you can see a red green  
Ss: nice colours  
T: nice colours yes  
[...]  
Sf: **gewürze**  
T: in english please yes? in english gewürze?  
Sf: **spices**

Above, the learner first answers in German, however, when being explicitly reminded to formulate an answer in English, she is apparently able to state the required item of vocabulary.

EFL learners frequently show a tendency towards taking the easiest route, i.e. they formulate their messages according to what takes less effort. As already mentioned it is faster and also easier, since the processes involved are well automatised, to formulate a message in ones native language than in a foreign one. It is hence very frequent that learners first try to communicate in German, especially if they know that their interlocutors can understand them, before they switch to English.

As already mentioned in the beginning of this section, code switching denotes the learner's switching to a *code* other than the target language. Kellerman et al (1987) prefer the term *code* switch to *language* switch strategy because it allows for the inclusion of utterances that are not necessarily coded in a certain language but also accounts for the use of images, mime, gesture or other events that are of extra-linguistic origin.

**[Example 17]** *low proficiency*

T: not the some secret things the speed not really the most important thing they use during during their their driving  
Sm: ah  
Sm: **hupe**  
T: yes in english

- Sm:** *tüt*  
**Ss:** in english (laughs)  
**T:** yes they use their **horn** i think the horn yes it's a yes it's very dangerous to go around in istanbul

The learner in the above example is lacking the term *horn*. He therefore switches to its German equivalent *Hupe*. The teacher obviously thinks that the learner's switching to German results from an impulse (see above), and therefore asks him to give the answer in English. It appears that in order to emphasise the lack of the English word, the learner then uses the onomatopoeic expression *tüt*, to describe the concept. This final attempt to indicate the lack of the term is eventually understood by the teacher.

Since this study is investigating into data from Austrian CLIL classrooms, it is most likely to assume, that code switches are most commonly used in order to bridge a lack of knowledge of English; the following extract, however, illustrates the reverse situation.

**[Example 18]** *high proficiency*

- Isabella: nein. aber ham sie in dem **civil war** nicht diesen Ukrainern und Weißrussen (?) und (?) so was alles aus-... (XX) dazugenommen (?) halt weil sa s'meistens (??) hm(?)

This unusual switch can be explained by again taking the context of the interaction into account. The excerpt is taken from a history CLIL lesson. Since the learner is used to being taught history through English, she is used to using certain expressions within a certain subject area in a language other than her mother tongue. The learner in this particular extract, when planning this utterance, realised that the German equivalent of civil war was not available to her and used the English expression instead.

Learners in CLIL classrooms are used to communicating about certain subject matter in a particular language. It thus appears that language and content are to a certain extent linked. The learner in this case was unable to retrieve her mother language's expression for *civil war* (*Bürgerkrieg*) and thus replaced it with an expression in that language she usually employs when talking about this particular subject. This, of course, does not mean

that the learner is not familiar with her native language term for civil war, she is just used to talking about these concepts in English. What it does indicate, however, is that in the context of a CLIL history lesson, the expression ‘civil war’ may come to mind prior to *Bürgerkrieg*.

### **b) L2 based Strategies**

Other than L1 based strategies, which, as illustrated above, draw on information from the learner’s native language, when employing L2 based strategies the learner uses those target language forms and rules that have already been well established in his interlanguage.

#### *Approximation*

The term approximation (also referred to as semantic contingency or generalisation) describes a strategy by means of which the learner replaces the appropriate term for the referent with a more general one. These substitutes are in a majority of cases, terms that are different yet semantically related to the missing referent, for example synonyms, hyponyms or all-purpose words.

#### **[Example 19] high proficiency**

mr schöller: information technology ah a lot of different technologies weapons, ...  
naja computer you can’t say computer but  
S: a race to the moon  
mr schöller: ah jo sicha computers and the space project ...ahm and i think there **are**  
**a lot of other ah ...things**

The learner in extract 19, lacks the appropriate term for a concept, and thus substitutes it by using the all-purpose word *things*. The hesitation markers as well as the pause preceding the term *things* indicate that the learner originally planned the utterance in a different way, featuring the appropriate term for the concept he had in mind. However, due to insufficient linguistic knowledge, he saw himself unable to execute his original plan.

As illustrated by the above example, learners can use words such as *thing*, *thingy* and *stuff* to refer to a certain concept for which they are lacking the precise term. While the aforementioned terms are not semantically related to the concept, learners at times use terms that are.

**[Example 20a]**

mr schöller: (in the background) **this this text** ah has a lot of dates (XXX) statements but yeah it's in parts interesting.  
[...]

The learner in the above extract uses the hyponym *text* in order to denote a different, more precise concept. Investigating this example more closely, one could now argue that the learner in this particular extract, meant *text*, and the repetition before the term is not indicative of a communication strategy but constitutes a mere false start. There are, however, various indicators which work against this claim. First of all, the repetition of the demonstrative prior to the word '*text*' is indicative of the point in the language production process where the learner had to change his original plan. Secondly, in a turn that immediately follows the one stated above, the learner explicitly uses the noun '*article*' to describe the exact same object.

**[Example 20b]**

mr schöller: and there are interesting facts but the the **article very ah... ... net so spannend!**

It thus appears that the learner first, and despite hesitation could not retrieve the term '*article*'. In a later turn, however, after an additional amount of time had passed, the he was able to replace the general expression with the more precise one.

Not only do learners use hyponyms to stand in for the missing referent, but synonyms are, as well, frequently resorted to when the learner needs to overcome a gap in his knowledge.

**[Example 21]** *high proficiency*

Isabella: **Lenin was a fan of Marx's(/s:/) ah ja .. opinion hm**

Example 21 features two distinct approximation strategies. The learner attempting to express that Lenin was a supporter of the Marx's idea, is not able to form the required target language structure. She therefore substitutes 'supporter' with 'fan' as well as 'idea' with 'opinion', respectively.

Depending on the point of view adopted by this analyst, this particular strategy could, also be classified as a paraphrase strategy (see later). The learner, unable to retrieve the appropriate linguistic item or structure to express that Lenin was supporter of Marx, paraphrases this by employing various means at her disposal resulting in the statement given above.

Problems concerning the classification of CS are mainly resulting from what the analyst regards to be the original plan. Given that that learner's original plan would have been to state that Lenin was fascinated by teachings of Marx, the message the learner then in fact produced would be classified as paraphrase strategy. However, considering that a message such as the one stated at the beginning, "Lenin was a supporter of Marx's ideas", would have been the original plan, the learner would simply have replaced the missing referents with semantically related terms which would then be classified as approximation or semantic contingency.

*Paraphrase*

Similar to most of the communication strategies previously mentioned, paraphrasing or paraphrase strategies can take various distinct forms either.

Learners can, for example, *describe* what the concept or person in question is used for, what it looks like or what he or she does, respectively.

**[Examples 22]** *low proficiency*

T: =i had a belly dancing too in egypt of cour er in istanbul=

Florian: =and the the person who had those things **i forgot the name he turns ten minutes he can turn ten minutes without getting**

Sf: dizzy

Florian: **dizzy, and he you you and he has those things in his hands**  
 T: yes that's right yes how do we call this person,  
 Florian: I forgot

**[Example 23]** *low proficiency*

*(talking about the statue of liberty)*

S3: oceans  
 T: yes okay but seven? ... spikes ...spikes ja ...okay good ...so come on  
 T1: annabell you can say it yourself! say it yourself!  
 Annabell: **da ist eine ausstellung drinnen**  
 T1: a what?  
 Annabell: **ausstellung ...people can look at things**  
 T: yes that's right ...there is ...an exhibition room

In both of the above extracts the respective language learners are lacking the term for a certain person or location. In example 22 the learner explicitly states that he does not know what the person is called (*'I forgot the name'*) and hence describes what this particular person does (*'name he turns ten minutes he can turn ten minutes without getting [...]dizzy, and he you you and he has those things in his hands'*).

Example 23 is similar. The learner in this case is lacking the term *'exhibition'*. In order to overcome this gap in his knowledge he first switches to German. Since the switch is unsuccessful he then describes the location she has in mind by explicitly stating what people can do there, they *'can look at things'*.

Looking at the above examples in greater detail, it appears that paraphrase strategies frequently involve sub-strategies. A sub-strategy is a strategy that is, despite the fact that it can also stand on its own, imbedded or incorporated into another strategy. In both, example 22 as well as example 23, the sub-strategy embraced by the paraphrase strategy is approximation since both learners use the term *'thing/s'* to stand in place for a more precise concept they are lacking.

Description, however, is not the only way by means of which unknown concepts are being paraphrased. Alternatively, learners frequently choose to

compare the missing referent to a concept that they expect their interlocutors to be familiar with.

**[Example 24]** *low proficiency*

- S: There are celebrations and ...is ...**it's in it like wiener stadthalle**  
T1: it's like the?  
S: vienn ...  
T1: stadthalle yeah we can say that

The learner in example 24 obviously has problems retrieving the term for a location where celebrations and other festivities are held. In order to make himself understood he compares the location in question to a location that he assumes his interlocutor might know, the *Wiener Stadthalle*.

Employing a paraphrases strategy does, despite the fact that they are frequently quoted among those CS that are more likely to be comprehended by the interlocutor (Bialystok 1983, Rossiter 2005), not necessarily end in mutual understanding.

**[Example 25]** *high proficiency*

- Sf: the troops which were sent by the Americans to the war, (xxx) **they got the last power.**  
T: yes, who got the last power? I mean, what do you mean with last power ?  
Sf: (xxx)  
T: aha, this is what you mean. Also, they were not tired of the war. They were well fed, well rested, ok. [...]

The learner lacking the required lexical items or TL structures to formulate her message, tries to paraphrase her ideas by stating that '*they got the last power*'. Her teacher, however, is not able to comprehend what she intended to say and thus asks for further clarification which is then obviously given.

*Word coinage*

Word coinage describes a strategy by means of which the learner makes up new words that do not exist in the target language.

**[Example 26]** *low proficiency*

- T: christoph! ... okay michi



Michi: **a glassy (?) snake**  
 T: a glassy (?) snake ...in german?  
 Michi: blindschleiche

Lacking the English term ‘*slowworm*’, the learner in this extract randomly produces terms that he believes to fit the concept in question. One of these creations is ‘*glassy snake*’. This genuine creation is resulting from the learner collocating the noun snake and collocating it with the, in his opinion, suitable adjective *glassy*. Both terms do not exist in the target language. The adjective glassy could be interpreted as deriving from the term ‘*glossy*’, which is probably used because a slowworm is a rather glossy or shiny animal.

**[Example 27]** *low proficiency*

T2: yes and all those words are very similar in English so we have .. uma?  
 Uma: cellplasma  
 T2: yes  
 Uma: and.... and.. **cellseed**  
 T2: nonono not seed  
 S2: **cellegg**  
 Uma: cell...

The above example includes two newly coined words. The first one is *cellseed* the second one is ‘*cellegg*’. Both creations can be traced back to the learner’s using different sub-strategies.

The first newly coined word is the result of the learner literally translating the German term ‘*Zellkern*’ into English (*Zelle* = *cell*; *Kern* = *seed*). It is hence difficult to clarify, considering the respective definitions of word coinage and literal translation, whether *cellseeds* is resulting from the former, the latter or a combination of both.

The term ‘*cellegg*’ on the other hand, appears to be the result of various target language nouns assembled creatively and hence resulting in a newly coined word and hence a prototypical realisation of *word coinage*.

*Restructuring*

Whenever a learner is

“Abandoning the execution of a verbal plan because of language difficulties, leaving the utterance unfinished, and communicating the intended message according to an alternative plan” (Dörnyei&Scott 1997: 189)

this is referred to as a *restructuring* strategy. In more familiar terms, foreign language learners start out communicating their original plans, however, due to a problem encountered while executing their messages, they have to abandon this plan and communicate their message in a different way. What differentiates sequences that result from restructuring strategies from other the previously mentioned types of communication strategies, is that traces of the originally planned message are still visible. The following examples will illustrate this in greater detail.

**[Example 28]** *high proficiency*

Philipp: Okay.. **ahm there is no... there live seven to eight people in one room there is no electricity**, there is no running water, ... they ahm there is a lot of garbage,... there are crime, drugs and the people help the .. organised crime to .. to protect them from the police.

**[Example 29]** *high proficiency*

Monika?: **and in the background there iss- it's all light and not so dark**  
 S: mhm (?)  
 Monika: **and this sh- ... mm looks like there are (?)** coming better times then/than (?).. there (??) are. (?)

Both restructuring sequences, are, as many of those CS stated previously, resulting from the respective learner's attempt to communicate, in spite of lacking a certain item of vocabulary. The learners, hence, abandon their initial plan, i.e. to refer the concept in question by directly naming it, however immediately after having done this add a description of the particular concept in question after a short pause.

In example 28, for example, the learner, lacking the term *space*, paraphrases it by stating that '*there live seven to eight people in one room*'. A similar event can be observed in the extract 29. The learner, here, is missing the term '*light source*', however, instead of giving up, he immediately restructure his utterance stating that '*it's all light and not so dark*'.

Investigating the above examples more closely it becomes obvious that restructuring sequences can include a number of distinct strategies. There is no indication that the individual CS that are included in a restructuring sequence have to be paraphrase strategies, however, drawing on evidence found in the dataset investigated into this is most commonly the case.

### *The use of Anglicism*

One strategy that is not mentioned in the CS literature, most likely because it is very specific to a German or Austrian context, which was, however, found in the dataset, is the inappropriate usage of Anglicisms. While the majority of Anglicisms used in the German language maintain their original meaning (cf. snowboard or computer) some of them undergo slight alterations. The following example is a result of such a change.

#### **[Example 30]** *high proficiency*

- T: ein fehlschlag. Why do you think was this a failure ?  
S: maybe it was a failure (*ähm*) because the French and the troops *ähm* (xxx) **ham überrissen, checked**, what to do and how to beat the German troops.

The learner in the above extract tries to convey that the French troops *found out* or *realised* how to beat the German troops. He, however, is unable to retrieve the expression necessary to formulate his message and therefore uses the English verb ‘*to check*’, to make up for this lack. The verb ‘*to check*’ when it is being used in German denotes a different mental activity. The original (English) meaning of “to check something” is to make sure, whereas in German “etwas checken” means to understand or to realise something. Strictly speaking the learner is performing a language switch here, without directly changing the language because he uses the English word in its German sense.

#### 5.1.1.3. Appeals

As already mentioned, psycholinguistic research on CS does not include appeals. Despite the fact that researchers (cf. Faerch&Kasper 1983) do

mention them, they fail assign them to a special place in their respective speech production model.

In communicative situations where second language users find their target language means insufficient to express their thoughts, one of the many options available to them is to ask their interlocutors for assistance. In CS literature, these attempts are most commonly referred to as *appeals* and described (Faerch&Kasper 1983, Dörnyei&Scott 1997) as certain events in communication where speakers turn to their interlocutors. Two distinct shapes that appeals can take have been identified and distinguished thus far, direct appeals and indirect appeals. As stated above, the definition of what appeals actually are is very vague and imprecise the following examples will hence offer a small insight into the area.

**[Example 31]** *high proficiency*

mr steinbauer: okay ahm as you know gusen is a little river near ah my hometown sankt georgen and everybody round there if you ask them for gusen, everybody just knows oh there is a little village and there is those little rivers but nobody really knows about ah the concentration camp gusen. and ah i assume that's why ah that's because ah everyone **who went into gusen as ...ah "häftling" wie sogt ma do?**  
Ss: prisoner

Example 31 is representative of the way in which direct appeals were most frequently realised throughout the dataset investigated into. While communicating their messages, the language learners become aware of a problem which is in most cases the lack of a particular lexical item in the TL. They hence ask their interlocutors for help, i.e. to supply the term that is missing. Irrespective of the fact that direct appeals can be realised in both, the target as well as the source language, the data only showed occurrences of direct appeal in the German language.

Irrespective of the fact that this paper regards of communication strategies as attempts by an individual that are used to overcome problems while communicating, these problems are, as evidence found in the data implies,

not always due to difficulties encountered when actively *producing* language.

**[Example 32]** *high proficiency*

- S: (in the background) Herr professor, ahm **what is a what is stand** (?)  
T: ah in fact I have got no idea. (laughs), it could be tough position, his opinion, I am not ... I am not sure.

Example 32 neatly illustrates this aforementioned claim. The learner in this extract apparently has difficulties understanding a particular word, which is ‘*stand*’ in a previously uttered target language message. To overcome this problem, and thus be able to comprehend his interlocutor’s utterance, he asks for further clarification (‘*What is a stand, what is a stand?*’).

A further example that illustrates that appeals can be used to overcome difficulties that occur when the language learner tries to comprehend a TL utterance is the following.

**[Example 33]** *high proficiency*

- Sf1: **das armistice, was ist das? Heißt das Waffenstillstand?**

In the above example the learner’s appealing is again not due to the need to be provided with a certain target language item, but solely to ensure that a certain TL word had been understood correctly. The learner’s direct appeal ‘*das armistice was ist das?*’ (‘*Armistice, what does that mean?*’) is immediately followed by the question aimed to elicit confirmation from the interlocutor ‘*heißt das Waffenstillstand?*’ (‘*Does it mean armistice?*’). Posing this latter question, the learner intends to clarify whether the item had been comprehended in the right way. Michael Long (1983) identified utterances like these as *comprehension checks*. Comprehension checks belong to a group of conversational features that can be observed in the speech of more proficient speakers in a conversation with less proficient

speakers, mostly NS/NNS conversations. They are used by more proficient language speakers to ensure that the less proficient speaker's message had been understood correctly. In this case, however, the situation is reverse. The learner, i.e. the less proficient speaker, employs the comprehension check to ensure that the more proficient speaker's message had been understood correctly. Despite the fact that strict psycholinguistic definitions of communication strategy, would not include phenomena like those two stated above would not be included into the realm of communication strategies, they still constitute attempts by an individual to deal with a communicative crises. They can thus, adopting a broader definition of CS, and accounting of them as any attempt to deal with a problem in communication, still be identified as included in CS taxonomies, even from an intraindividual point of view because they nevertheless constitute manifestations of the individual's decision.

As already mentioned, direct appeals were always executed in the German language. However, a short amendment has to be made to that statement because, direct appeals that were targeted at understanding a message were usually produced in the target language, i.e. English. It thus appears that the language in which appeals are executed is to a very large extent dependent on the context in which they are uttered. When facing a problem in language production learners usually use their native language, i.e. German (example 31), when faced with language reception problems, however, most of the appeals are executed in English (example 32, example 33).

Where direct appeals denote a "turning to the interlocutor for assistance by asking an explicit question concerning a gap in one's L2 knowledge" (Dörnyei&Scott 1997: 191), indirect appeals function on more subliminal grounds. Employing an indirect appeal, the learner is "trying to elicit help by expressing lack either verbally or non-verbally." (Dörnyei&Scott 1997: 191).

**[Example 34]** *high proficiency*

Isabella: ..... ya, found the White Army to fight- to fight against the government,  
and the civil war broke out in nineteen eighteen, and the Red Army  
repulsed, abwehren (lacht), **this this this ahm angriff?**  
S: attack  
S: attack

As illustrated above, the learner, when employing an indirect appeal, does not pose an explicit question regarding the missing referent but solely indicates that there might be a lack in her IL.

Similar to direct appeals, indirect appeal in the data were usually performed in the very same fashion, either: At a certain point while they are formulating their messages, the language learners seem to realise that their TL means are insufficient; i.e. that they are lacking a certain item of vocabulary. The missing referent is then simply replaced by its German equivalent, which is then pronounced in a question-like fashion, i.e. with rising intonation.

As described above, indirect appeals include a switch to a code other than the target language; German in this case. This observation is also in accordance with what Faerch and Kasper (1983) observed about indirect appeals, namely that they are “often sublimat[ed] by other communication strategies.” (Faerch&Kasper 1983: 51)

As we have seen, the learner’s switching to a different, i.e. his native language may at instances constitute an implicit attempt to elicit his interlocutor’s assistance. On the other hand, certain language phenomena that take the surface form of appeals, can, at times, fulfil a different function than merely asking for help.

The data showed occurrences of learners asking appeal-like questions without actually expecting the interlocutor to supply the missing term or structure. These appeals then are of a rhetorical nature and, as such, solely used to gain additional time to retrieve the missing term themselves.

### [Example 35]

mr schöller: during the war ah the whole people i don't think that they knew it so my my ah grand ...mum ah from klein ah they did not know what happened in the concentration camps. they know that there were some camps ah ... if any prisoner tried to invade deeper ah underground to get out somewhere else they could possibly not find out because there were ah tunnels in this directions and then **ah ...how do you call it ah (XXX)** was in this direction. and ah the people were explained that they were very straight, so if you go in it's very verwirrend?

It appears that the learner in example 35, is appealing in a rhetorical way. He obviously has problems remembering a certain item of vocabulary and thus poses the appeal-like question '*how do you call it?*' in order to gain the time necessary to retrieve a certain name.

Since the goal of strategies like the one stated above can be identified as gaining some additional time, others researchers thus interpreted and classified them not as appeals but as belonging to the group of stalling strategies (Hübner 2000), which are then again interpreted as a distinct CS category.

As already stated in the beginning of this section, psycholinguistic research on CS has thus far failed to assign appeals to a certain place in their respective speech production models. However, investigating the above examples in greater details, it appears that appeals are most frequently used in two basic situations a) the learner has problems retrieving a certain item of vocabulary b) the learner needs additional time to retrieve a certain item of vocabulary.

Concerning a) one could now argue, that appeals are to a certain extent what Faerch and Kasper (1983) termed 'retrieval strategies'<sup>11</sup>. This assumption is based on the observation that appeals, especially indirect appeals, were most frequently used when the learners were producing continuous stretches of speech in English. This could indicate that somewhere during the execution of the message, the learner encounters a problem which he was not aware of before and despite making up an alternative plan himself, he chooses to ask his interlocutor for help.

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<sup>11</sup> Retrieval strategies are various distinct strategies, the learner uses when he experiences problems in the execution phase of the message. (Faerch&Kasper 1983)



### **5.1.2. Differences concerning the use of CSs by the two learner groups**

Previous research has shown that differences in language proficiency lead to different numbers and types of communication strategies that are being used by the respective group. This is however not the only difference. Not only do learners at different language proficiency levels employ vary concerning the type of strategy the use, they are also differences related to how the individual strategies are being used.

One might assume that since advanced learners are endowed with what can be considered as a more advanced IL competence, they may at fewer instances have to ask their interlocutors for help. This is, however, not the case. Analysis of the data revealed that the number of appeals used by the high proficiency group is slightly higher than that used by the low proficiency group; 10% and 9% respectively. Irrespective of this similarity in figures, the high proficiency group used a higher proportion of indirect appeals, i.e. inserting a L1 word into an L2 utterance which is then pronounced with rising intonation whereas the low proficiency group showed an increased tendency towards employing direct appeals in German. A further interesting detail about appeals is that in both language learner groups, there are no instances of direct appeals in the English language. Appeals only appear to be phrased in the target language when they are about language comprehension, i.e. the learner appeals in order to ensure that a previously mentioned term had been understood correctly. This observation is actually extremely interesting because it indicates that appeals are, to a certain extent, dependent on their linguistic environment. It appears that appeals that are due to a problem in language production are most frequently phrased in German, mainly indirect appeals resulting from the lack of a certain term. On the other hand, appeals that result from difficulties in language reception are most frequently phrased in English. This observation is, however, entirely restricted to the high proficiency learner group because all the appeals found in the low proficiency group are, irrespective, of their linguistic environment phrased in German.

Additionally, most indirect appeals used by advanced learners were found in longer continuous stretches of learner language. On behalf of the data, one could assume, taking Faerch and Kasper's (1983) model of speech production into account that appeals are used when the learner encounters a problem in the execution phase of the message – appeals would thus, using Faerch and Kasper's terminology be classified as retrieval strategies. In other words, while executing their message, the learner encounters a problem – the lack of a certain item of vocabulary. Alternatively, to trying to retrieve the missing referent by various means, he encloses an appeal, asking the teacher for assistance.

Similar to appeals, the number of reduction strategies used by both group did, as well, not show significant differences. While, as already mentioned, beginning learners choose to reduce their communicative goal in 13 out of 100 problematic situations, advanced learners do so at 12. Despite this similarity in figures, the ways in which the respective learner groups reduce their messages varies significantly.

It appears, that the high proficiency groups' reduction strategies mainly result from lexical problems, i.e. the lack of a particular term. They therefore frequently employ omission, i.e. leaving a gap where the item in question is ought to be or similar strategies that do not require them to completely abandon their message. Less proficient learners, on the other hand, do not only abandon their messages due to lexical problems but also due to phonological or syntactical difficulties. Their message abandonment is always 'complete' - there are no instances of omission but messages are always completely terminated.

The fact that low proficiency group tends to abandon message altogether whereas high proficiency group uses omission, indicates that that foreign language competence is higher, i.e. high proficiency group problems mainly result from a reduced foreign language lexicon. Low proficiency learners, on the other hand, frequently struggle with both, syntactic as well as phonological issues.

Coming to L2 based strategies, some interesting observations could be made about ‘foreignisation’ and ‘literal translation’ strategies.

With respect to the former it became obvious that while beginning learners appear to apply English phonology to random German words, all those words that were ‘foreignised’ by advanced learners did previously exist in the target language. Advanced learners, for example, ‘foreignised’ the German word *Alliance*, to refer to *the Allied Forces*, which are also known as *die Allianz (die Alliierten)* in German.

Concerning literal translation it was found that the low proficiency group literally translated whole utterances, sentences, phrases as well as individual words. Direct transfer strategies used by the high proficiency group were, however, only restricted to individual words or phrases.

The most significant differences between the two learner groups were found in their respective use of code switch strategies. Irrespective of the fact that both learner groups switch to a language other than the target language in a large number of instances, the way in which the individual groups switch is significantly different. While the advanced learner group displays a high number of borrowing strategies, i.e. the insertion of a single source language item into a otherwise TL message, beginning learners at times chose to phrase their whole message in German. An interesting detail about code switches used by high proficiency learners might be that a significant amount of switches to German is made up of indirect appeals.

Additionally, there seems to be a general tendency, especially among beginning learners, towards answering the teacher’s questions in German first. These switches, however, do not seem to be motivated by insufficient target language knowledge or command because when explicitly reminded to do so the students are able to produce an English answer. These switches can thus either function as stalling strategies which allow the learner more time to produce a target language answer or be interpreted as the learners attempt to exploit the communicative situation because he knows that he will be understood if he answers in German.

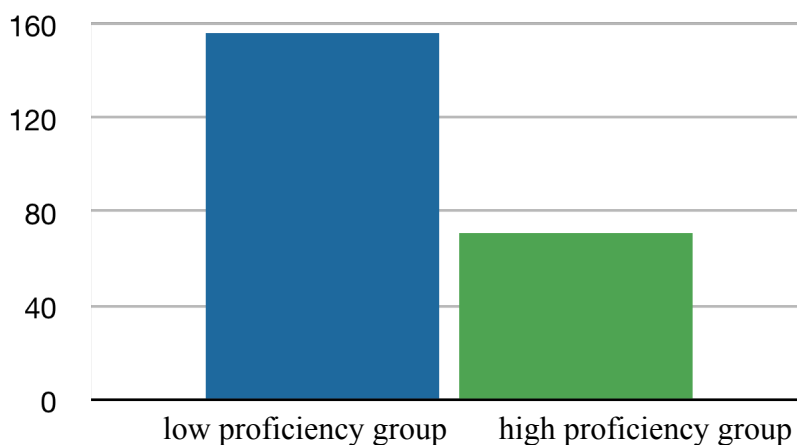
After this short insight into the data set and the examples drawn from it, I would now like to turn to the quantitative analysis of the data.

## 5.2. Quantitative Analysis of the findings

Similar to earlier studies in the field, the findings from this study also confirm an inverse relationship between the learners' proficiency level and the number of communication strategies that are used.

	Low proficiency group	High proficiency group
<i>CS used in total (8 lessons á 50 minutes)</i>	157	72

**Table 2:** Total number of CSs found in the dataset (absolute numbers)



**Graph 1:** Communication strategies use by the 2 proficiency groups (absolute numbers)

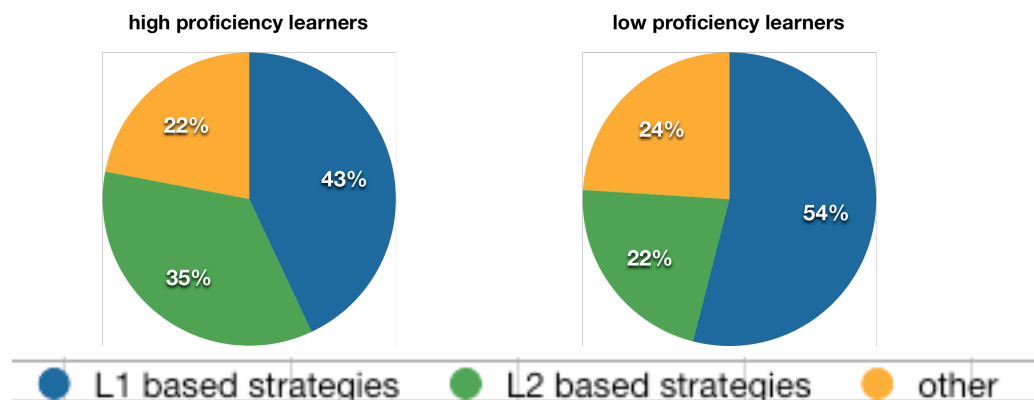
To put the above table and graph in writing, the evidence drawn from the data analysis shows that beginning learners use more than twice as many individual communication strategies than advanced learners do. Despite the fact that they were employing different CS taxonomies, research projects carried out by Poulisse and Schils (1989) or Chen (1990) among others, also obtained these findings. Both of the aforementioned studies found that the

less proficient learner groups they observed employed CS at a higher frequency than the more advanced groups.

It is, however, not only the absolute numbers of strategies employed that varies considerably. Furthermore, a profound difference concerning the type of strategies that are used by learners at different proficiency levels could also be reaffirmed. To be more precise, while less proficient learners try to solve their communicative problems by frequently employing L1 based strategies, more proficient learners, it appears, more often rely on the target language means at their disposal, i.e. they use L2 based strategies. As illustrated above, the low proficiency group used 157 individual communication strategies. Out of these 157 strategies 85, i.e. more than half, of the strategies used were based on the learners' first language, i.e. German and only 35 were based on the source language code. Concerning the more advanced learners group, it must be said that less than 50% of all strategies used were based on the learner's first language (31 out of 72 strategies).

	low proficiency group	high proficiency group
L1 based strategies	85	31
L2 based strategies	35	25
other (appeals, reduction, other strategies)	37	16

**Table 3:** Differences concerning strategy types used by beginning and advanced learners (absolute numbers)

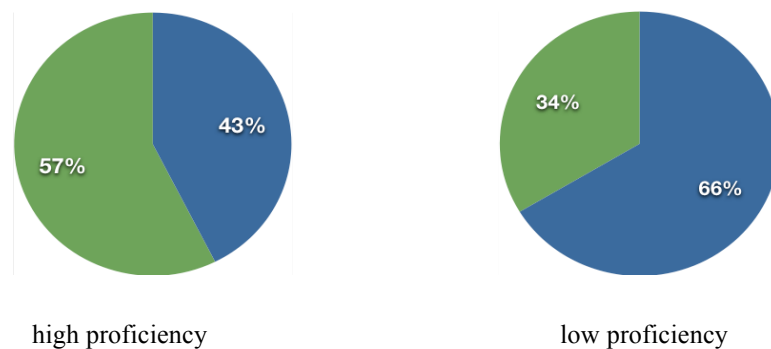


**Graph 2:** strategy types used by individual learner groups (relative numbers)

### **5.2.1. Learners' use of L1 based strategies**

As already mentioned, an increase in language proficiency brings with it a decrease in the number of L1-based strategies used. Irrespective of the fact that this study also points towards this finding, the difference in figures is not as drastic as previous studies found. Bialystok (1983: 108; emphasis added) for example reported that the “advanced students used **significantly** fewer L1 based strategies”. Concerning the advanced learner group in this study, however, still more than 40% of all strategies used were accounted for by strategies that are based on the learners' native language. This figure is undeniably smaller compared to the number of L1 based strategies used by beginning learners (57%), it is, however, far from having dramatically decreased. A comprehensive table on the total and relative numbers of communication strategies used in CLIL classroom interactions can be found in the appendix.

As stated above, when comparing the numbers L1 based strategies used by beginning learners and those used by advanced learners no significant decrease could be noted. If we, however, take into account the actual time the individual groups spend talking in their respective classrooms. In L1 as well as L2 lessons, it is generally assumed that teacher talk makes up for 60% to 80% (Chaudron 1988) of all talking time in a lesson. On isolating the individual turns and counting the words used in these turns it turned out that this number is fairly appropriate with regard to the low proficiency group lessons (ratio: 66% : 34%). Concerning the high proficiency group, however, this number changed profoundly. On average, the advanced learners made up for 57% of the talking time in their lessons. It, thus, turns out that the high proficiency increased their talking time by 25% while still using a lower number of communication strategies.



**Graph 3:** Teacher/student talking time

In both groups, the most frequently used L1 based strategy is code switching. Less proficient learners switch to a code other than the target language in nearly half of their utterances, while code switches only account to 38 % in the more proficient group. Compared to other studies, this difference is, as already mentioned, not very significant. It appears that in Austrian CLIL classrooms, learners use their first language excessively, irrespective of their proficiency level.

Haastrup and Phillipson in their 1983 study obtained a similar finding. Observing Dutch learners at different proficiency levels, they also noticed a general tendency towards the language learners' using their first language first and only refraining to other strategies in cases where the code switch was unsuccessful. While the aforementioned researchers did not render an explanation for this finding, one possible explanation for the high number of code switches in this study is the research setting:

Previous studies in the field obtained their data either through explicitly designed elicitation tasks or from LL/NS conversations. The samples of learner language analysed in this project were, however, recorded in Austrian CLIL classrooms. In CLIL classrooms, and presumably also in EFL classrooms in Austria, it is a given that the learner and the teacher share the same first language. The students thus, exploit this setting and switch, in a high number of those situations that are problematic to their mother tongue. A language switch in this particular environment simply presents itself as the safest option because it is the one strategy that is most

likely to be understood by their interlocutor. Put simply, if a learner knows the answer to the teacher's question, is however, not able to formulate his answer in the English language, he switches to German to prove to that teacher that he knows the answer but cannot say it. The setting, hence, has an undeniable influence on the strategies used and hence on the outcome of this study.

It is, however, still impressive that students do not always exploit this situation, or with an increase in proficiency exploit the situation less often, which is indicated by the increase of L2 based strategies when comparing low and high proficiency level.

While code switching is the most frequently used L1 based-strategy, literal translation and foreignisation only play a marginal role, amounting to 3% in both learner groups, respectively.

### **5.2.2. Learners' use of L2 based strategies**

This study also confirmed the increase in L2-bases strategies with higher language proficiency that was found in previous research. While among the low proficiency group less than one quarter of all communication strategies used were based on the target language, among the high proficiency group L2 based strategies accounted for 34%, which is more than a third.

With an increase of 14 %, paraphrase strategies are those strategies which rose most drastically and may hence be particularly interesting to be looked at.

While the less proficient learners only used 8% paraphrase strategies, those used by the more advanced learners amount to 22% and thus more than doubled. Rossiter (2005) in her study found that learners with increasing proficiency tend to employ strategies that are more effective, i.e. that can be



more easily understood by the interlocutor. It may therefore be assumed that the more proficient group, in this study, also, to a certain extent, favours strategies that are more effective. It is hence to assume, that at instances when less proficient learners may use switch the code or abandon their message, which are defined by Rossiter (2005) to be less effective strategies, more advanced learners may use a strategy that is more likely to be successful. Not only would this observation account for the increase in paraphrase strategy, which are regarded as most effective (Rossiter 2005) but also for the decrease in code switch strategies.

Approximation, word coinage and restructuring strategies only play a marginal role when it comes to L2 based strategies.

Approximation, for example, is rarely used by both low and high proficiency groups; accounting for 4% and 8%, respectively. Nevertheless, the relative number of this strategy used by advanced is twice as high as those used by the beginning learners, which is, again, in accordance with previous studies, which all found a relative increase in L2 based strategies. This particular increase can be explained by taking into account the fact that the high proficiency group experienced more formal training in English and can thus be expected to have a more elaborate vocabulary. These learners, compared to beginning learners presumably can overcome problems in language production by choosing from a variety of words that will all approximately denote the desired concept.

Other than the number of approximation strategies which doubled, the exact same relative amount of restructuring sequences is used by both learner groups under investigation. This particular finding, is in fact, contrary to expectation because an increase regarding all L2 based strategies was predicted.

A further observation which is also not in accordance with the hypotheses could be made about word coinage. While there is no a single instance of

word coinage with the more proficient group, the strategy accounts to 6% of all strategies used among the low proficiency group. A possible explanation for this may be that due to their longer formal training in English, high proficiency learners may have a certain conception of what might be possible in the foreign language, and hence may refrain from creatively making up words for which they lack the precise term.

Concluding this sub-section it can hence be said that there is a smaller number of L1 based strategies as well as a higher number of L2 based strategies used by more advanced learners. However, the differences in these figures are, as already mentioned not as drastic as indicated by previous research. Also, this aforementioned general tendency cannot be overgeneralised to include all L1 based as well as all L2 based strategies since there are certain strategies in the respective strategy group whose figures did not change (restructuring, foreignisation, literal translation) as well as strategies which decreased where they were predicted to increase (word coinage). It is thus inevitable to conclude that other factors as well must have an undeniable influence on use of communication strategies (see also Bialystok 1983, Poulisse and Schils 1989)

### **5.2.3. Learners' use of Reduction Strategy and Appeals**

Not all strategies employed are, however, based on either the learner's source or the target language. Tarone (1977) rightly observed that communication is a mutual undertaking and as such a project to which both interlocutors contribute. Faerch and Kasper (1983) also include cooperative strategies, such as appeals, in their framework. Furthermore, learners may at times also be put in situations where they have to adjust their communicative goal to their linguistic means, i.e. reduce their message to a degree which allows them to express themselves. Previous studies on the influence of language proficiency on the use of communication strategies have so far only focussed on achievement strategies, i.e. in how far learner's can expand their means to reach their communicative goal. This research

project, however, investigates in how far the number reduction strategies and appeals differs when comparing high to low proficiency learners.

One might assume that since more proficient learners have a more elaborate knowledge about the target language they might use a significantly smaller number of appeals than low proficiency learners do. This assumption, however, contradicts with what was found in the dataset since it was the more proficient learner group which showed a slightly higher number of appeals being used. It thus appears that beginning learners rather refrain from directly asking for help but use alternative strategies like code switches which are used very frequently by beginning learners.

A similar observation could be made concerning reduction strategies. The surprisingly small number of reduction strategies found in the dataset could indicate that learners in CLIL, independent of their proficiency level, opt for reducing their communication goal in rare cases only.

It thus appears that at every proficiency level there are about 10% of messages that cannot be formed either without the interlocutor help or with the means at ones disposal respectively.

Concluding, it can be said that since mostly the same types communication strategies were found in both groups, it is thus impossible to say that beginning learners have a smaller number of strategies at their disposal, they simply do not know how to use their strategies most effectively and thus refrain to code switches half of all situations in which they encounter problems. The situation is slightly improved when it comes to high proficiency learners. First of all they use a smaller number of strategies altogether (only half as many). Secondly, they use more L2 based strategies which Rossiter (date), as already mentioned, identified to be more effective. This observation does, however, not change the fact that the most frequently used strategy, in both learner groups, is the code switch

## 6. Conclusion

In the research project illustrated throughout previous pages, I have aimed to investigate the relationship between the individual's language proficiency and his or her use of communication strategies. I would now like to reach a conclusion by relating the findings to my three main hypotheses which were introduced in chapter 4.

*a) There will be a difference concerning the quantity of communication strategies used by high and low proficiency learners.*

My findings suggest that the more proficient a learner is the less often he feels the need to resort to a communication strategy in order to make himself understood. In other words and similar to what earlier studies in the field have revealed, the existence of an inverse relationship between the speaker's language proficiency and the quantity of communication strategies used can hardly be neglected. To put this into absolute numbers, the beginning and more advanced learners investigated for this research project used a total of 157 and 72 individual communication strategies, respectively. Various explanations can be offered for this development. First of all, there is the undeniable fact that more formal training in a foreign language positively affects the learners foreign language competence and as well as his performance, i.e. an increased stock of words will ultimately reduce the need to resort to communication strategies; if the learner knows what the object he wants to refer to is called there is no need to use a CS.

A second possible explanation for this difference in number is that with more advanced learners communication strategies are simply more difficult to detect and identify. At a more advanced stage in their language development learners simply manage to mask their 'shortcomings' more efficiently and successfully.

One particularly interesting observation could be made about the extent to which appeals are employed by the individual learner groups. Towards the

beginning of this project I assumed that due to them being at the initial stages of foreign language learning, beginning learners might use more appeals to elicit help from their interlocutors. However, the contrary was the case, as the more advanced group showed a higher percentage of appeals. I might add here that the corpus is too small to draw any general conclusions from that finding.

b) *There will be differences concerning the quality of communication strategies used by high and low proficiency learners.*

This hypothesis could also be reaffirmed. Similar to previous research in the field (cf. Chen 1990, Rossiter 2005, Bialystok 1983 a.o.), the data investigated for this study confirms qualitative differences concerning the communication strategies used by high and by low proficiency learners. The high proficiency learner group was found to use a higher percentage of L2 based strategies, while the beginning learners resorted to L1 based strategies more often. Similar to the quantitative differences, these findings can also be explained by taking into consideration that the more proficient group is per definition further in their IL development and as a result of this does less often resort to communication strategies that would utilise their L1 knowledge but rather chose strategies that make use of their TL competence. An interesting observation that could be made about the quality of communication strategies used by both groups is the fact that the major part of L1 strategies that were used were made up of switches to the learner's first language. As for the less proficient group; nearly half of all strategies could be identified as language switches (46%). Concerning the high proficiency group the number of switches used was smaller, however, still amounts to 38%. This high number of language switches can be easily explained by taking into account the situation in which these classroom interactions were placed. In Austrian immersion or CLIL classrooms, learners obviously tend to take advantage of the fact that their interlocutor is a native speaker of German and will therefore comprehend and understand in cases the decide to switch from English to German.

- c) *There will be differences with regard to how individual strategies are used by high and low proficiency learners.*

One point that, in my opinion, has been neglected in communication strategy research so far is that researchers have not been investigating into how individual communication strategies are being utilised by different learner groups. My findings imply that learners at different proficiency levels do not only use a different amount or different types of communication strategies but that they may use one and the same strategy in very different ways. The two learner groups investigated, for example, employed appeals in a very different fashion. Beginning learners mostly used direct appeals (in the German language) to elicit assistance from their interlocutor. This is completely different from the way in which appeals were utilised by the more proficient learner group. Advanced learners used first of all used a higher number of indirect appeals and furthermore also used, what appears to be ‘rhetorical appeals’ in order to gain some additional time. A further example of the same strategy being used differently by the two learner groups is *foreignisation*. Alternatively to beginning learners who tend to foreignise German words very creatively, the only instances of foreignisation that could be found in the advanced data set foreignised words that did already exist in the target language, however, carried a different meaning, e.g. *fabrics* vs. *Fabriken*. This implies that with increasing proficiency learners develop a certain understanding of the words that might exist in the English lexicon and what words might not.

Concluding I would like to say that I have been able to prove my three main hypotheses. And irrespective of the fact that a lot of research has been carried out on communication strategies so far, there still is a lot for work to be done, for example and as mentioned, to investigate more closely in the relationship between proficiency level and how different communication strategies are used. Because this might not only help to improve English foreign language teaching but also help us to draw further conclusions about the precise mechanisms behind language acquisition and learning.

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## 8. Appendix

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**Appendix II: An overview of communication strategies used by the two learner groups investigated**

		<i>low proficiency learners</i>		<i>high proficiency learners</i>	
<b>Achievement Strategies</b>			<b>%</b>		<b>%</b>
L1 based strategies		<b>85</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>43</b>
<i>language switch</i>		75	49	27	38
<i>Foreignisation</i>		5	3	2	3
<i>literal translation</i>		5	3	2	3
L2 based strategies		<b>35</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>35</b>
<i>Approximation</i>		7	4	6	8
<i>word coinage</i>		9	6	-	-
<i>Paraphrase</i>		14	8	16	22
<i>Restructuring</i>		6	4	3	4
<i>Other</i>		2	1	-	-
<i>appeals</i>		14	9	7	10
<i>Reduction Strategies</i>		21	13	9	12

### *Appendix III: Abstract - English*

The paper at hand addresses what Elaine Bialystok (1990: vii) referred to as “a very simple problem” which is: How do foreign language learners of English manage to communicate in spite of their not fully developed language competence. The answer to this question is relatively simple on first glance – they use a certain set of strategies. These strategies are usually referred to as communication strategies and as such defined as those strategies of language use which assist the individual in solving various problems he or she might experience in foreign language production. Recent research on the topic in question has shown that learners at different proficiency levels use those strategies differently.

The present study investigates how Austrian foreign language learners use communication strategies in their everyday classroom interactions. To render a comprehensive picture on the subject matter, language production by two learner groups who are at different stages in their interlanguage development have been investigated and the findings analysed with regard to a framework based on Faerch and Kasper’s (1983) and Elaine Bialystok’s (1983) work.

The results of the study were similar to findings previously obtained. Communication strategy use by high and low proficiency learners differs with regard to quality and quantity, i.e. beginning learners display a tendency to use a higher number and a different type of communication strategies than more advanced learners. Furthermore, the data also indicates that when it comes to the use of individual communication strategies, beginning and advanced learners appear to use the particular strategies for different reasons.

#### *Appendix IV: Abstract – Deutsch*

Die vorliegende Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit Unterschieden, die in Bezug auf die Verwendung von Kommunikationsstrategien (communication strategies) zwischen Lernergruppen, die sich an verschiedenen Stadien ihrer Fremdsprachenentwicklung befinden, auftreten. Um die Sprachproduktion in einem möglichst natürlichen Umfeld zu beobachten, wurde Unterrichtsdiskurse in CLIL (content and language integrated learning) bzw. EaA (Englisch als Arbeitssprache) Lernumgebungen aufgezeichnet und analysiert.

Die Arbeit umfasst einen theoretischen, sowie einen empirischen Teil. Der theoretische Teil beschäftigt sich mit verschiedenen theoretischen Konzeptionen und Definitionen sowie verschiedenen Arten von Strategien, insbesondere Kommunikationsstrategien und vergleicht diese miteinander. Im Laufe des empirischen Teils wird der Frage nachgegangen, inwiefern sich Anfänger und fortgeschrittene Lernende in Bezug auf die Verwendung von Kommunikationsstrategien unterscheiden.

Die im Rahmen der Studie erzielten Ergebnisse lassen darauf schließen, dass Lernende die sich an verschiedenen Stadien ihrer Fremdsprachentwicklung befinden nicht nur in Bezug auf die Quantität und Qualität der verwendeten Kommunikationsstrategien variieren sondern auch teils, ähnliche Strategien für unterschiedliche Zwecke verwenden.

# Lebenslauf

## Persönliche Daten

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**2003** Matura

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**1994-1998** röm.-kath. Hauptschule Theresianum Eisenstadt

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**2009-2011** Büroadministration  
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**2008** Fremdsprachenassistentin für Deutsch an  
Sekundarschulen in Sheffield, England

<b>2007-2008</b>	Projektmitarbeit: CLIL in HTL Universität Wien
<b>2005-2010</b>	Prüfungsaufsicht und Administration (Cambridge Certificates) British Council
<b>2004-2008</b>	Raiffeisen Daten Service Center Abteilung: Cash Management geringfügige Beschäftigung
<b>2000-2004</b>	Ferialpraktika in unterschiedlichen, wirtschaftlich orientierten Unternehmen

## **Sprachen**

<b>Deutsch</b>	Muttersprache
<b>Englisch</b>	C1/C2
<b>Französisch</b>	Grundkenntnisse

## **Sonstige Fertigkeiten und Kenntnisse**

Führerschein B

Certificate for Teaching English for Specific Purposes

Maschinschreiben

Computerkenntnisse

(MAC Anwenderkenntnisse, Photoshop, Windows,  
Microsoft Office)

HTML (Programmiersprache)