An Investigation into EFL Algerian Students' Communication Strategies

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Abstract

The present study investigated the use of communication strategies of 118 Algerian University majors at the department of English at Badji Mokhtar University in relation to gender, years of study, ability and proficiency level as variables. Strategy use was assessed through a self-reported questionnaire based mainly on Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and level of proficiency was determined by the number of years of English study. Various analyses were then administered to see to what extent earlier studies could be generalized. The major finding was that English language majors' use of communication strategies is at a medium level; code modification strategies were found to be the most used strategies and physical communication strategies the least used ones. It also appeared that each of the independent variables (gender, years of study, ability and proficiency level) had a significant relationship with students' use of communication strategies (CSs).

Keywords: Communication strategies, code modification strategies, physical communication strategies, strategy use.

Résumé

Cet article rapporte les résultats d'une étude sur l'utilisation des stratégies de communication réalisée auprès de 118 étudiants d'Anglais à l'Université Badji Mokhtar Annaba pour mettre en évidence et pour relier ces stratégies avec les variables telles que sexe, aptitude de l'apprenant, et nombre années d'études, etc., caractéristiques des sujets soumis à l'enquête.

Le Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SIIL) d'Oxford (1990) a été utilisé comme instrument. Les résultats ont montré que les apprenants se servent de stratégies d'apprentissage. Les moyennes obtenues montrent que les stratégies de compensation (circonlocution ou modification) sont les plus utilisées, alors que celles du mime ou de la gestuelle sont les moins utilisées. En outre, un lien a été observé entre les variables indépendantes et l'utilisation des stratégies.

Mots clés: Stratégies de communication, stratégies de modification, stratégies du mime ou de la gestuelle, l'utilisation des strategies.

ملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة استراتيجيات التواصل التي يستخدمها الطلاب في قسم اللغة الانجليزية بجامعة باجي مختار–عنابة. تم توزيع استبيان اعتمادا على قائمة استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة لأكسفورد (1990) على 118 طالبا من الجنسين.

بيّنت النتائج أن مستوى استعمال الطلاب لاستراتيجيات التواصل كان متوسطا، في حين كان استعمالهم لاستراتيجيات التعديل أو التكييف مرتفعا.و بيّنت أيضا أنّ استراتيجيات التواصل الجسدي لديهم كانت أقل استعمالا.

وقد لوحظ أن هناك علاقة ارتباط بين المتغيرات المستقلة(الجنس ،عدد سنوات الدراسة، القدرة ومستوى الطلاب) وب استعمالهم لاستراتيجيات التواصل.

الكلمات المفاتيح : استراتيجيات التواصل، استراتيجيات التعديل، استراتيجيات التواصل الجسدي، استخدام الاستراتيجيات.

Introduction

Whenever an individual intends to speak, two types of decisions occur in his mind; the first one is what he will say and the second is how he will say it. Normally, both decisions happen automatically when we use our native language, but, when we want to communicate in a foreign language, the second decision (how we will say it) will be a source of trouble for the speaker, since he will probably lack for certain if not many constituents of the message he wants to convey. In such situation, the foreign language user is obliged to use one of the two options: either he adjusts his message to what he can say or abandon altogether.

This underlying aspect of language is known as communication strategies (CS) which have been defined, for the sake of this study, as devices used by foreign/second language learners to overcome obstacles arising while using the target language. There appears to be widespread disagreement in the literature over the nature and classification of communication strategies. Dornyei and Scott (1) state that the list of strategies and their taxonomies in different studies vary significantly. This fact has promoted the existence of a rather confusing multitude of different strategies. Bialystok (2) claims that the variety of taxonomies proposed in the literature differs primarily in terminology and overall categorizing principles rather than in the substance of specific strategies. The taxonomy of CSs adopted in this study was based on existing taxonomies most notably those suggested by Margolis (3) Oxford (4) Khanji (5) and Chen (6) but modified slightly for the purpose of our analysis. The reason after using this taxonomy is that it includes both engagement and disengagement strategies as categories of CSs and that both categories present the general possible problem-solving mechanism in language use. Badawy (7) believes that the study of disengagement strategies is important; it highlights the crucial role played by CSs in enhancing communication by diminishing the learners' reduction behaviour which is a major obstacle against language development. Hence, the taxonomy proposes six major categories of CSs:

- ***Disengagement communication strategies*** refer to those strategies that emphasize the speakers' disengagement from the second language communication context. Subcategories of this item are:
  - Message abandonment or avoid particular topic because of some difficulty,
  - Limit speaking or adjusting the message to the speaker's linguistic means. (Questions 15,19, and 24 in the present study)
- ***Code-switching communication strategies*** refer to the strategies where learners switch to L1 or L3 to maintain communication in the second language. (In this case either Arabic or French). (Questions17,18)
- ***Guessing communication strategies*** are those techniques employed by learners to utilize context or other clues to make intelligent guesses about meaning (8). (Questions 25,26,28, and 34)
- ***Physical communication strategies*** refer to the use of gestures, facial expression and other physical movement to help convey meaning.(Questions 6,7,33, and 35)
- ***Interactive communication strategies*** refer to those strategies that involve interaction either with text or human as in the case of appeals for help, self repetition and use of fillers.(Questions 8,9,10,16,30, and 36)

▪ ***Code- modification communication strategies*** refer to a collection of strategies where the gap of knowledge is bridged by some form of target language modification. Subcategories of this item are circumlocution, word coinage, literal translation and approximation (Questions 5, 11, 12, 13, 22, and 23).

▪ **The study**

The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Do Algerian learners of English use communication strategies?
2. What types of strategies do they most and least use?
3. Does proficiency level affect the use of strategies?
4. Does proficiency level affect the choice of the strategy used?

Method

Subjects

The study was conducted during the academic year 2004-2005 and used an overall number of 118 undergraduates studying at the Department of English (Badji Mokhtar University-Annaba) as informants who were divided into two groups:

- Group 1 consists of sixty second year students representing an intermediate level of proficiency as they had studied English for about seven years and ranging in age between 19and 20 years.
- Group 2 consists of fifty eight fourth year students representing a more advanced level of proficiency as they had studied English two more years than group 1, with an average age of 22- 23 years.

The purpose of having two different levels was to explore the effect of proficiency level on the use and choice of CSs.

Elicitation Procedure

To assess the extent to which students used CSs, a self reported questionnaire was developed. In addition to the strategies identified by Oxford [(9)], SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning), other strategies observed by Margolis ([10]) or published in the literature were included. (See Appendix).

The questionnaire asked the students to indicate the extent to which they used CSs for each of the activities of reading, listening, writing and speaking. These items were written with a five point Likert scale and students responded by reporting the frequencies of their use of CSs (1= Never, 2= Not Usually, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = usually and 5= Always).

Furthermore, students were asked to rate their overall English ability, and individual macro- skills ability according to a different five point Likert scale (1=Beginner, 3= Intermediate and 5= Advanced).

The data were collected during a month. The questionnaire was administered by the class teachers during regular classes. Subjects were told that the questionnaire to be completed contained questions about their use of CSs. Most of the subjects had no difficulty in understanding the questionnaire. The administration of the questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes for each group. The advantage of this method of elicitation is that it helps to provide a good overview of the range of strategies that foreign/second language learners may use whenever they faced a communication gap, since it covers almost any decision taken in the process of language learning and language use. Moreover, it can easily be administered to large groups [(11).] In order to obtain a complete and a less biased picture of strategy use, both quantitative and

qualitative analyses were carried out on the data. First, data were entered into SPSS for windows version 5.o.1, and subjected to a variety of analysis to obtain frequencies, means, standard deviations, F ratios and correlation coefficients. Next, an analysis of variance with gender, years of study, ability and level of proficiency as independent variables and the SILL scores as the dependent variable was carried out to see whether or not they had an effect on strategy use.

Analysis of the Results

The starting point for this study was to sort out the mean scores of the six categories of CSs used by students. All means varied between 2, 48 and 4, 47 on a scale of 5, a range which Oxford [(12)] defined as medium use. So, the informants participating in this study used CSs at a medium level.

Students' background

Participants differed in their answers to the first three items of the questionnaire.

Table 1

Percentage of Years of Study, Hours of Class Study and Home Study of English

	Below 5 years	**5 – 6**	**Above 6 years**
Q1	**9 (8%)**	**20 (17%)**	**89 (75 %)**
Q2	**71 (60%)**	**11 (9%)**	**36 (31%)**
Q3	**98 (83%)**	**12 (10%)**	**8 (7%)**

Results of item 1: (How many years in total have you been studying English?)

75% of the respondents reported having been studying English for more than six years, 17% have been studying English for five to six years and 8% have been studying for less than five years.

Results of item 2: (How many hours of English classes (per week) have you had?). 60% of the students answered having had less than 5 hours of English classes weekly, 31% reported having had more than 6 hours of English classes per week and 9% percent reported having had 5 to 6 hours of English classes weekly.

Results of item 3: (outside of classes, how many hours per week do you practice English?). 83% of students reported practising English less than 5 hours per week. Outside of classroom, 10% reported 5 to 6 hours per week and7% only reported more than 6 hours per week.

Table 2

Mean Scores & Standard Deviations of Students Background

Level	**Q1**	**Q2**	**Q3**
Second year Mean	**6.46**	**558**	**2.77**
N	**58**	**1.94**	**58**
Std. Deviation	**1.05**		**1.46**
Fourth year Mean	**6.66**	**4.00**	**2.95**
N	**60**	**60**	**60**
Std. Deviation	**.86**	**1.69**	**1.94**
Total Mean	**6.56**	**4.52**	**2.86**
N	**118**	**118**	**118**
Std. Deviation	**.96**	**1.88**	**1.72**

As shown in Table 2, fourth year students got a slightly higher score than second year students in both years of English class study and home study.

In question 2 (How many hours of English classes (per week) have you had?) second year students got a higher score than fourth year students which means that their answers concerned second and fourth year university studies because second year students had ten modules and fourth year students only six modules. In other words, second year students had more hours of English classes than had fourth year students.

Self- Reported Ability level

As a measure of language self- ability, the students were asked to rate themselves on a scale from one to five to indicate how successful they thought they were at English (listening, reading, writing, speaking and overall ability).

Table 3

Respondents Self- Rated Ability Means and Standard Deviations

Level	Overall	Speaking	Writing	Listening	Reading
Second year (n.60)	**2,55 (1.03)**	**2.83 (.99)**	**3.21 (1.10)**	**3.45 (1.17)**	**3.83 (.96)**
Fourth year (n. 58)	**3.12 (.85)**	**3.17 (.90)**	**3.42 (1.06)**	**3.58 (1.14)**	**4.07 (.92)**
Combined Mean (n.118)	**2.84 (.98)**	**2.98 (.98)**	**3.31 (1.07)**	**3.51 (1.15)**	**3.93 (.94)**

Table 3 presents the mean scores and standard deviations of students' self rated ability. These means range from intermediate to advanced. Students self assessment shows that they perceive themselves as intermediate in speaking, writing and overall ability. Their reading and listening self assessment is rather better. A comparison of the means presented in Table 3 denotes that fourth year students rated their abilities better than second year students in every skill.

To answer the question which strategies do Algerian students most use, the mean responses to questionnaire items were examined. Strategy means that exceeded 3.5 were considered high use strategies [(13)]; [(14)]). Ten strategies emerged from this process and are listed in table 4. Strategy 12 (*describe the idea or situation for unknown words)* was the most used strategy among our students. Only 1% of the 118 students responding to the item claimed to have never resorted to this strategy. The mean response for this item was 4, 47. The second most utilized strategy was *consulting a dictionary for unknown words*; these were followed by *using a similar word to help convey an unknown one, asking for repetition, using general words to convey unknown ones, using background knowledge and experience to help convey the meaning, switch to Arabic or French, limit speaking to avoid making mistakes, using a literal translation from Arabic or French and finally avoiding difficult grammar* respectively.

Table 4

Most Utilized Strategies Ranked by Means, Highest to Lowest

Strategies	Mean	Standard Deviation	Significance
Q12. Describe the idea or situation for unknown words.	**4.47**	**.75**	**000**
Q27. Consult a dictionary	**3.95**	**1.09**	**000**
Q14. Use similar words for unknown ones	**3.94**	**.98**	**000**
Q31. Ask for repetition	**3.71**	**1.28**	**000**
Q21. Use general words to help convey an unknown one.	**3.65**	**1.01**	**000**
Q29. Use background knowledge and experience to help convey meaning.	**3.60**	**1.00**	**000**
Q17. Switch to Arabic or French.	**3.56**	**1.06**	**000**
Q19. Limit speaking to avoid making mistakes.	**3.54**	**1.09**	**000**
Q22. Use a literal translation from Arabic or French.	**3.54**	**1.00**	**000**
Q15. Avoid difficult grammar.	**3.51**	**1.20**	**000**

To identify which strategies were least utilized by our students the mean responses for the questionnaire was examined. Strategy means below 3 were considered low use strategies. Six strategies were identified by this process and are listed in Table 5.

The least utilized strategy was *using charts, pictures and graphics to help understand meaning when reading*, the second least utilized strategy was *using an antonym to help express an known word*; these were followed by *using a similar sound when they can't pronounce a sound well*, *using facial expressions when they can't find the appropriate words, brainstorming a list of words about the topic* and finally, *asking the interlocutor for difficult pronunciation*.

Table 5

Least Used Strategies Ranked by Means Lowest to Highest

Strategy	Mean	Standard Deviation	Significance
Q25. Use charts, pictures and graphics	**2.58**	**1.29**	**.00**
Q11. Use an antonym to help convey an unknown word.	**2.60**	**1.35**	**.00**
Q5. Use similar sounds for difficult ones	**2.74**	**1.21**	**00**
Q22. Use literal translation from Arabic or French	**2.91**	**1.36**	**.50**
Q7. Use facial expressions to help convey meaning	**3.92**	**1.22**	**.50**
Q9. Ask for help for correct conjugation	**2.97**	**1.22**	**.82**

Variation in strategy use (proficiency as independent variable)

To answer the question whether or not there were differences in strategy use between the two groups, a comparison between the mean scores of CSs of the two groups independently was made. Strategy means that exceeded 3.5 were considered high use strategies and strategy means below 3 were considered low use strategies. Results revealed differences between the two groups in strategy use as far as the frequency number and also the rank order of strategies are concerned.

An examination of the CSs used by both groups showed that the group with a low level of proficiency (group 1) employed significantly more CSs than did the group with high level of proficiently (group 2).

Analysis of data taken from group 1 showed that 15 strategies emerged as most utilized strategies. Means and standard deviations of these strategies are listed in table 6 ranked from highest to lowest.

Table 6

Group 1 Most Used Strategies Ranked Highest to Lowest

Strategy	Mean	S.D
Q12. Describe the idea or situation for unknown words.	**4.43**	**.86**
Q27. Consult a dictionary when reading	**4.26**	**.93**
Q14. Use similar words for unknown ones.	**4.05**	**1.01**
Q31. Request the speaker to repeat.	**3.90**	**1.31**
Q21. Use general words for specific ones.	**3.76**	**1.20**
Q19. Limit speaking to avoid making mistakes.	**3.76**	**1,00**
Q17. Switch to Arabic or French.	**3.71**	**1.08**
Q29. Use background knowledge and experience to guess the meaning.	**3.70**	**1.17**
Q22. Use a literal translation from Arabic or French.	**3.67**	**.98**
Q37. To catch the meaning, try to write out unknown words when listening	**3.65**	**.96**
Q15. Avoid difficult grammar.	**3.65**	**1.18**
Q32. Silently repeat to understand.	**3.60**	**1.01**
Q39. Request the speaker to spell confusing words.	**3.53**	**1.08**
Q6. Use gestures to convey meaning.	**3.53**	**1.43**
Q13. Make-up a new word to fill the gap in the English expression.	**3.52**	**1.27**

Analysis of data taken from group 2 showed that students made use of 09 strategies which is considered a small number compared to group 1 where 15 strategies appeared to be most utilized.

Table 7

Group 2 Most Used Strategies Ranked Highest to Lowest

Strategy	Mean	Standard Deviation
Q12. Describe the idea or situation for unknown words.	**4.52**	**.62**
Q18. Consult a dictionary when speaking.	**3.87**	**1.21**
Q28. Use context to help guess meaning.	**3.85**	**.95**
Q14. Use similar words for unknown ones.	**3.82**	**.95**
Q29. Use background knowledge and experience to guess the meaning.	**3.67**	**1.21**
Q30. Repeat reading to understand better.	**3.67**	**1.17**
Q26. Look for clues in the text to understand meaning.	**3.65**	**1.12**
Q13. Make up a new word to fill a gap in the English expression.	**3.53**	**1.28**

Q16. Use fillers to gain time.	**3.50**	**1.20**

Tables 6&7 respectively show that low level students and high level students differed not only in the frequency number of strategies and the rank order, but in the choice of strategies they used as well.

As mentioned earlier, low level students were found to use a greater number of strategies than high level students (15 and 9). The rank order of these strategies changed when examining the differences between the two groups separately. Strategy 30 *repeat reading several times* comes in the first rank and stands as the most utilized strategy by both groups. The second most utilized strategy stands as a difference between the two groups: while group 1 reported *consulting a dictionary when reading* as their second most utilized strategy, group 2 made use of this strategy to some degree. But, when speaking, strategy 31 *request the speaker to repeat* ranked third for both groups. Another difference between group 1 and group 2 lies in the selection of strategies. Though the number of strategies employed by low level students considerably surpasses those employed by high level students, two strategies (28 and16) that have been chosen by high level students as most utilized strategies are not present in low level students list of most utilized strategies, suggesting that level of proficiency affected the choice of strategy use.

Students' responses were also aggregated by strategy category. The questionnaire comprised six aggregated categories:

- Interactive strategies (items 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 23, 26, 30, 31, 32, 36, 39, and 40).
- Code- modification strategies (items 5, 12, 13, 14, and 23)
- Code- switching strategies (items 17 and 22).
- Guessing strategies (items 28, 29, 33, and 34)
- Physical compensation strategies (items 6, 7, 35, 37, and 38).
- Disengagement strategies (items 15, 18, 19, 24, and 27)

Table 8

Aggregated Compensation Strategy Use Ranked Most to Least Utilized.

Aggregated compensation strategies	Mean	Standard Deviation	Significance
Code-Modification strategies	**3.46**	**.73**	**.00**
Disengagement strategies	**3.36**	**.73**	**.00**
Interactive strategies	**3.34**	**.56**	**.00**
Guessing strategies	**3.24**	**.64**	**.00**
Code-switching strategies	**3.21**	**.66**	**.00**
Physical compensation strategies	**3.11**	**1.15**	**.30**

The students were found to use *code modification strategies* most in this study. *Disengagement strategies* were the second most utilized category followed by *interactive*, then *guessing*, then *code-switching* and finally *physical compensation strategies*.

To investigate whether or not there were differences in aggregated strategy a –**T-test** was used. Results of the –**T- test** revealed many differences in the mean scores and also the rank order of strategies. For low level students, the rank order remained

the same for code-modification strategies, but changed a little for the rest of strategy types. Interactive strategies ranked second. *Disengagement strategi*es switched to the third rank followed by *code switching*, and then *guessing strategies* and finally *physical compensation strategies.*

The key difference between the second year or low proficiency level group and the fourth year or high proficiency level group is with *interactive strategies* which ranked first with the high level group. *Code-Modification* strategies ranked second with this group, *guessing strategies* ranked third, followed by *disengagement strategies, code-switching strategies* and finally *physical compensation strategies.* However, in almost every instance, group 1 mean scores are above the combined mean and group 2 mean scores fall below the combined mean except for guessing strategies which the combined and group 2 means were almost the same (3,24 and 3,24 respectively) but group 1 mean, as far as this category is concerned, was higher (3,36).

Table 9

Group 1 Aggregated Compensation Strategy Use Ranked Most to Least Utilized

Aggregated Compensation Strategies	Mean	Standard Deviation	Significance
Code-Modification Strategies	**3.55**	**.73**	**00**
Interactive Strategies	**3.45**	**.66**	**00**
Disengagement Strategies	**3.45**	**.66**	**00**
Code switching	**3.39**	**1.13**	**01**
Guessing	**3.36**	**.75**	**01**
Physical Strategies	**3.35**	**.65**	**00**

Table 10

Group 2 Aggregated Compensation Strategy Used Ranked Most to Least Utilized

Aggregated compensation strategies	Mean	Standard Deviation	Significance
Interactive Strategies	**3.39**	**.69**	**.00**
Code-Modification Strategies	**3.37**	**.83**	**.00**
Guessing Strategies	**3.23**	**.50**	**.00**
Disengagement Strategies	**3.13**	**.61**	**.09**
Code-Switching Strategies	**3.03**	**.59**	**.73**
Physical Strategies	**2.87**	**1.15**	**.37**

Students strategy use was also identified regarding the four language skills as grouped in the questionnaire. To discover which of these aggregated strategies were most and least utilized, means and standard deviation were calculated as shown in table 11.

Table 11

Aggregated Macro-Skill Compensation Strategy Use

Aggregated Macro-skill compensation strategies	Mean	S.D	Significance
Speaking strategies	**3.63**	**.58**	**.00**
Writing strategies	**3.40**	**.57**	**.00**
Reading strategies	**3.20**	**.53**	**.00**
Listening strategies	**3.17**	**.72**	**.01**

The students report using speaking compensation strategies most often, followed by writing, then reading and finally listening strategies. This finding suggests that the

students' main problem is speaking. To investigate whether proficiency level had an effect on aggregated macro-skill compensation strategies use, the **ANOVA F-test** was conducted. Results of this process indicate that low level subjects means scores are, in every instance, above the combined mean. However, the mean scores of the high level students fall below the combined mean, suggesting that CSs use is more predominant among low proficient students. Yet, the order of aggregated CSs remained the same as the combined list shows (see Table 11).

Table 12

Aggregated Macro Skill Compensation Strategy Use Differences between Group 1 and Group 2 Ranked Most to Least Utilized

Aggregated Macro-skill compensation strategies	**GI**		**GII**			
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**F**	**Sig**
Speaking Strategies	**3.68**	**.59**	**3.57**	**.58**	**.924**	**.34**
Listening strategies	**3.50**	**.58**	**3.27**	**.56**	**4.90**	**.03**
Speaking strategies	**3.32**	**.56**	**3.09**	**.51**	**5.30**	**.02**
Writing Strategies	**3.28**	**.62**	**3.04**	**.78**	**3.27**	**.07**

The differences between the 2 groups reached significance in *listening* and *speaking strategies* and nearly reached significance (.07) for *writing strategies*. The **ANOVA (F) test** was run for each of the individual strategy. It was found that there was significant positive relation of proficiency to nine strategies. The summary of the **ANOVA** results for the strategies is shown in table 13.

Table 13

Anova (F) test correlation between proficiency level and individual strategies

Item		**Mean Scores**	**F**	**Significance**
Q5	**Between groups** **Within groups**	**31, .0** **1,17**	**26.47**	**00**
Q6	**Between groups** **Within groups**	**22,18** **1,47**	**15.12**	**00**
Q7	**Between groups** **Within groups**	**6,60** **1,47**	**4.47**	**04**
Q22	**Between groups** **Within groups**	**10,31** **1,81**	**5,69**	**02**
Q25	**Between groups** **Within groups**	**8,75** **1,62**	**5.40**	**02**
Q27	**Between groups** **Within groups**	**10,33** **1,12**	**9,19**	**00**
Q28	**Between groups** **Within groups**	**7,05** **1,05**	**6,72**	**01**
Q36	**Between groups** **Within groups**	**7,34** **1,71**	**4,92**	**04**
Q37	**Between groups** **Within groups**	**5,25** **1,17**	**4,48**	**04**

Among the strategies which showed significant association to proficiency, three fall into *physical compensation strategies* items (6, 7 and 37), two fall into *interactive*

strategies items (25 and 36), and one from each of the following strategies: *code modification, code switching, disengagement* and *guessing compensation strategies*.

In order to analyze the relationship between aggregated strategy use and the independent variables of gender, level, ability and years of study, **Pearson Correlation Test** was carried out. Several correlations reached the levels of significance. Table 13 above presents the correlation coefficients observed. The correlations between gender and aggregated strategy use were not very strong which may be due to the small number of males (16.1%) participating in this study. However, three reached levels of significance could be observed: gender and reading compensation strategies (r=40); gender and writing compensation strategies (r= 33), and gender and physical compensation strategies (r=33). The latter correlation is especially interesting given that physical compensation strategies were most utilized by female students. The correlations between level of proficiency and aggregated strategy use were not very strong. Nevertheless, two reached levels of significance: level of proficiency and guessing strategies (r=42), level of proficiency and code modification strategies (r=31). These correlations suggest that advanced students may be more likely to utilize these strategies than less advanced students.

Interestingly, negative correlations were observed between level of proficiency and speaking strategies (r= -21) level of proficiency and listening strategies (r=-24), level of proficiency and interactive strategies (r=-23), level of proficiency and physical strategies (r=-32) and level of proficiency and code switching strategies (r=-22). Moreover, level of proficiency and self- reported ability were correlated at a significant level (r=23) suggesting slight relationships between students level of proficiency in English and their confidence in reporting their abilities.

The correlations between years of study and compensation strategy use were also not very strong. Three reached levels of significance: years of study and listening strategies (r=23), years of study and interactive strategies (r=21) and years of study and guessing strategies (r=20). These correlations suggest that students who study foreign languages for a longer time may be more likely to utilize these strategies more frequently than those who have been studying for fewer years

Table 14

Pearson correlations coefficients for aggregated strategies

Level	-.161								
Ability	-.016	.229*							
Years of study	-.021	-.126	.020						
Modification	0.59	-.169	.005	.100					
Interactive	-.080	-.234*	-.090	.209*	.367**				
Switch	.020	-.225*	-.217*	-.040	.111	.189*			
Guess	.067	.021	.147	.145	.422**	.314**	.060		
Physical	.205*	-.321**	-.019	.063	.303**	.357**	.262**	.244**	
Disengagement	.014	-.114	-.232*	.014	.415**	.317**	.422**	.206*	.221*
	Gender	**Level**	**Ability**	**Years of study**	**Modification**	**Interactive**	**Switch**	**Guess**	**Physical**

The correlation between student self-reported ability and CSs use were also not very strong. However, two reached levels of significance, suggesting slight relationships between overall ability and employment of *reading strategies* (r=, 21) and *guessing strategies* (r=23). The latter correlation is especially interesting given that *guessing strategies* were most utilized by fourth year students. In other words, students' use of *guessing strategies* stands out as a major difference between intermediate and advanced students.

Table 15

Pearson correlations coefficients for aggregated abilities

Level	-.161						
Ability	-.016	.229*					
Years of study	-.021	-.126	-.020				
Speak	-.012	-.206*	-.137	.073			
Write	.117	-.179	-.219*	.028	.551**		
Read	.146	-.099	.002	.098	.465**	.330**	
Listen	.098	-.239**	.037	.230*	.422**	.270**	.442**
	Gender	**Level**	**Ability**	**Years of study**	**Speak**	**Write**	**read**

Table 15 also presents each of the aggregated strategies. The relationships among the strategies have stronger coefficients than gender, ability, level and years of study. Most of them show positive relationships.

Discussion and conclusion

The questionnaire was a retrospective measure to check students' use of CSs and how they rated themselves as far as strategy use is concerned. Means (3, 2) show that the students in this study used CSs at a medium level. Results of the SILL revealed that participants used all strategy categories. The Algerian majors of English reported using *code-modification strategies* with the greatest frequency as indicated by the mean score (M= 3.46). Interestingly, Tarone &Yule [(15)] reported that native speakers tend to most utilize *code-modification strategies* when facing communication problems; they even recommend that L2 students need to be trained to do the same. *Disengagement strategies* were found to be the second most utilized strategy. This finding is in accordance with Khanji [(16)] who found that *message abandonment* was the second most utilized strategy in his study of 36 Jordanian EFL students. Oxford [(17)] considers that the use of *disengagement strategies*, such as, *avoiding topics* or *quitting in mid-utterances*, is sometimes necessary to emotionally protect learners. However, Margolis [(18)] found that Korean students' least employed category is *code-modification strategies*. The difference between Margolis' study and the current study may be attributed to the differences in the teaching background of the target language and the differences in the subjects' level in both studies. Margolis' subjects are students at a tourism institute while the subjects in this study are university English language

majors who are thought to be aware of the learning process and the strategies they employ to achieve their intended meaning. The least employed category by this sample was *physical compensation strategies.* Also, there were less proficient-related discrepancies in the choice of CSs than expected; in other words, both groups participating in this study used strategies at approximately the same frequency.

Regarding the relationship between strategy use and the independent variable proficiency level, the results of this study showed greater overall use of CSs among low proficient level subjects and a difference in the choice of the strategy used. Among the six categories analyzed, two categories reached the level of significance with the level of proficiency: level of proficiency and *guessing strategies* and level of proficiency and *code-modification strategies*. Furthermore, as the study was also concerned with strategy use regarding the four language skills, students' score were higher suggesting that they use more strategies which help them to compensate for limitations in speaking and writing than in overcoming limitations in listening and reading. Finally, the analysis of the relationship between aggregated strategy use and the independent variables of gender, ability and years of English study revealed that each of the independent variables reached level of significance with certain strategies. Gender was found to have a relationship with *reading strategies*, *writing strategies* and *physical strategies*. The correlations between ability and aggregated strategy use were not very strong. However, it was found that students' self- reported ability had a relationship with their level of proficiency. The correlations between years of English study and aggregated strategy use showed that there exists a relationship between listening strategies and years of study, interactive strategies and years of study, and finally, guessing strategies and years of study.

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Appendix

Student's Questionnaire

Dear student,
This questionnaire aims to identify communication strategies i. e., those devices that most students use when they lack appropriate words to express themselves. Please help us identify these devices by answering the following questions as truthfully as possible. Your answers will be strictly confidential.

Name(optional)
Gender: Male/Female
Level:
For number 1-3 circle the number that best describes you.
(+)= more than

1. How many years have you been studying English? 1 2 3 4 5 6 +
2. How many hours of English classes (per week) have you had? 1 2 3 4 5 6 +
3. Outside classes, how many hours (per week) do you practise English? 1 2 3 4 5 6 +

Please read the following scale and answer question 4a-4e.

1= Beginner: You know some expressions, words and grammar structure, but you don't have the ability to use them to communicate in English.

2= You can communicate to some degree in English, but often experience frustration and confusion.

3= Intermediate: You have the ability to communicate basic needs in English, you might make a lot of mistakes in communication, but the exchange of ideas is possible

4= You can communicate more than basic needs. While you sometimes make mistakes, you have the ability to communicate in English. You know and can use a large vocabulary in many contexts.

In you honest opinion, please rate your English ability according to the above scale.
Circle the number that corresponds with your rating.

	Beginner	-2-	Intermediate	-4-	Advanced
4a.Overall Ability	1	2	3	4	5
4b.Speaking	1	2	3	4	5
4c.Writing	1	2	3	4	5
4d.Reading	1	2	3	4	5
4e.Listening	1	2	3	4	5

For the following, please circle the number that best matches how frequently you use the strategy to fill gaps in your English communication.

1=never	2=not usually	3=sometimes	4=usually	5=always
0%	25%	50 %	75%	100%

When speaking

5. When you can't pronounce a sound well, you use a similar sound. 1 2 3 4 5
6. When you can't convey your meaning, you use gestures. 1 2 3 4 5
7. When you can't find the appropriate words, you use facial expressions. 1 2 3 4 5
8. When you can't pronounce a difficult word you ask your interlocutor to help you. 1 2 3 4 5
9. When you can't remember the correct form of the verb, you ask your interlocutor to help you. 1 2 3 4 5
10. When you can't remember the correct word, you ask your interlocutor to help you. 1 2 3 4 5
11. When you can't remember the correct word, you use the opposite one. 1 2 3 4 5

12. When you don't know a word you try to describe the idea or situation. 1 2 3 4 5
13. When you can't remember the correct word, you make up a new one. 1 2 3 4 5
14. When you can't remember a word, you use a similar one. 1 2 3 4 5
15. When you don't know the correct conjugation of a verb, you avoid it. 1 2 3 4 5
16. When you can't remember a word, you use expressions, such as *well, hmm, you know, I'm not sure* and other fillers to gain time. 1 2 3 4 5
17. When you don't know a word in English, you say it in Arabic or in French. 1 2 3 4 5
18. When you don't know a word in English, you consult an Arabic-English Dictionary or a French-English dictionary. 1 2 3 4 5
19. To avoid making mistakes, you limit your speaking. 1 2 3 4 5

Please write any additional strategies you use to cope with difficult parts when speaking.

When writing

20. Brainstrom a list of words about the topic. 1 2 3 4 5
21. When you can't remember the specific word, you use a general word. 1 2 3 4 5
22. To fill a gap in the English expression, you use a literal translation from Arabic or French. 1 2 3 4 5
23. To express your idea, you use a paraphrase. 1 2 3 4 5
24. To avoid making mistakes, you limit your writing. 1 2 3 4 5

Please write any additional strategies you use the cope with difficult parts when writing.

For the following, please circle the number that best matches how frequently you use the strategy to fill gaps in your English communication.

1=never	2=not usually	3=sometimes	4=usually	5=always
0%	25%	50%	75%	100%

When reading

25. To help understand meaning, you use charts pictures and graphics.
26. To understand the meaning; you look in other parts of the next for clue.
27. For unknown words, you consult an Arabic-English dictionary or a French-England dictionary
28. To help guess the meaning of unknown words, you use the context
29. To guess the meaning, you use background knowledge and experience
30. When faced with a difficult passage, you repeat reading several times

Please write any additional strategies that you use to understand difficult parts when reading:

When listening

31. To confirm your understanding, you ask the speaker to repeat what was said. 1 2 3 4 5
32. You ask the speaker for examples. 1 2 3 4 5
33. To guess the meaning, you try to interpret the physical cues of the speaker (like gestures) 1 2 3 4 5
34. To guess the meaning, you try to interpret the speaker's intonation, rhythm, and sound cues. 1 2 3 4 5
35. To inform the speaker that you don't understand, you use gestures of facial expressions 1 2 3 4 5
36. You, directly, ask the speaker that you don't understand. 1 2 3 45
37. To help you catch the meaning, you write words that you hear. 1 2 3 4 5
38. To understand a word or an expression better, you silently repeat it. 1 2 3 4 5
39. You ask the speaker how to spell confusing words. 1 2 3 4 5
40. You ask the speaker to slow down. 1 2 3 4 5

Please write additional strategies that you use to understand difficult parts when listening