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على استخدامهم لاستراتيجيات التواصل

The Impact Of Iraqi EFL Learners' English Proficiency Level On Their Use Of Communication Strategies

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المُلخَص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من تأثير مستوى إتقان اللغة الانكليزية لدارسيها كلغة أجنبية على استخدامهم لاستراتيجيات التواصل عندما يتواصلون بها شفهيًا. وظفت هذه الدراسة الية متعددة الأساليب لجمع البيانات. كانت مهام الاستنباط والأدوات عبارة عن ثلاث مهام شفوية ، ومقابلات استدعاء محفزة ، واستبيان . كانت المهام الشفوية من نوعين: مهمة أحادية الاتجاه (وصف الصورة) ، ومهام ثنائية الاتجاه: مهمة فجوة المعلومات (ايجاد الفروقات) ومهمة فجوة الرأي(مقابلة تبادل الآراء). كان المشاركون (٥٦) طالبًا جامعيًا في السنة الثانية و (٢٢) طالب ماجستير في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية - كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية - جامعة الموصل ، للعام الدراسي ٢٠٢٠-٢٠٢١. أظهرت النتائج أن متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يواجهون العديد من مشاكل التواصل عند استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية شفهيًا. كما اظهرت ايضا أن مستوى إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية له تأثير كبير على استخدام متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق لاستراتيجيات التواصل حيث انه كلما كان المتعلم أكثر كفاءة ، كلما قلّ استخدامه لهذه الاستراتيجيات. لقد وجد أن الاختلاف الأكثر وضوحًا كان في استخدام استراتيجيات التقليل. يُعزى ذلك إلى أن المبتدئين يميلون إلى استخدام استراتيجيات الاختزال، أي ترك رسالتهم غير مكتملة، أو تغيير موضوع المحادثة ، أو التبديل إلى لغتهم الأم، العربية، بدلا من المخاطرة باستخدام اللغة الإنجليزية لعدم امتلاكهم لمستوى كفاءة متكامل.

Abstract

This study is aimed at investigating the impact of Iraqi EFL learners' proficiency level in English on their use of communication strategies (CSs) when they communicate orally in English. It employed a mixed-methods procedure to collect data. In this procedure, elicitation tasks and instruments were three oral tasks, stimulated recall interviews, and a self-reported questionnaire. The oral tasks were of two types: a one-way task (picture description), and two-way tasks (information-gap task and opinion-gap task). The participants were (56) undergraduate sophomores and (22) M.A. students in the Department of English-College of Education for Humanities-University of Mosul, during the academic year 2020-2021. The results revealed that Iraqi EFL learners face many communication problems when using English orally. They also revealed that English proficiency level has a significant impact on Iraqi EFL learners' use of CSs. The more proficient the learner was, the less CSs s/he used. It was found out that the difference in use of CSs is most obvious in reduction strategies. This is attributed to that beginners tended to use reduction strategies, i.e., leave their message unfinished, change the conversation topic, or switch to their mother tongue, Arabic, in preference to taking the risk, of using English, with their non-fully developed competence in English.

Introduction:

In communities where English is learned/taught as a foreign language, EFL learners are usually after developing their English competence so as to be able to use the language effectively. However, using the foreign language in communication is a challenge, especially in oral tasks. This is due to the fact that productive language skills are harder to master than receptive ones (Al-Alawi,2016). At the same time, it is a significant challenge to equip learners with the required receptive and productive abilities for competent performance in a foreign language context. EFL learners must develop an in-depth understanding of grammar, a broad range of lexical items, better pronunciation, and most importantly, be able to communicate effectively in English. They have numerous difficulties in gaining accuracy and fluency in the foreign language. Therefore, there has been a shift in focus, during the last three decades from looking at language as a mere system of vocabulary being used according to some rules of grammar, to considering language as accumulative knowledge of its speakers and learners. This demands a development of learners' competence of the foreign language in its four components as a whole (Rababah, 2002; Al Alawi, 2016). Canale and Swain (1980) stated that communicative competence is composed of four components: *grammatical*, *sociolinguistic*, *discourse* and *strategic* competence. EFL learners in general, and Iraqi ones in this context, struggle to communicate their message in English because of their limited communicative competence of English. To cope with such situations, they employ various communication strategies (henceforth CSs). This study aims at investigating the influence of Iraqi EFL learners' English proficiency level on their strategic behavior when they face such communication problems. It is after answering the following research question:

- Is there any impact of proficiency level on the communication strategies used by Iraqi EFL learners in oral tasks? If yes, how?

It is hypothesized that Iraqi EFL learners face communication difficulties when using English orally, and they make use of CSs to help them get their message shared. Numerous scholars have addressed communication issues in a variety of recent studies. The significance of this study lies in that it is carried out in order to enhance the teaching / learning process to help future EFL students in Iraq. The expectation is that the insights acquired will be of interest to other EFL teachers, learners, and researchers, particularly those working with Arabic-speaking students. Additionally, it is hoped that this will raise teachers' awareness of the importance of communication strategies in enhancing EFL students' oral communication skills, as well as equip EFL teachers to address communication issues by training their students to know how to handle such communication barriers, and succeed to convey their message. There could be a linguistic block in a form of a single word, phrase, or full structure. There is always a tool to fill this communication gap through the use of effective CSs. One important point to note here is that CSs should not be confused with language learning strategies. The major distinction between the two is the aim of each: the former are used to learn some new aspects of language, whereas the latter are basically used to keep the communication channel open (Oxford, 1990).

1. Theoretical background:

In the process of a foreign language and/or a second language learning, two main types of strategies are basically identified: language learning strategies and language use strategies. CSs are labeled within the latter type next to performance strategies and production strategies.

Performance strategies are simply those employed by learners to practice and master language structures. They are usually used in classroom. Production strategies are often referred to as learner's attempts to use her/his linguistic repertoire to fulfill a communicative need efficiently, but with as minimum effort as possible (Tarone, 1980, p. 419; Cohen et al. , 1996, p. 1-2; Ellis, 1999, p. 530).

Selinker (1972) coined the term 'communication strategies' to refer to these techniques as one of the five basic processes involved in second language acquisition. Later definitions would be proposed by researchers such as Váradi (1973) and Tarone (1977). These early studies concentrated on describing and classifying CSs by developing taxonomies that would subsequently be used to analyze and categorize them (Tarone, 1977; Corder, 1983; Dornyei & Scott, 1997). Later, Canale and Swain (1980) incorporated these devices as a sub-component of their model of 'communicative competence,' namely strategic competence (Rosas, 2016).

2.1. Definitions of communication strategies:

CSs have been defined differently by various scholars. Dornyei & Scott (1997) attributed this diversity of definitions to this different standpoints from which CSs have been tackled. CSs are basically defined from psycholinguistic and interactional perspectives.

Tarone (1977) defined CSs as “An individual employs conscious communication techniques to overcome the crisis that happens when language structures are insufficient to convey the individual's thought”. Later, Tarone (1980, p. 420) presented an interactional definition of CSs, she defined them as “a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to

agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared”.

Canale and Swain (1981) proposed that CSs are “ verbal and non-verbal devices that may be used to compensate for communication breakdowns caused by performance factors or a lack of competence”.

Faerch and Kasper (1983) stated that “CSs are potentially deliberate strategies for resolving an issue that an individual perceives as a barrier to achieving a specific communicative aim”.

Dornyei (1995) defined CSs as “a systematic strategy used by a speaker to convey his or her message when confronted with a problem”. Dornyei and Scott (1997) also confirmed the existence of two criteria for defining CSs that are in accordance with both interactional and psycholinguistic approaches: these criteria are *problem orientedness* and *consciousness*. The former means that CSs are basically used to solve a communication problem, usually that of “resource deficit”. The latter indicates that learners consciously use CSs to achieve a communicative goal though their TL competence is limited.

Boxer & Cohen (2008) stated that CSs are “a systematic endeavour by FL learners to offer or provide an accurate meaning that is not consistent with the target language's rules”.

It is obvious that no full agreement is there among scholars on the precise definition of CSs, but still all the definitions share the same essence. CSs are problem-solving tools that are consciously used.

1.1. Classifications of communication strategies:

The conceptual distinctions among scholars of CSs domain become most apparent when they identify the specific linguistic devices they believe to be CSs. There is no complete agreement on classifying CSs due to scholars' different theoretical perspectives in tackling CSs (Dornyei & Scott, 1997). In this section, classifications of CSs are presented as they were proposed and introduced by different scholars.

Tarone (1977) divided CSs into “avoidance strategies, asking for assistance, paraphrase, borrowing, and mime”. However, Tarone's typology contains overlapping areas . The first shortcoming in her approach is that the limits she uses to define strategy types and the distinctions she makes between them are imprecise. Another shortcoming of Tarone's classification is its inability to account for a more realistic relationship between techniques and outcomes. That is, it makes no attempt to explain how the approach might have worked in order to accomplish its objective. Finally, Tarone's "interaction" principle does not apply to monologue, and her division appears to be only a list of diverse communicating ways that does not reflect the role communication strategies play in the communicative procedure . Later, Bialystok (1983) categorized CSs into two major groups: first-language based CSs and second-language based CSs. The former reflects the strategies that EFL learners use depending on their knowledge of their mother tongue, not that of the target language. Examples of this group are literal translation and code switching. The latter refer to techniques that learners use depending on their knowledge of the second language. Examples of these are circumlocution and approximation (Dornyei & Scott, 1997; Abunawas, 2012, p. 180).

The other taxonomy of CSs was proposed by Faerch and Kasper (1983). It is based on how learners could respond when confronted with communication difficulties. It is composed of two major techniques: *reduction* strategies, which are determined by the learner's avoidance behavior. Reduction strategies are of two types: *formal reduction*, and *functional reduction*. The other major category of strategies are *achievement* strategies, which are determined by the learner's achievement behaviour. According to Faerch and Kasper (1983) students can resolve communication problems by either avoiding the problematic topic and changing the communicative goal, or by relying on achievement behaviour, attempting to directly address the problem by developing an alternative plan (Faerch & Kasper, 1983).

Paripakht (1985) proposed another CSs taxonomy in which CSs “were classified into three main verbal categories: *linguistic approach*, which exploit the semantic aspects of linguistic items, *contextual approach*, which exploit the speakers' knowledge of the communication context, and *conceptual approach*, which exploit the speakers' knowledge of the world as a whole” (Rababah, 2001).

Willems (1987) also proposed a taxonomy of CSs in which CSs were categorized into two main types: “*reduction* CSs and *achievement* CSs”. The former type contains *formal* and *functional* reduction strategies. The latter is composed of *paralinguistic* and *interlingual* strategies. Then, there were other classifications by the Nijmegen group who classified CSs as *conceptual* and *linguistic* code strategies”. Poulisse (1993) also categorized CSs into *substitution* and *reconceptualization* strategies. The widest taxonomy that covered almost all the CSs was proposed by Dornyei and Scott (1995); they introduced CSs as being one of three types. The first type is *direct* CSs which are either related to limited linguistic resources, or to speaker's

performance problems. The second type is interactional CSs that also related to limited TL knowledge, speaker's own performance problems, or to the conversation partner's performance problems. The third type is the indirect CSs that include processing-related CSs, own-problems related CSs, and other's-problems related CSs (Dornyei & Scott, 1997). Below is table (1) which shows the adopted CSs taxonomy proposed for this study.

Table (1) the adopted CSs taxonomy

Factors	Target strategies
Reduction CSs	Message abandonment
	Topic avoidance
	Code switching
	Foreignizing
Self-solving CSs	Circumlocution
	Approximation
	Use of all-purpose words
	Word coinage
	Self-correction
Interactional CSs	Appeal for help
	Comprehension check
	Asking for repetition
	Clarification request
	Asking for confirmation
Time-gaining CSs	Use of lexical fillers
	Use of non-lexical fillers
	Self-repetition

1.2. English proficiency:

The variable of TL proficiency was investigated and explained by some researchers. Interest in investigating the effect of learners' TL proficiency level increased due to its potential influence on the number and type of CSs; many studies found out that beginners use more CSs than intermediate and advanced learners. The other reason of the increase in such interest is Bialystok and Frohlich's (1980) thought that effective CSs use requires certain proficiency level (Poulisse & Schils, 1989, p. 18). It has been discovered that learners with varying TL proficiency levels drew upon a variety of sources of knowledge to solve their communication problems (Chen, 1990, p.174). In many circumstances, learners' TL systems are still growing and weak and cause their use of CSs. Their low proficiency reflects their ineffective TL systems. As a result, it's unsurprising that the skill levels of L2 learners differ and have an impact on the use of CSs (Jidong, 2011, p. 92). Paribakht (1985) reports that highly proficient language learners with a greater depth of TL knowledge tended to take a linguistic approach, whereas those with low proficiency took a conceptual approach that does not require specific target language linguistic or cultural knowledge to compensate for their limited linguistic knowledge. Similar findings are found in Chen's (1990) study; it has been indicated that high proficient learners preferred linguistic-based CSs more than low proficiency learners did. Additionally, there have been many studies (Chen, 1990; Nakatani, 2010; Hua, Nor & Jaradat, 2012; Kaivanpanah, Yamouty & Karami, 2012; Uгла, Abidin and Abdullah, 2019) which confirmed that high proficient learners made more efficient use of CSs than low proficient ones. Some other studies (Gümüş, 2007; Ting and Phan's , 2008) revealed no significant impact of proficiency level on the use of CSs. Based on what has been

presented above, the influence of proficiency level could be said to be context-specific; some studies found out that it has a potential impact, while others deny this finding. Hence, it is suggested that further research is needed to arrive at what precisely causes such variety in the nature of its impact.

1.3. Previous studies:

There have been many previous studies that attempted to account for the effect of EFL learners' target language proficiency level, if any, on the use of CSs. By reviewing these studies, it is apparent that no previous study has employed the same procedures of this study, and no one was conducted in the context of the current study.

Paribakht (1985) carried out a study that was aimed at examining the influence of Persian students' English proficiency level on their strategic competence and behaviour. It was after explaining the nature of such relation between proficiency level and CSs use. the study targeted two groups of intermediate and advanced level, and a group of English native speakers to carry out the comparison process. The study employed, and pictures, cards and a kind of interaction to collect the required data. It was found that all the three groups of participants used L1 based and L2 based CSs. There was a significant variation in the frequency and type of CSs used, as well as in the procedures the participants followed to cope with the communication barriers they faced.

Nakatani, Mekki, & Bradley (2012) also conducted a study to assess the use of CSs by Iranian EFL learners in free, open-ended interaction. The study targeted thirty pairs of learners, they were divided according to their proficiency level into elementary, intermediate, and advanced. Data were collected via an observation of classroom interaction. It was found out that was a relatively low

frequency of CSs use, and that approximation and circumlocution were improperly employed.

Uztosun and Erten (2014) investigated the relation between Turkish EFL learners' proficiency level and their use of CSs. The study targeted seventeen pairs of students. They were given some short movies to talk about and their performance was observed and analyzed by adopting an interaction-based method. The participants' proficiency level was found to be an influential factor in the use and frequency of only message abandonment, topic avoidance, and mime strategies.

Al-Alawi (2016) carried out a similar study in the Omani context. The study was aimed at identifying the CSs used by Omani learners of English in reference to their proficiency level. The study was qualitative in nature. It employed picture description and semi interview tasks to elicit data. It targeted sixty students in the Technology College. It was indicated that learners' levels of proficiency influenced the use of CSs.

Inkaew and Thumawongsa (2018) studied the effect of foreign language proficiency level on the use of CSs in Thai context. The study was aimed at finding out what CSs Thai learners use, and if there is an influence of their English proficiency level on such a use. it targeted (89) university fresh students. It was quantitative in nature and employed a questionnaire to collect data and elicit CSs. It was found that students at the advanced level favoured risk-taking strategies such as circumlocution and clarification requests, whereas those at the beginning level favoured topic avoidance and body language.

This study differs from the above-mentioned studies in that it is carried in a different context (Iraqi context), and in the research method and instruments it employed. It is a mixed-methods -procedure study, and the elicitation tasks are also different (see section 3.2).

2. Methodology:

2.1. Population and sampling:

The samples of this study were (56) second-year undergraduate university students and (22) postgraduate students in the Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, university of Mosul, of the academic year 2020-2021. This was done to identify CSs by each group, and then to compare such use between the two groups. The participants were randomly chosen, and they voluntarily did the oral tasks required.

2.2. Data collection procedures and instruments:

To answer the research question and achieve the objective of this study, and to elicit CSs use and have reliable data, the researcher employed three oral tasks, stimulated recall interviews, and a self-reported questionnaire. These tasks are basically meant to meet the needs of the current study and answer its question. To decide learners' proficiency level, the researcher adopted Penguin placement test (2005). This test is basically devised to assist instructors place learners in their appropriate language level. It is well-organized and divided into many sections each of which targets a certain area of language mastery, but it has the demerit of time consuming. The researcher modified this test in a version that covers all the areas targeted in its original version but with some adjustments to make it practicable within acceptable time span. The test starts with easy, straightforward areas and ranking to those difficult ones. The participants' performance of the tasks was audio recorded and transcribed. Then, CSs used were coded, counted and computed in reference to frequencies and percentages of use in the three participants groups: beginners, pre-intermediate, and post-

intermediate. As for the self-questionnaire, it was shared with the participants online by means of Google forms application.

2.2.1. The elicitation tasks:

Three oral tasks were employed to get as much reliable data and range of CSs use as possible. They were of two different types; a one-way task, and two-way tasks. The former was picture description task, and the latter were information-gap task, and opinion-gap task.

Picture-description task:

Heaton (1988) confirmed that picture description tasks are very useful instrument to examine learners' oral performance. This task is a one-way task since a learner usually does it alone. The participants were given a picture of a house. The picture contains (11) sub-picture of some people doing various house work. The participants were asked to work individually and do the task. they were asked to give as much description of what each person was doing as they could. To break the ice and familiarize the participants with the task, the first three pictures were described in a simple language by the researcher.

Information-gap task:

This task is a two-way task, i.e., participants did it working in pairs. The participants were given two pictures of two similar halls, but with ten differences between them. The participants were asked to negotiate and cooperate to find these differences. Each participant was asked to look at his own picture , and not allowed to see his partner's picture. To simplify the task, one of the differences was characterized and introduced to help the participants carry out the task and spot the other differences.

Opinion-gap task:

This is also a two-way task in which the researcher met the participants, one participant at a time, to negotiate their opinions about a specific conversation topic. The topic of these interviews was *tourism*. The researcher prepared three questions about this topic in advance and they were addressed to all of the participants in the same manner. This was intended to have a consistent procedure of eliciting CSs use by exposing all the participants to the same task requirements.

Stimulated recall interviews:

The procedure of this study also involved carrying out stimulated recall interviews to help the researcher get a more authentic insight into the participants' strategic behaviour. They are intended to let the participant listen to their own recorded oral performance, and confirm, or deny, any CSs that were detected and counted in their performance. The researcher asked (15) participants to comment on their use of certain CSs in some occasions. He asked them what they were thinking at specific moments then. Such instrument helped the researcher make sure of what was an actual strategic behaviour and what was not. To ease the process of carrying out the stimulated recall interview, an observation schedule was developed in the light of that of Alahmed's (2017). This schedule was divided into 30-second intervals to help the researcher find the occasions where stimulated recall interviews were needed.

A self-reported questionnaire:

Another data collection instrument was a self-reported questionnaire. It has been proved to be an efficient data collection tools as it helps researchers gather a lot of data in rather short time as compared to other

instruments (Gillham, 2000). It was created in the light of those Nakatani's (2006), Kongsom's (2009), and Alahmed (2010). It contained (48) items that reflect the range of CSs that were likely to be used by learners in the study context. The items were developed and presented in simple language to help the participants grasp their intended objectives and meaning. They were all multiple choice items in which the participants were asked to choose the suitable option that best revealed the CSs they usually use. The items asked the participants to express the frequency of their using of CSs by choosing either *never*, *rarely*, *sometimes*, *often*, or *always*. The questionnaire items had odd number of response scale options since odd number has been preferred to even number in that it allows the middle alternative to be interpreted as neutral position and this will not oblige a respondent to take a direction. The questionnaire underwent a pilot study by asking (50) learners, other than the main sample of the study, to fill it online. The purpose of such pilot study was to check the internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire. The degree of internal consistency reliability was (0.81) which indicates a good value (Field, 2009, p. 679). The questionnaire was then shared with the participants of the main sample online as well.

After getting all the data from participants' performance in the three oral tasks, the data were transcribed and coded. Coding CSs was re-checked by inter-coder process of both blind coding and normal coding. 20% of the transcribed raw data was given to a specialized person in applied linguistic to code the CSs used. On other hand, 20% of coded-CSs data was given to another colleague. Then, the numbers of CSs were computed as to find the frequencies and percentages of the CSs used. The data obtained were analyzed by means of SPSS to

compare the frequency and types of CSs that were used by the three groups, beginners, pre-intermediate, and post-intermediate.

3. Findings and discussion:

The findings revealed that proficiency level has an important influence on the choice and use of CSs: the more proficient a learner was, the less CSs s/he used.

Table (2) CSs in terms of proficiency level

Factors	Target strategies	Task 1			Task 2			Task 3		
		B	Pre-I	Po-I	B	Pre-I	Po-I	B	Pre-I	Po-I
Reduction CSs	Message abandonment	8	3	0	13	6	2	11	5	2
		73%	27%	0%	62%	28%	10%	61%	28%	11%
	Topic avoidance	14	7	5	20	9	2	21	11	3
		54%	27%	19%	65%	29%	6%	60%	31%	9%
	Code switching	10	6	0	9	5	0	19	9	0
		63%	37%	0%	64%	36%	0%	68%	32%	0%
	Foreignizing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Self-solving CSs	Circumlocution	25	15	8	13	7	3	19	9	4
		52%	31%	17%	57%	30%	13%	59%	28%	13%
	Approximation	98	62	38	34	15	5	7	5	3
		50%	31%	19%	63%	28%	9%	47%	33%	20%
	Use of all-purpose words	8	3	2	7	5	4	9	7	6
		62%	23%	15%	44%	31%	25%	41%	32%	27%
	Word coinage	2	1	0	3	1	0	2	1	0
		67%	33%	0%	75%	25%	0%	67%	33%	0%

Factors	Target strategies	Task 1			Task 2			Task 3			
		B	Pre-I	Po-I	B	Pre-I	Po-I	B	Pre-I	Po-I	
	Self-correction	28	17	4	17	10	8	16	8	3	
		57%	35%	8%	49%	29%	22%	59%	30%	11%	
Interactional CSs	Appeal for help	0	0	0	14	8	3	19	10	2	
		0%	0%	0%	56%	32%	12%	61%	32%	7%	
	Comprehension check	0	0	0	8	6	1	6	4	1	
		0%	0%	0%	53%	40%	7%	55%	36%	9%	
	Asking for repetition	0	0	0	17	8	4	20	13	5	
		0%	0%	0%	58%	28%	14%	53%	34%	13%	
	Clarification request	0	0	0	9	6	3	14	6	5	
		0%	0%	0%	50%	33%	17%	56%	24%	20%	
	Asking for confirmation	0	0	0	11	6	5	14	4	4	
		0%	0%	0%	50%	27%	23%	64%	18%	18%	
	Time-gaining CSs	Use of lexical fillers	16	12	2	17	15	4	19	16	11
			53%	40%	7%	47%	42%	11%	41%	35%	24%
Use of non-lexical fillers		22	14	7	21	13	4	29	13	9	
		51%	33%	16%	55%	34%	11%	57%	25%	18%	
Self-repetition		23	10	2	11	6	2	21	8	7	
		65%	29%	6%	57%	32%	11%	58%	22%	20%	

As a result of their deficiency of proper linguistic competence, beginners tended to employ reduction (negative) CSs more than pre-intermediate learners and much more than post-intermediate ones. On the other hand, the difference among the three groups was not only in

terms of number of CSs used but in the choice of CSs kinds as well; post-intermediate learners tended to avoid using *reduction* strategies since they are able to manage their communication problems by means of other strategies like *self-solving*; they never used *message abandonment* in picture description task, and used it only 10% in information-gap task, and 11% in opinion-gap task. They used *topic avoidance* in few cases; 19%, 6%, and 9% , in the three tasks respectively (these percentages are in reference to the percentages of the three levels of proficiency in each task, and not in reference to the overall use of CSs). Moreover, they never employed *code switching* strategy in all tasks. Pre- intermediate were in-between; they used CSs less more than post-intermediate learners and more than beginner ones. Beginners tended to employ *reduction* strategies more often; *message abandonment* was used 73%, 62%, 61%, *topic avoidance* was used 54%, 65%, 60%, and *code switching* was detected in 63%, 64%, 68% of the instances. Furthermore, beginners either switched to their L1(Arabic) or left their message incomplete. Furthermore, some beginners not only used the strategy of *code switching* ,but they further employed it to handle other CSs such as *appeal for help*, and *asking for repetition*, as shown in the examples below, this was due to their insufficient knowledge of English to the extent that they preferred to switch to their L1 (Arabic) to ask for assistance and repetition more than having their time to formulate their utterance in English. When asked, they explained that they do not know how to ask for these in English.

Ex.1.

A- *Could you please list some of the tour guide's responsibilities?*

B- *er yes, عفوا كيف اقول (سياح) باللغة الانكليزية؟*

Here the learner was not even able to ask for A's help in English, that was why he switched to his mother tongue, Arabic.

Ex.2.

A- *What is the impact of tourism on the economy and population of a country?*

B- *ممکن تعيد السؤال؟*

Table (3) categories of CSs in terms of proficiency level.

Factors	Task 1				Task 2				Task 3			
	B	Pre-I	Po-I	Total	B	I	Po-I	Total	B	Pre-I	Po-I	Total
Reduction (negative) CSs	32	16	5	53	42	20	4	66	51	25	5	81
	60%	30%	10%	100%	64%	30%	6%	100%	63%	31%	6%	100%
Self-solving CSs	161	98	52	247	74	35	20	129	53	28	16	97
	52%	31%	17%	100%	57%	27%	16%	100%	55%	29%	16%	100%
Interaction al CSs	0	0	0	0	56	30	22	108	73	37	17	127
	0%	0%	0%	0%	52%	28%	20%	100%	58%	29%	13%	100%
Time-gaining CSs	61	36	11	108	49	34	10	93	69	37	27	133
	57%	33%	10%	100%	53%	36%	11%	100%	52%	28%	20%	100%
X²	16.049				10.045				8.476			
Sig.	0.003*				0.123				0.205			

As shown in the tables above, the difference in the overall CSs use in terms of language proficiency level was more significant in one-way task than in two-way tasks, its value was (0.003) which indicates an important difference since it is less than (0.005). Such difference was

specifically obvious in *reduction* strategies. Beginners used reduction strategies 60%, 64%, 63%, pre-intermediate learners used them 30%, 30%, 31%, and post-intermediate learners employed them 10%, 6%, 6% in picture description, information-gap, and opinion-gap tasks respectively. This can be attributed to the assumption that more proficient learners' aware of managing situations when getting into a communication trouble while using L2 by employing other strategies than leaving the idea incomplete or switching to L1. One further reason was that, as long as this task was individually done, there was no room for interactional CSs, so the learner had to handle the situation her/himself alone. Such a task proved to be a good tool to reflect each learner's L2 knowledge since s/he performed alone, without the help of a partner.

The results obtained from the questionnaire are presented in the table (4) below:

Table (4) results of the questionnaire

Factors	Education level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-cal.	T-tab.	Sig.
Reduction CSs	Primary	51	32.62	8.027	2.170	1.996 0.05 (71)	0.033*
	Postgraduate	22	28.31	7.180			
Self-solving CSs	Primary	51	54.15	7.953	0.012		0.990
	Postgraduate	22	54.18	7.563			
Interactional CSs	Primary	51	54.21	8.176	1.186		0.240
	Postgraduate	22	56.81	9.540			
Time-gaining CSs	Primary	51	13.45	3.022	1.312		0.194
	Postgraduate	22	14.45	2.939			
Total	Primary	51	154.45	21.521	0.122	0.903	
	Postgraduate	22	153.77	22.411			

This table presents the results of the attempt to show the difference between the undergraduate and postgraduate students in their use of CSs. The most significant difference between the two groups was in reduction strategies. Its value was (0.033) and the mean scores were (32.62) and (28.31). The T-cal test result was (2.170), and the T-tab test result was (1.99). The total T-cal value was (0.122). Postgraduate participants preferred using other strategies to leaving their message incomplete or giving up talking.

The findings of this study are in accordance with those of Poulisse & Schils (1989), Chen (1990), Tuan (2001), Abunawas (2012), Uztosun & Erten (2014), Al Alawi (2015), Inkaew & Thumawongsa (2018) and Uгла (2019) which confirmed that language proficiency has a direct impact on CSs use, and the more proficient a learner is, the less CSs s/he uses.

4. Conclusion:

Based on the findings of this study, it has been concluded that Iraqi EFL learners face considerable problems when they communicate orally in English. Consequently, they employed various CSs to manage such problematic situations. It has been found out that Iraqi EFL learners' English proficiency level has a significant impact on their use of CSs: the more proficient a learner was, the less CSs s/he used. The difference among the three groups (beginners, pre-intermediate, and post-intermediate) was most apparent in *reduction* strategies. Beginners preferred to abandon the message or change the conversation topic more than pre-intermediate and much more than the post-intermediate learners. This was due to beginners' limited knowledge of English and their still ongoing development of their English competence.

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