

Language Learning Strategies of Students at Different Levels of Speaking Proficiency

Carissa C. Cabaysa

San Beda College, Manila

Lourdes R. Baetiong

*Division of Curriculum & Instruction, College of Education
University of the Philippines, Diliman*

Abstract

This causal-comparative study aimed to examine the use of language learning strategies by high school students when speaking in class, and factors affecting such strategy use. Seventy sophomore students at a public school were observed, interviewed and asked to answer a 19-item language learning strategy checklist. Results show strategy use to follow this order: metacognitive, social/affective, and compensation strategies. Subjects were classified using an adaptation of the ACTFL proficiency guidelines. Intermediate and novice speakers were further observed and made to complete retrospection statements. The f-test was used to compare strategy use of the two groups while Chi-square values were computed to compare the groups' combined strategies based on retrospection statements. Results indicate significant differences between groups in the level of frequency at which metacognitive strategies were used and at which strategies were orchestrated. These factors were shown to influence strategy use: achievement in school, attitudes towards speaking English, task at hand, subject area, topic of discourse, and teacher's techniques in allocating turns to speak and easing tension among learners asked to use the second language. Data suggest that students could further improve their speaking abilities if they would gain knowledge about learning strategies. Awareness of terms referring to various strategies would enable them to monitor the effectiveness of their strategy use and help them develop autonomy in learning English.

Key words: language learning strategies, speaking proficiency

Correspondence regarding this article should be sent to Carissa C. Cabaysa at cariss_b@yahoo.com or to Lourdes R. Baetiong at lrd.s.baetiong@gmail.com.

The common observation that learners exposed to common instruction procedures exhibit varying degrees of success in language learning and the concept of language acquisition as the spontaneous development of language even without instruction have shifted researchers' concerns from methods and products of language teaching to processes in language learning known as language learning strategies. Recent studies conducted in different contextual backgrounds have shown that strategies promote language development. Moreover, these have focused attention on culture and other variables that affect the choice and use of learning strategies. This paper investigated language learning strategy use by public second year high school students when speaking in class. It is a causal-comparative study that compared the strategy use of intermediate and novice speakers and related this to learner and situational factors.

Both reception and production of language contribute to second language learning. According to Krashen's (1989) Input Hypothesis, comprehensible input generated when a learner produces language during conversation promotes grammatical competence. Swain (2000, 2005) advanced the same view in explaining that learners confront difficulties in expressing their ideas during interaction by trying out their linguistic knowledge and verifying their hypotheses depending on the feedback provided by an interlocutor. Furthermore, Ellis' (1994) collaborative discourse hypothesis claims that learners benefit from the scaffolding effect of other speakers.

Strategies used by learners to express their thoughts when they lack knowledge of the target language rules have been referred to by Tarone et al. (1983) as production strategies. However, due to strategies closely associated with language production such as the overgeneralization of a word meaning across contexts in order to understand language input, they replaced the term production strategy with communication strategy. Corder's (1983) view was different in that he considered both communication and learning strategies as productive strategies which he distinguished from receptive strategies. According to him, strategies used for communication can lead to learning. The overlapping of communication and learning strategies is evident in Oxford's classification (1990) of Tarone's communication strategies (1983) as a category of learning strategies known as compensation strategies. These include using a word that is similar in meaning to the more appropriate term, making up a new word, using description for an idea instead of the appropriate term in the second language, translating from the second language, using words in the native language, asking for the correct word, using gestures, avoiding communication,

discontinuing an utterance, and choosing the topic to be talked about. Aside from these, the strategies identified in this research to be most relevant to speaking are O'Malley et al.'s (1990) metacognitive and social/affective strategies.

In the production of speech as a learner tries to test and modify knowledge of a language, he / she makes use of the metacognitive strategies of planning thoughts and behavior and selective attention (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). The monitoring of correctness in the use of grammatical forms is also a metacognitive strategy. When learners speak of difficulties in using a language, they are trying to monitor their efforts to do a task. They assess their knowledge and abilities in order to understand their difficulty (Wenden, 1991).

Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, which posits that affective variables either impede or facilitate the acquisition of the target language helps explain the link between social/affective strategies and language learning. Through the strategy of self-talk, second language learners assure themselves that they are capable of handling a task, thus they are able to lower a high affective filter which prevents the processing of language input for later use during language production.

The most recent research on language learning strategies conducted mostly in the Asian context confirmed results of previous studies in the Western setting that point out the positive correlation between strategy use and success in the performance of language tasks. In addition, these revealed the effects of culture over variables that include gender, attitudes and motivation, the task at hand, and aptitude.

Studies done by Hashim and Sahil (1994) and Gu (2002) showed females to be better strategy users than males. However, Gu cited that in recent studies, specific learning task and cultural context had complicated this result. Males tended to use global strategies while females used more of local strategies in reading. Females were inclined towards using strategies for learning vocabulary. Gu further mentioned that the dominance of males in Russian society could explain the greater use of strategies by Russian males, as shown in Brecht, Davidson and Ginsberg's study (1990, cited in Gu, 2003). In explaining female Chinese learners' more frequent use of strategies in his research, Gu cited the influence of social expectations. In China, high expectations in learning are given to women.

Motivation, which is considered by Van Lier (1996) as a very important, if not the most important factor in learning, was shown in these studies to refer to either the extrinsic or intrinsic type. Asian learners' concern for achievement in their studies (Hashim and Sahil, 1994) and belief in effortful learning especially by the Chinese (Gu and Johnson, 1996; Gu, 2003) are extrinsic. These correlated positively with the use of learning strategies and success in language learning. Enjoyment in learning a second language shown in the studies conducted by Mochizuki (1999) and Mistar (1999) among Japanese and Indonesian students respectively and a high self-efficacy among Asian foreign/second language learners contributing to learning strategy use shown by Siew-Lian Wong (1995) can be considered intrinsic.

The powerful impact of affective factors in language learning was evident in Pappamihel's (2002) study wherein the anxiety of Mexican ESL learners led to withdrawal from the learning experience.

The influence of the requirements of a task was supported by Lawson and Hogben's (1995) research wherein students who knew that they would be tested on their retention of vocabulary repeated words and meanings. Likewise, ESL learners from Arabic, Chinese, Persian, Portuguese, and Spanish language backgrounds engaged in section and word repeating when guessing word meanings while reading, monitoring inferences, and self-questioning (Nassaji, 2003). Another factor influential to strategy use which was shown in Mistar's study (1999) was language aptitude. High language aptitude proved to be supportive to the use of compensation strategies and engagement in conversations by Indonesian students.

The Study

Purpose

The study was designed to investigate the language learning strategies high school students use in speaking, their consciousness in the choice and use of strategies, and the difference in strategy use between intermediate and novice speakers. It also aimed to reveal factors in the environment of the students that influence their choice of strategies.

Sources of Data

Participants in the research were seventy Filipino learners of English who belonged to a heterogeneous section in a public high school. Being at an

early stage in their secondary schooling, they are likely to benefit from strategy training during the remaining years of their basic education.

Data-gathering Instruments

Data-collection instruments included an observation checklist that contained observable strategic behaviors, focused interview schedules, a set of proficiency guidelines adapted from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages guidelines, retrospection sheets, and a strategy checklist based on the version for ESL/EFL of Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning.

To ensure validity of the instruments, these were shown to a panel of three ESL teachers who have had twelve, eighteen, and twenty years teaching experience at a public high school. The teachers had each earned 36 units of Master of Arts in Education courses, major in Language Education at the University of the Philippines. For further validation, the strategy checklist was pilot tested with a section of the same year level and sectioning bracket as the class participating in the study. Based on the students' answers, the Pearson r was computed for each checklist item resulting in an obtained r value of 0.09 which indicated a high positive relationship between each respondent's total score and the score in each item in the strategy checklist.

Data Collection and Analyses

During the two-month daily observation of English, mathematics, and science classes which lasted from June 18, 2007 to August 24, 2007, instances of strategic behavior were noted and confirmed during focused interviews conducted as soon as possible after these were observed. Daily interaction was recorded and transcribed. Based on daily classroom performance and informal conversations, individual students were classified using the adapted set of proficiency guidelines. There were 19 novice level speakers, 49 intermediate, and one advanced. A random choice of nine novice and twelve intermediate speakers were asked to attend enrichment classes for further observation and comparison of their strategy use. Nine intermediate and nine novice speakers' performances were compared. Interactions during these classes were also audio-taped and transcribed. After each enrichment session, a retrospection sheet was completed by each participant. The last data gathering step was the accomplishment of the language learning strategy checklist by the whole section that participated in the study. Due to the transfer of a student to another school and the absence of seven others, only sixty-two answered the checklist.

The checklist yielded data that showed the frequency levels at which the different strategies identified for the study were used. To supplement these, strategy use noted through observation and from retrospection sheets were tabulated. Significant difference in strategy use based on the strategy checklist between the novice and intermediate speakers was tested using the one-way anova or f-test while orchestration of strategies by the two groups based on the retrospection statements were compared using the chi-square. Also, the t-test was computed to test the significance of the difference in strategy use between male and female students.

The weighted means for use of the various strategies were accounted for in relation to available literature and through analyses of the interaction transcripts. These, together with analyses of retrospection statements helped identify and explain learner and contextual factors that influence the employment of strategies.

Findings and Discussion

1. Strategies the Students Use

In answer to the question about the strategies used by the high school students when speaking in class, weighted means of strategy use based on the checklist were computed. Among the five metacognitive strategies, planning had a weighted mean of 3.61 which was the only frequency level verbally interpreted as often. The rest were paying attention to instructions with 3.37, monitoring with 3.32, concentrating on ideas with 3.29, and evaluating with 3.21. Verbal interpretation for these was sometimes. The very little differences among the weighted means could be due to the nature of speaking tasks. According to Ellis (1994) language tasks predispose learners to employ certain strategies. He also distinguished between planned and unplanned language. Language learners who do not use the second language in daily conversation plan their language output. This explains the highest level of frequency at which the research participants planned their speech. The use of monitoring is expected to be limited because as explained by Krashen (1982), not all language users monitor and monitoring is employed with only a part of a language grammar such as simple rules. The monitoring done by the students could be taken as an indication of their consciousness about correctness which had resulted from their exposure to grammar lessons. As Krashen mentioned, the formal setting for language learning is a condition that leads to error correction. Evaluation appears to be least crucial in enabling a speaker to produce language which could explain the least frequent use of the strategy.

As for social/affective strategies, questioning for clarification, with a weighted mean of 3.58, was most frequently employed by the students. According to Ellis (1994) the setting of language use affects strategy employment and classroom interaction offers little opportunity for the use of social strategies with the exception of questioning for clarification. Self-talk items with weighted means of 3.53, 3.21, and 3.06 being next in rank is suggestive of the anxiety experienced by the students about performing speaking tasks which could be related to their being at the stage of adolescence. As Ellis (1985) cited, after puberty, the affective filter strengthens, that is, adolescents are more cautious in taking risks that might lead to embarrassment. It is strongly suggested that this anxiety also stems from the students' lack of confidence in speaking English due to their limited proficiency. This was revealed by their lack of accuracy and fluency when producing the second language. According to Bailey, Clement, Clement, Dornyei, and Noels (as cited in MacIntyre, 1999) the reason why a classroom setting may provoke language anxiety could be that an individual's self-image is so closely related to how he/she communicates.

Two compensation strategies were used often such as selecting the topic with a weighted mean of 3.52 and switching to the mother tongue with a weighted mean of 3.47. The rest were used only sometimes. Among these, coining words and circumlocution had the lowest levels of frequency. This is likely to be expected of learners who lack competence in the production of the target language. It was observed that two-thirds of the class chose to be quiet during the daily classroom interaction. Ellis (2005) mentioned that memories of the structures uttered by a language user promote linguistic competence. Because the students were not active in class recitation, it is very probable that they lacked exemplars of second language structures in memory which were needed to keep them speaking in English or to resort to the strategies of coining words and circumlocution. This situation is similar to that of Mexican participants in Pappamihel's (2002) research wherein ESL learners chose to speak in their native tongue.

Table 1 shows that the frequency with which the language learning strategies were used follows this order: metacognitive (highest), social/affective, and compensation (lowest).

**Table 1: Weighted Mean of the Strategy Categories
Based on the Strategy Checklist**

Learning Strategies	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Metacognitive	3.36	Sometimes	1
Social / Affective	3.02	Sometimes	3
Compensation	3.16	Sometimes	2
Average	3.18	Sometimes	

2. Consciousness in Strategy Choice and Use

With regard to the question about consciousness in strategy use, interviews revealed that the students lack knowledge of the strategy taxonomies that they may employ when performing speaking tasks. This is expected because they have not undergone training that could have raised this consciousness. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), it is conscious, systematic use of strategies that contributes to successful use of the target language.

3. Difference in Strategy Use Based on Proficiency Level

a. Differences in Frequency of Strategy Use

Results of the f-test revealed a significant difference in the use of metacognitive strategies between the novice and intermediate level speakers.

Table 2: Strategy Use by Groups Based on the Strategy Checklist

Strategies	Df	Fc	Ft	Ho	Verbal Interpretation
Metacognitive	1/16	11.85	4.49	R	S
Social/affective	1/16	0.53	4.49	A	NS
Compensation	1/16	0.26	4.49	A	NS

* $p = 0.05$

As shown in Table 2, the computed F-value for metacognitive strategies exceeds the tabular value of 4.49 using the 1/16 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This means that there is a significant difference between the

novice and intermediate speaking groups in the use of metacognitive strategies. This indicates a positive relationship between employment of metacognitive strategies and level of speaking proficiency.

Comparative results of the retrospection and the observation sheets were similar. As noted from retrospection sheets, metacognitive strategies were used 165 times by the intermediate level speakers, whereas these were employed 75 times by the novice speakers. Results obtained through observation showed that the metacognitive strategy of monitoring was noted 12 times for the intermediate speakers and three times for the novice speakers. Littlewood (1992) explained that speakers of limited proficiency lack automaticity in the planning and articulation of words and sentences. It is either they think more of meanings and produce less accurate and/or less fluent speech or give attention to their grammatical structures and find difficulty monitoring their ideas.

a. Differences in Strategy Orchestration

O'Malley and Chamot's (1989) and Gu and Johnson's (1996) studies showed that successful learners made use of combinations of strategies. Likewise, the tabulation of strategies noted from the retrospection statements of the participants in the enrichment classes revealed that there were more instances when the intermediate level speakers combined strategies.

As presented in Table 3, the novice speakers never orchestrated five strategies in any instance of participation while the intermediate speakers did so eight times. The intermediate group also used four, three, and two strategies 12, 31, and 30 times respectively, while the novice students did so three, 13, and 28 times. The novice group used only one strategy 37 times while the intermediate speakers did so eight times.

Table 3. Strategy Orchestration by Groups

Number of Strategies Used	Frequency of Orchestration	
	Novice	Intermediate
5	0	8
4	3	12
3	13	31
2	28	30
1	37	8

To test the significance of the above differences, the chi-square was computed. As shown in Table 4, the chi-square computed value of 45.9 exceeds the chi-square tabular value of 11.07 using five degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that differences in the combination of strategies between the two groups of speakers are significant. It suggests that using strategy combinations promoted the participants' ability to speak and that a more advanced proficiency enabled the use of more strategies. The advantage of using more strategies had been shown by results of studies conducted by Lawson and Hogben (1995), Gu and Johnson (1996), Mochizuki (1999), Gu (2002, 2003), Nassaji (2003), and Baker and Boonkit (2004). The use of strategies and the more advanced level of speaking proficiency of the intermediate speakers in the present study were mutually beneficial. The more they used strategies the more they could interact and the more they interacted the more they developed their strategies. Participating in verbal interactions promotes the development of strategies (Ellis, 2005).

Table 4 Computed Chi-square Value for Strategy Orchestration by Groups

Variable	Df	Chi-square Computed Value	Chi-square Tabular Value	Verbal Interpretation
Strategy Orchestration	5	45.9	11.07	S

4. Factors that Influenced Strategy Use

The factors found to be influential to strategy use were achievement, learners' attitudes, task at hand, subject area, topic of discussion, and teacher's techniques. Different from previous studies, gender was not included among these variables.

a. Gender

Results of the t-test used to test difference in strategy use based on gender were insignificant. These do not support the findings of Gu (2002) which showed female learners' greater use of strategies which he attributed to the high expectations in learning given to women in China. This could be because in the Philippines, both male and female students usually speak of striving to help their parents in the future.

b. Achievement

Comparison of level of achievement between the novice and intermediate speakers was based on the grade in English and academic average obtained by each student during the previous school year. The grades in English and academic averages of the intermediate speakers ranged from 79 to 84% while those of the novice speakers ranged from 75 to 78%. In relating these to significant differences in how they used learning strategies, the effect of achievement to self-efficacy should be considered. Ehrman (1996) explained that self-efficacy defined as a learner's judgment of his / her capacity to fulfill a learning task is increased when a learner succeeds in accomplishing a learning task. Students with high self-efficacy are willing to take risks. The opposite is true of learners who see themselves as not capable. This was very evident of the novice speakers who never volunteered to participate in classroom interactions and chose to speak last and little during the daily enrichment sessions. As a result, the learners were not able to take advantage of opportunities that promote implicit knowledge and proceduralization of explicit knowledge (Ellis, 2005). They were not able to develop strategies for expressing their ideas. In contrast, the intermediate speakers showed willingness to participate in speaking tasks. Although there were instances when they admitted feeling nervous, they had developed techniques for coping with this difficulty. For example, an intermediate speaker said she applied the teacher's advice to forget themselves when speaking in front. It was why she could often speak in class, she added. This statement revealed an evaluation of her ability to participate in classroom interaction. As shown by Gu and Johnson (1996) and Siew-Lian Wong (2005), self-efficacy has a strong influence on the use of language learning strategies.

c. Learners' Attitudes

About fifteen of the sixty-nine students often volunteered to respond to teachers' questions, thirty-five recited only when called, and the rest would not say a word when asked to answer. Interviews revealed that the learners who refused to speak in class originally belonged to lower sections and were transferred into their current section during the equalization of the number of students per class done so that the number of teachers in the school would suffice for the total number of students. These transferees confided that they had been criticized as having been included in the section without much effort compared to the original members of the class who had studied diligently thus deserving to be there. As a result, the former developed feelings of inferiority

that led to withdrawal from learning tasks thus preventing them to process the language being learned.

d. Requirements of the Task at Hand

Ellis (1994) attributes the use of certain strategies to the type of task that a learner is instructed to perform. In this study, as revealed by the students' retrospection statements, the metacognitive strategies of planning, selective attention, and monitoring, the social/affective strategy of cooperating to solve a problem, and the compensation strategy of switching to the first language were the strategies that were employed most frequently by the students. Differences in the frequency for each strategy were a result of the demand for certain types of strategies during the different stages of the speaking tasks. Hence, because planning was an essential part of the process of production, this was used with the highest frequency. Among the three metacognitive strategies just mentioned, monitoring was used least frequently. As mentioned earlier, according to Krashen (1982), successful monitoring demands complex mental processes involved in recalling the rules of a language. For this reason, only a few speakers are able to monitor successfully. Thus frequent monitoring could not have been expected of the students who were asked to participate in speaking tasks.

e. The Subject Area

The varying language learning opportunities offered by the different subject areas in the school curriculum are a result of two factors such as the interaction goals in the classroom and the patterns of interactive roles performed by the teacher and more importantly, by the students (Ellis, 1988). Interaction goals could be medium-oriented, message-oriented, or activity-oriented. Medium-oriented goals lead to teacher-initiated interaction that elicits short responses from students.

Both medium-oriented and message-oriented interactions were noted during observation of English classes in this research. An example of medium-oriented interaction is presented in the following extract.

- 1 *Teacher: What are the possible answers to these questions? Are you crazy?*
- 2 *Students: no*
- 3 *Teacher: Ill, are you crazy?*
- 4 *Students: yeees*
- 5 *Teacher: What about this question, do you love music? ...N14, do you love music?*
- 6 *Student N14: yes*

- 7 Teacher: *Ok, next question, which do you prefer, Jollibee or McDonald's?*
- 8 Students: *McDonald's*
- 9 Teacher: *Or you can also choose?*
- 10 Students: *Jollibee*
- 11 Teacher: *Last question, how much money is in your pocket?*
- 12 A student: *twenty thousand*
- 13 Teacher: *Twenty thousand?Student I27*
- 14 Student I27: *ma'am, forty million*
- 15 Teacher: *Look at the possible answers to the questions. Based on these possible answers, you could identify the types of questions that we have on the board. So what type of question do you think is number one? Cheryl.*
- 16 Student N2: *(no answer)*
- 17 Teacher: *Based on the possible answers, what do you think is this kind of question?*
- 18 Student N2: *interrogative*
- 19 Teacher: *They are all interrogatives. What type of interrogative is it?*
- 20 Student N2: *yes-no question*

Interactions such as the above give students little opportunity to negotiate meaning. As shown in the extract, the structures the students produced such as 2 to 10 and 18 were one-word answers while 12, 14, and 20 were two to three-word answers that contained meanings that were expected by the teacher and the listeners. Giving such responses did not demand the use of strategies.

The teaching of language is not always medium-centered however. An example of an observed message-oriented lesson is shown in the following teacher-student exchange.

- 1 Teacher: *Can you give an example of a person with interpersonal intelligence? When a person is sensitive to the feelings of others, how will you describe that person?...Do you know of persons like that?*
- 2 Student: *helpful*
- 3 Teacher: *What else?*
- 4 Student: *friendly*
- 5 Teacher: *Can you give an example of a person with interpersonal intelligence?*
- 6 Student I16 : *Like ano..the...**tawag dito..the.. patalastas..like the lo the the lola the...lola** in the advertisement..*
- 7 Teacher: *O how do you say lola?*
- 8 Students: *grandmother*
- 9 Student I16: *...ma'am a ma'am the **tawag don..ma'am** the she give **boso** in the ano and then she hug*

It is shown that as student I16 tried to respond to the teacher's follow-up request for an example of a person with interpersonal intelligence in 5, which she had asked in 1, he needed to compensate for the gaps in his language through code-switching. Also noticeable are the gap-filling devices such as

“ano” in line 6 and “ma’am a ma’am” and “ano” in line 9. These are evidences that message-oriented lessons in language classes entail the expression of meanings that are not known to the teacher and listeners leading to the use of learning strategies, different from the interaction in the first wherein the students’ answers are known by the teacher and expected by some listeners.

The message-oriented goals in the teaching of English resulted in the use of learning strategies in speaking. Whereas, even if the goals in mathematics classes could be classified as message-oriented because the goal of the teacher is the teaching of content, interactions did not prove supportive to strategic engagement in classroom interaction. This could be because different from the language class, the answers to the teacher’s questions in mathematics were pre-determined by the teacher. These demanded very little use of learning strategies in speaking. The following extract samples a classroom interaction in mathematics.

- 1 *Teacher: Ok, so the graph...falls to the right. So this is the graph of the equation y is equal to negative four x plus two...(draws)..For equation number three, we have the equation y is equal to three times four x minus five. And the slope as ah the y intercept is? ..So that is the point. ..That is the point. ..(not understood by observer)And then the y intercept is equal to negative five. We are going to rise how many units?*
- 2 *Students: three*
- 3 *Teacher: Is it positive?*
- 4 *Students: yes*
- 5 *Teacher: So from this point, two, three...and run to the left or to the right?*
- 6 *Students: right*
- 7 *Teacher: How many units?*
- 8 *Students: four...1, 2, 3, 4 (as teacher draws line).. y is equal to four x minus ...1.*
- 9 *Teacher: Do you understand?*
- 10 *Students: yes*

In the extract, the teacher kept asking questions while showing how an equation is graphed. There were no answers to these but the ones given by the students. Besides these were very short answers that did not challenge the language competence of the learners.

It was noted that common to all the extracts is the teacher initiation - pupil/student response – teacher feedback pattern of interaction. So it is not the pattern of interactive roles but the type of interaction goal typical of a subject area that explains the differences in the opportunities for language use in the observed classes. Furthermore, the types of questions involved in the

interactions determined the length of students' responses that, in turn, determined the extent to which they used learning strategies. A greater number and a variety of questions that elicit longer responses can be asked during message-oriented lessons in English or in science. Examples are questions that ask for cause and effect, inferences, opinions, support for opinions, explanation of observed experiment results and many more. In mathematics, it was observed that questions which sought long responses were limited to asking a student to explain his / her solution. Most other questions elicited short answers and were asked for the teacher to check on the students' understanding of a mathematical solution.

f. Topic

During observation of the stage of a grammar lesson wherein the learners were given the chance to produce their own structures using the forms in focus, it was noted that specifying the topic of discourse affected language production. A topic that deals with what is true at the present place and time encourages communicative speech (Ellis, 1988) and therefore promotes the use of learning strategies.

In the succeeding extract, the teacher asked student I22 for an example of a yes-no question.

- 1 *Teacher: Student I22, your example*
- 2 *Student I22: Was there....was there....*
- 3 *Teacher: You think of a subject. What can be a subject of the sentence?*
...animals, persons, things...
- 4 *Student I22: ...Was there....aah..*
- 5 *Teacher: What animal?*
- 6 *Student I22: a tiger in the cave*

When student I22 was asked to give an example of a yes-no question, there was no particular topic in focus. Hence, he did not communicate an intended meaning but just complied with the teacher's request for an example of a yes-no question by uttering whatever word came to his mind. When the teacher offered a suggestion in 5, he thought of tiger and produced it in a phrase in 6. If the idea he expressed were part of a context which he had in mind, there could have been thoughts for which he had to think of appropriate words. So he might have resorted to the social strategy of cooperating to solve a problem or the compensation strategy of switching to the first language. Unlike the preceding extract, the extract below shows that the discourse dealt with a

particular topic, which was the way to the student's home. The topic was not only specified; it was about what was true at the place and time when the language user had to talk about it.

- 1 *Teacher: From the gate of our school, how do you go to your house?...The easiest way...the easiest instructions you can give me,...tell me how I can go to your house.*
- 2 *Student I22: Aah, first...first, you...you..ride in a tricycle and..and say ah and..and say and say in..the driver when when you were go..and say..*
- 3 *Teacher: When?*
- 4 *Student I22: ..when..when..when a..when ... (uses hands to show direction)*
- 5 *Teacher: Is it when?*
- 6 *Student I22: ..whe whe..*
- 7 *Teacher: where*
- 8 *Student I22: where..and...say say it a..you say...aah...ah..if if if the if the..tricycle driver..ano aah...aah...talk to you and the question is ano..ah if your answer is I'm go ah..if I'm I'm go I'm go ah..I'm going to ano aah..Kenneth Kenneth and..and the the and the dri and the driver ano alam na po yon..and*
- 9 *Teacher: The driver already knows the direction.*
- 10 *Student I22: Yes ma'am and..and...bum bumababa po..ma'am ano pos a English yung bumababa?*

The interaction was the final stage of the lesson on imperatives. The topic of the communicative exchange, which was instructions on how to reach the student's home, adhered to the principle of referring to contiguous factors such as the place and time in question. This principle is included among the conditions that promote the development of communicative language use (Ellis, 1988). This could also be considered supportive to strategy use.

g. Teacher's Techniques

A teacher's techniques could refer to how opportunities to speak are allotted to teach student in class, how the tension felt when instructed to speak is lessened, and how learners could benefit most from small group discussions.

Wong-Fillmore (1989) favors calling on each individual student several times. When students know that they will be called, they prepare for it and pay attention at least until they are called. When they recite, they increase their opportunity to make use of their resources for producing language. However, with the class size under study, this was not easy to do. Due to the large class size, a student had to wait for several others to recite before he/she took turn. And after reciting, the student may have lost interest thinking he/she would not be called again. The difficulty was worsened by the negative outlook about

language learning and learning in general of about one-third of the students who kept quiet in class. That is why in large classes like this, the teacher does not only need to plan regular turn-allocating procedures that would involve all members of the class but also has to find ways to lessen students' negative view of learning. For example, speaking performance can be required of small groups which could be less threatening (Wong-Fillmore, 1989). The abilities of the groups and the situations that foster language learning should be considered when assigning tasks (Fillmore, cited in Ellis 1997). These situations are that teacher's input is essential to prevent novice speakers from practicing forms that were not learned well and that novice speakers could benefit from interactions with speakers who have higher language competence.

Conclusions and Implications

Like learners in other contexts, the students in this study are predisposed to employ language learning strategies when they participate in speaking tasks. However their tendency to resort to strategies should be replaced with the ability to take control when they need to speak in class. This requires knowledge of the strategy taxonomies and individual strategy terms which they could pick and employ appropriately. Such awareness is basic for the students to develop autonomy in language learning.

Metacognition is needed for the students to manage classroom situations. This will not only enable them to intentionally or consciously focus attention on a task, engage in planning, and monitor their output, but also lead them to evaluate their performance so that they would know what and how to improve.

A consideration of learner factors and analyses of recorded classroom interactions and interviews revealed that the factors influential to the learners' strategy use were the learners' achievement, their attitudes, the task at hand, subject area, the topic of discourse, and the teacher's techniques.

The need for improved strategy use requires the intervention of educators. There are several ways to achieve this. One is through inclusion of strategy awareness training in the curriculum, which could be in the form of games that are enjoyable and motivating (Oxford, 1990). Another is through greater attention on the affective aspect of language learning. In order to enhance self-efficacy, activities that excite even novice speakers to participate and provide them a sense of achievement should be increased. Moreover, the challenge of enabling every student to speak in class could be addressed through a consistent technique for allocating turns to speak. In conducting small group

discussions during the free stage of a grammar lesson, it would help to consider the composition of the groups to allow less competent learners to benefit from more competent students and to prevent the practice of incorrect forms.

It is recommended that subsequent research on language strategy use can improve on this study by dealing with a sample that represents three levels of speaking proficiency. This will add strength to the findings presented here. Further, the involvement of more than one observer to participate in the classification of students according to proficiency level is to be desired.

References

- Baker, William, & Boonkit. (2004). Learning strategies in reading and writing: EAP contexts. *RELJ Journal*. 35, 299-328.
- Corder, P. (1983). Strategies of communication. In C. Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in interlanguage communication* (pp.15-18). London: Longman.
- Ehrman, M. E. (1996). *Understanding second language difficulties*. CA: Sage Publications.
- Ellis, R. (1985). *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (1988). *Classroom second language development*. London: Prentice Hall.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (1997). *Second language acquisition*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2005). At the interface: dynamic interactions of explicit and implicit language knowledge. *Studies in second language acquisition*. 27, 305-341.
- Gu, Y. (2002). Gender, academic major, and vocabulary learning strategies of Chinese EFL learners. *RELJ Journal*. 33, 35-51.
- Gu, Y. (2003). Fine brush and freehand: the vocabulary learning art of two successful Chinese EFL learners. *TESOL Quarterly*. 37, 73-99.

- Gu, Y. & Johnson. (1996). R. K. Vocabulary learning strategies and language learning outcomes. *Language Learning*. 46, 643-679.
- Hashim, R. A. & Sahil S. A. S. (1994). Examining learners' language learning strategies. *RELC Journal*. 25, 1-19.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Krashen, S. (1989). *Language acquisition and language education*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Littlewood, W. (1992). *Teaching oral communication*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lawson, M. J. & Hogben, D. The vocabulary learning strategies of foreign-language students. *Language learning*. 46, 101-135.
- MacIntyre, P. D. (1999). Language anxiety: a review of the research for language Teachers. In D. J. Young (Ed.), J. F. Lee & B. Vanpatten (Gen. Eds.), *Affect in foreign language and second language learning: a practical guide to creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere* (pp. 24-33). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Mochizuki, A. (1999). Language learning strategies used by Japanese university students. *RELC Journal*. 30.
- Mistar, J. (1999). English learning strategies of Indonesian university students across individual differences. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*. 11, 19-34.
- Nassaji, H. (2003). L2 vocabulary learning from context: strategies, knowledge sources, and their relationship with success in L2 lexical inferencing. *TESOL Quarterly*. 37, 645-666.
- O'Malley, J. M. & Chamot A. U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Malley, J. M., Chamot A. U. & Kupper, L. (1995). Listening comprehension strategies in second language acquisition. In H. D. Brown & S. T. Gonzo (Eds.) *Readings on second language acquisition* (pp. 138-157). NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies*. New York: Newbury.
- Oxford, R. L. (1990). Styles, strategies, and aptitude: connections for language learning.
- Pappamihel, E. N. (2002). English as a second language, students and English language anxiety: issues in the mainstream classroom. *Research in the Teaching of English*. 36, 327-349.
- Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In S. M. Gass & C. G. Medden (Eds.), *Input in second language acquisition* (pp. 235-253). MA: Newbury.
- Swain, M. (2000). The output hypothesis and beyond: mediating acquisition through collaborative dialogue. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 97-114). Oxford University Press.

- Tarone, E. (1983). Some thoughts on the notion of communication strategy. In C. Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in interlanguage communication* (pp. 61-74). London: Longman.
- Van Lier, L. (1996). *Interaction in the language curriculum*. London: Longman.
- Vanpatten (Gen. Eds.), *Affect in foreign language and second language learning* (pp. 13-23). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Wenden, A. (1991). *Learner strategies for learner autonomy*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Wong-Fillmore, L. (1989). When does teacher talk work as input?. In S. M. Gass & C. G. Medden (Eds.), *Input in second language acquisition* (pp. 17-50). MA: Newbury.
- Wong, M. S. (2005). Language learning strategies and language self-efficacy: Investigating the relationship in Malaysia. *RELC Journal*. 36, 245-269.
-

About the authors:

Carissa C. Cabaysa teaches English courses at the San Beda College, Manila.

Lourdes R. Baetiong is an Associate Professor at the Language Education Area of the Division of Curriculum & Instruction, College of Education, University of the Philippines Diliman.