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CH 10 Cognitive Account

Communication Strategies

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Communication Strategies

The second aspect of procedural skill: C0MMUNICATION strategies' (CSs). CSs focus on a subset of production phenomena (i.e. those that are conscious and arise as a result of a communication problem the learner is experiencing). For example, a learner's use of

-**Reduction strategies** (such as avoiding difficult words) or

-**Achievement strategies** (like paraphrasing)

The term 'communication strategy' was coined by Selinker (1 972.)

CSs have been viewed as a sociolinguistic phenomenon.

Sociolinguistic accounts of CSs have also paid greater attention to the pragmatic problems that learners experience.

Defining Communication Strategies

CSs viewed as discourse strategies that are evident in social interactions involving learners, or they can be treated as cognitive processes involved in the use of the L2 in reception and production.

Interactional Definitions

Tarone defined CSs as involving 'a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared'. As such they differ from **PRODUCTION STRATEGIES**

PRODUCTION STRATEGIES, which she defined as attempts to 'use one's linguistic system efficiently and clearly, with a minimum of effort'.

Psycholinguistic Phenomenon 'Conscious communication strategies are used by an individual to overcome the crisis which occurs when language structures are inadequate to convey the individual's thought'

One of the problems with the interactional approach to defining communication strategies (CSs) is deciding which interaction behaviors are truly "strategic" (caused by a communication problem) and which are just part of normal language use. For example, it's hard to say whether hesitation (pausing while speaking) is strategic. Most researchers have excluded hesitation from CSs, but Dörnyei and Scott (1997) argued it should be included. They suggested that learners might hesitate not only because they have a communication problem, but also to give themselves time to think of a solution.

Dornyei and Scott (1997) distinguished three types of communication

problems that can give rise to CSs:

(1) own-performance problems (i.e. the learner recognizes that something he/she has said is incorrect or only partly correct),

(2) other-performance problems (i.e. the learner finds something problematic in something said to him/her)

(3) processing-time pressure (i.e. the learner needs more time to plan L2 speech). Tarone's early definition covered mainly

(1) although one of her strategies— 'appeal for assistance 'relates to (2)

(2) in fact includes the strategies involved in the negotiation for meaning

(3) involves the production processes generally considered in accounts of fluency.

Psycliolinguistic Definitions

In this approach, communication strategies (CSs) are placed within a general model of speech production, which has two key phases:

1. Planning Phase: The speaker creates a plan for communication by selecting the most appropriate language rules and items to achieve their communicative goals. The aim is to prepare a plan that will result in effective verbal behavior.

2. Execution Phase: This is when the speaker carries out the plan by producing the speech necessary to reach the original goal.

During the planning phase, the speaker decides on the best language tools to use in order to ensure that their communication will be successful.

In this model, communication strategies (CSs) are viewed as part of the planning process in speech production. They are used when learners face a problem with their original communication plan that prevents them from successfully executing it. There are two possible solutions:

1. Avoidance: The learner changes their original goal by using a reduction strategy (such as skipping or simplifying the intended message).

2. Achievement: The learner keeps the original goal but develops an alternative plan using an achievement strategy (like finding different words or ways to express the same idea).

This model emphasizes a psycholinguistic perspective, focusing on the mental processes learners use to solve communication problems.

In the Faarch and Kasper model, communication strategies (CSs) are considered "strategic plans" that differ from "production plans" in two main ways:

1. Problem-orientation: Learners use CSs when they lack the necessary resources in the second language (L2) to express their intended meaning (a problem in the planning phase) or when they cannot access those resources (a problem in the execution phase). In both cases, there is an imbalance between what they want to communicate (the ends) and what they can express (the means)

2. Consciousness: Faarch and Kasper viewed consciousness as a secondary defining characteristic of CSs. They identified challenges in asserting that all CSs are conscious, so they categorized them into three types:

(1) Plans that are always consciously employed.

(2) Plans that are never consciously employed.

(3) Plans that are consciously employed by some learners in some situations but not by others.

They suggested that CSs fall under categories (1) and (3), meaning they are potentially conscious strategies for solving problems that arise when learners strive to reach specific communicative goals.

Both the problematicity and the consciousness criteria have been criticized.

Bialystok (1990) argued that it is not clear how the distinction between 'production plans' (which are non-problematic) and 'strategic plans' (which are problematic) manifests itself in actual language processing.

Bialystok also criticized Faerch and Kasper's claim that CSs are potentially conscious on the grounds that there is no 'independent means' for deciding which plans fall into this category and that without this 'one is left to assume that all plans are potentially conscious'

Bialystok (1990) argued that the definition of communication strategies (CSs) should be situated within a comprehensive understanding of speech production. While she appreciated the effort of Faerch and Kasper to connect CSs to speech production, she found their approach lacking. Specifically, she noted that the fundamental concepts of "process," "plan," and "strategy" were poorly defined and that there wasn't enough evidence to support their claim that planning and execution could be clearly distinguished.

Bialystok proposed her own solution by differentiating between two types of CSs:

1. **Knowledge-based CSs:** These involve the speaker adjusting the content of their message by utilizing their knowledge of the concept. For example, they might provide additional information through a definition or circumlocution.

2. **Control-based CSs:** In these strategies, the speaker maintains their initial intention while changing how they express it. This can involve integrating resources from outside the second language (L2), such as using first language (L1) strategies or even gestures.

Bialystok emphasized that both types of strategies do not necessarily stem from problematic situations, like knowledge gaps or communication breakdowns. Just like native speakers, learners choose from their available options to express their intentions as accurately as possible, depending on the specific task they are engaged in.This approach distinguishes between two general mental processes that underlie the various manifestations of CSs:

1. **Conceptual processes:** These involve manipulating the underlying concept to make it expressible through the learner's available linguistic or mimetic resources.

2. **Linguistic (or code) processes**: In this case, learners adjust the language itself to get as close as possible to expressing their original intention.