



## Exploring Advanced EFL Learners' Awareness of Communication Strategies



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### Abstract

The present study explores communication strategies used by Iranian advanced EFL learners to overcome communication problems. This study aims to explore EFL learners' awareness of communication strategies. To this end, 17 advanced EFL learners who were willing to participate in the study were selected through snowball sampling. Their awareness of communication strategies was then explored through open-ended interviews and analyzed in line with the coding schemes of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1991). Iterative data collection and analysis yielded four main categories including explicit, reciprocal, implicit, and reduction strategies. Each of these strategies covers some subcategories. To visualize the findings and explore the degree to which the abstracted strategies reflect the participants' perspective, the transcribed data, along with the emerged strategies were fed to MAXQDA. This study can contribute to effective oral communication by elaborating on the notion of communication strategies and reaching communicative goals. The findings have implications for language learners, language teachers, and materials developers.

**Keywords:** Communication strategies (CSs); Comprehension; EFL learners; Sociolinguistic competence, Speech production.

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within this paper.

## Introduction

Communication plays an important role in human life. According to Thao (2005), communication is introduced as a process in which a concept or a message is converted from senders to receivers. Technically, it is stated that the sender encodes or translates thoughts and opinions into messages, and the receiver decodes or translates messages into thoughts. Communication helps people to convey or share messages effectively and to exchange meaning (Cap, 2021; Clark & Fey, 2020). Oral communication in the English language is challenging for most EFL learners. Hence, learning and teaching how to use one's knowledge of the language to exchange a message effectively and appropriately need to be investigated deeply, so that we know better the underlying mechanisms of communication. Communication strategies (henceforth CSs) as compensatory tools provide an elaborate framework for analyzing how learners express themselves appropriately regardless of their limited knowledge of the target language. Even native speakers of any language sometimes face problems finding the best grammatical structure or the most appropriate venue when they are trying to interact with others.

That being the case, in spite of the fact that EFL learners can master the knowledge of the language and have a presumably high level of language competence, sometimes they encounter communication breakdowns when they are not able to manage communication properly. Thus, language learners can resort to some techniques and strategies to enable them better interact through the target language. Communication strategies as alternative tools can compensate for these breakdowns and help learners to communicate more meaningfully. In this regard, Willems (1987) believed in familiarizing weaker L2 learners with strategies of communication, because CSs assist them in developing "a feeling of being able to do something with the language" (p. 352). Regarding the importance of CSs as an inevitable part of communication, this qualitative study aims at exploring CSs used by advanced EFL learners, and hence tries to not only recognize, categorize, and classify CSs but also elicit advanced EFL learners' perspectives on important factors that affect the choice of communication strategies. Ultimately, this study demonstrates the implication of learning and teaching CSs as facilitation tools and techniques for developing communication skills.

## Literature Review

The term communication strategy was introduced by Selinker (1972) for the first time; it refers to approaches that a learner utilizes to transfer a message in communication with a native speaker. As stated by Surapa and Channarong (2011), typologies and categorization of CSs have been classified differently. It was pointed out that there is no consistency in the categorization of CSs. Bialystok (1990) also was one of the researchers who comprehensively considered and analyzed CSs in the second language. Dörnyei (1995) tried to classify different types of CSs. To investigate the importance and application of CSs, the psycholinguistic view of Færch and Kasper (1983, 1984) and the interactional perspective of Tarone (1980) have been widely employed. From a psychological perspective, when speakers have limited linguistic resources, they rely on CSs to solve their communication breakdown. From a psycholinguistic perspective, the CSs are classified into *reduction* and *achievement* strategies. Reduction strategies including message abandonment, meaning replacement, and topic avoidance are employed in order to change the direction of communication. Alternatively, achievement strategies like literal translation, appeal for assistance, restructuring, code-switching, nonlinguistic strategies, paraphrasing, and word coinage are used to keep up the original purpose of the language user. Using achievement strategies can help the communication partner to bridge the communication gaps. Interlocutors consciously make decisions based on their communicative goals and when they do not have sufficient linguistic resources in communication, they can use CSs by offering help to fill the gap or asking for assistance in communication.

Based on Tarone's classification of CSs, they include paraphrasing (word coinage and approximation) circumlocution, transfer (literal translation and language switch), appeal for assistance, mime, and avoidance (message abandonment and topic avoidance). These strategies are similar to Færch and Kasper's (1984) perspective, but the prominence is that both the addressor and addressee purposefully make use of the CSs to help each other when they encounter communication breakdown. Tarone's perspective supports the framework proposed by Haghighi *et al.* (2019). Many researchers (for example, Altalib, 2019; Bialystok, 1983, 1980; Haastrup & Phillipson, 1983; Haselow, 2018; Poulisse & Schils, 1989) have used Færch and Kasper's (1984) psycholinguistic perspective. Although known for their psychological problem-solving framework of CSs, Færch and Kasper (1984) stated that advanced learners can anticipate a communication breakdown before it occurs and employ related CSs for effective and efficient communication.

Many studies have been conducted on communication strategies (Tarone, 1977, 1981; Færch & Kasper, 1980, 1983; Dörnyei & Kormos, 1998; Haselow, 2018). They tried to examine factors affecting the learners' choice of specific CSs, such as proficiency level (Tarone, 1977; Bialystok, 1983; Fernández Dobao, 2001; Haghighi *et al.*, 2019), native language (Fauré & Rouleau, 2011), personality and learning styles (Haastrup & Phillipson, 1983; Littlemore, 2003), or task demands (Bialystok, 1983; Cap, 2020; Fernández Dobao, 2001). Researchers also studied communication in order to uncover the potential communicative effectiveness of different types of strategic utterances produced by the learner (Bialystok, 1983; Pettersson, 2018; Poulisse, 1990; Whitty, 2019); and ultimately, they perform research on CSs as a means to present the possibility of instructing the foreign language learner on the effective use of CSs (Cap, 2019; Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991; Dörnyei, 1995).

In an attempt to uncover the effect of learner's proficiency level on the choice of CSs, Nayar (1988) carried out one of the first empirical studies, which investigated the relationship between learner's proficiency level and the use of CS by resorting to natural unelicited data. As a whole, the results indicated that learners from diverse levels of proficiency utilized linguistic, non-linguistic, and interactional communication strategies. More advanced learners employed less CS, while their dependence on the non-target language-based strategies was also reduced. Iwai (1995, 2000) studied the relationship between linguistic proficiency and CS choice in the learner's first language (L1) and his/her second language (L2). The results of this study indicated that proficiency level did not influence CS choice either in L1 or in L2.

One of the studies that supported teaching CSs to language learners was carried out by Chen (1990). It is an experimental study to explore the relationship between Chinese EFL learners' target language proficiency and their strategic competence. The 220 CSs used by 12 Chinese EFL learners of both high and low proficiency in their target language communication with native speakers were identified and analyzed. These communicative strategies were further divided into five categories: Linguistic-based CSs; Knowledge-Based CSs; Repetition CSs; Paralinguistic CSs; Avoidance CSs. A concept-identification task used as the communicative task was adopted in the research. The results indicated that the frequency, type, and effectiveness of CSs used by learners varied according to their proficiency level. Furthermore, the language distance between the learners' L1 and L2 affects their choice of communication strategies. These findings strongly supported the hypothesis that learners' communicative competence was probably increased by developing their strategic competence. The conclusion is that the teaching of CSs should be followed more rigorously in language classes.

Dörnyei (1995) conducted a strategy training course for 109 Hungarian learners of English and assessed the effect of the treatment using a pre-test and post-test. Three CSs, including (a) topic avoidance and replacement, (b) circumlocution, and (c) using fillers and hesitation devices, were taught for six weeks. The study was designed as quasi-experimental research and included a treatment group and two types

of control group; students in the first group received no treatment but followed their regular EFL curriculum; students in the second group were given conversational training without any specific strategies focus. For the pre- and post-tests, all the students took a written and oral test before the program and the oral test again after the training. Post-tests indicated improvement in both quality and quantity of strategy use, that is, there was an improvement in the quality of circumlocutions and the frequency of fillers and hesitation devices. In addition, students had positive attitudes toward the strategy training. The researchers concluded that it was worth teaching CSs directly because the training provided the learners with a sense of security in the L2 by allowing them room to maneuver in difficulties. It should be noted that Dörnyei's (1995) research provides some evidence that strategic competence may be teachable and strategy training may improve both qualitative and quantitative use of taught CSs. However, Dörnyei included only three strategies in the experiment. This study concludes that improving learners' CSs would result in a) raising learner awareness about the nature and communicative potential of CSs, b) encouraging students to be willing to take risks and use CSs, c) providing L2 models of the use of certain CSs, d) highlighting cross-cultural differences in CS use, e) teaching CSs directly by presenting linguistic devices to verbalize them, and f) providing opportunities for practice in strategy use (p. 80).

All empirical studies involving CSs instruction have been carried out with both school students and university students. The major research instrument employed for data collection is a communicative task. Most of the researchers rely on pre- and post-speaking tests to elicit data on CSs used by the subjects (e.g., Dörnyei, 1995; Maioreescu-Murphy, 2020; Muhamadjonovna, 2020; Nakatani, 2005; Rossiter, 2003; Steyn, 2018). In addition, other research approaches like self-report questionnaires (e.g., Muhamadjonovna, 2020) and retrospective protocol or stimulated recall interviews (e.g., Maioreescu-Murphy, 2020; Muhamadjonovna, 2020; Nakatani, 2005) were employed to investigate the effects of CS instruction. Various CSs such as circumlocution, approximation, word coinage, fillers, avoidance, and requests for help were proposed to teach in CSs instruction program. Explicit CSs training was conducted to enhance learners' awareness of strategy use. The findings from the reviewed studies report the possibility and advantages of teaching CSs to develop learners' strategic competence and oral skill. Taken together, the previous research on teaching CSs sufficiently supports a focus on explicit CS instruction.

### **Purpose of the Study**

A synthetic summary of the empirical studies on communication strategies explains CSs as an elaborate framework and compensatory tool to overcome the burdens of communication skills. In order to change EFL learners' perspectives on communication and help them to prevent communication breakdown, this study resorted to grounded theory to explore and classify the most practical and useful communication strategies leading to feasible communication. This study aims at exploring learners' awareness and possible use of CSs. More specifically, this study aims at answering the grand tour question, "what strategies do Iranian advanced EFL learners use to compensate for their linguistic incompetence in actual communicative contexts?"

### **Research Method**

#### ***Design***

Grounded theory was carried out as the methodological approach for this study as a means to formulate a theoretical model of advanced EFL learners' use of communication strategies. Due to the nature of the research question, the inherent methods of trustworthiness and rigor, as well the complex multi-factorial nature of this study, the grounded theory methodology initially explored by the work of Charmaz (2010, 2014) was selected.

### ***Sampling procedure and participants***

The participants of this study were advanced EFL learners who can communicate fluently and employ different types of CSs. In line with constructivist grounded theory, this study sampled purposefully and extracted different perspectives of advanced EFL learners about useful and practical communication strategies. One of the subsets of purposive sampling is the snowball sampling procedure. It is a procedure to trace additional participants. To sum up, regarding purposive sampling, the number of participants was not fixed, but it was shaped on the basis of theoretical saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). The research question was built based on the literature review but the analysis and subsequent formation of the theory are only based on extracted data and previous works do not influence them. This study was conducted with 17 advanced EFL learners.

### ***Data collection and analysis***

A central feature of grounded theory is its method of constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1997), in that data collection and analysis occur simultaneously and each item of data is compared with every other item of data. In line with the principles and accepted practice of grounded theory, this study started with a general question that aims at eliciting the techniques Iranian advanced learners actually use in communication, interviewing with them in order to identify, classify, codify, and characterize the data.

## **Results**

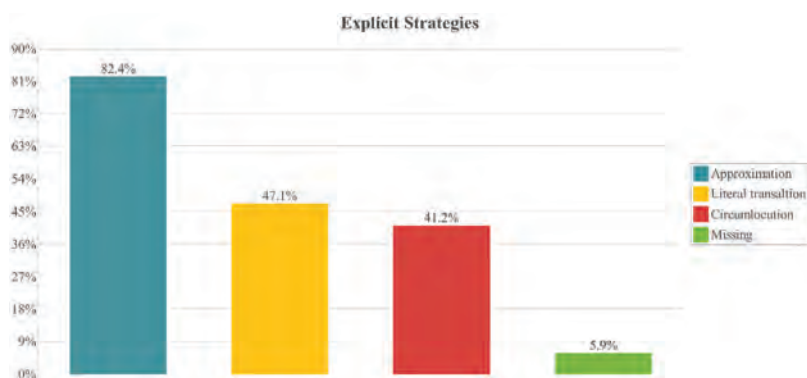
This study aimed to explore the techniques and strategies EFL learners employed in developing the communication process. The researchers used grounded theory to collect and analyze qualitative data. Analysis revealed that the participants used four main categories including explicit, reciprocal, implicit, and reduction strategies (Figure 1). What follows aims at elaborating these techniques and strategies by grounding them on the participants' perspectives. Data were presented using the framework of interviews for the development of categories and subcategories. Results from interviews on the use and usefulness of CSs are analyzed in MAXQDA based on descriptive statistical procedures of grounded theory and reported answering the research question. The categories include explicit, reciprocal, implicit, and reduction strategies.

### ***Explicit strategies***

Human beings have at their fingertips a wide range of strategies to transfer their thoughts and emotions, ranging from explicit to implicit strategies. Explicit CSs as alternative tools are employed to compensate for communication breakdowns. When the speaker is not able to express the exact words or structures, he/she employs some strategies such as related words, paraphrasing, or explanation in order to prevent communication breakdown. The distribution of explicit CSs based on interviews analysis in MAXQDA shows that 82.4% of the participants utilize *approximation* as an alternative technique to communicate effectively (see Figure 2); therefore, it is the most practical and useful explicit strategy. The second type of explicit strategy is the *literal translation*. It relies strictly on communication context and is used when learners cannot remember the target word, and where there is no way of employing other types of communication strategies to transfer the intended meaning. Therefore, the *literal translation* is considered an emergency strategy that can assist learners to be as intelligible as possible. The analysis shows that 47.1% of participants point to it as an effective strategy. Nonetheless, participants have varied perspectives on the usefulness of this strategy. While some learners are very proud to use this strategy, others do not consider it a useful strategy. Based on interview analysis, *circumlocution* is considered the third type of explicit strategy that is employed by 41.2% of the participants. Through circumlocution, speakers



**Figure 1** A schematic description of qualitative results based on MAXQDA software.



**Figure 2** The distribution of explicit CSs based on interviews analysis in MAXQDA software.

try to describe the property, function, characteristic, purpose, duty, or example of the action or object instead of the exact target language word or structure. It is revealed that 5.9% of the participants do not point to the explicit strategies directly. One of the participants claims:

*The main factors needed to enhance communication, in addition to grammar and vocabulary, are communicative strategies, particularly those that help learners to prevent communication breakdown explicitly. For example, I use related words, synonyms, simple words, and literal translations to convey a specific function.*

To clarify the importance of explicit strategies another participant states that:

*When I want to express my opinion, I try to use different techniques such as paraphrasing, literal translation, and exemplification to express my opinion. For example, when I want to talk about photosynthesis, I use some related words such as a tree, leaves, and*

*Carbon dioxide to explain and clarify the term, resorting to approximation techniques such as using 'enough' instead of 'sufficient', or defining the process of photosynthesis (in which cells capture the energy of sunlight), and employing circumlocution such as the process of burning for combustion, or literal translation such as using 'vakonesh' for 'reaction' to convey a specific function when I don't know or can't remember the exact word or structure.*

In what follows, the main categories related to explicit communicative strategies are presented. As it is clearly shown, the *approximation* strategy is most frequently used:

### **Reciprocal strategies**

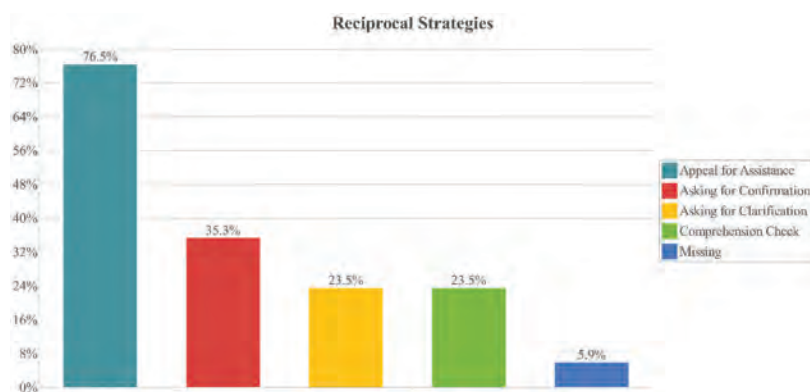
Communication is a reciprocal process. Unlike other unidirectional CSs where the speakers only use some techniques and strategies to prevent communication breakdown, reciprocal strategies are bidirectional. It means the two sides of the conversation try to achieve a communication goal. Therefore, according to these strategies, interlocutors try cooperatively to keep the communication channel open. The distribution of reciprocal CSs based on interviews analysis in MAXQDA software shows that 76.5% of participants utilize the *appeal for assistance* strategy, so it is the most frequently used type of reciprocal strategy. Based on the appeal for assistance, learners ask for the correct term or structure (e. g. I can't remember exactly, can you help me how to explain it, etc.). The analysis illustrates that 35.5% of interviewees use *asking for confirmation* strategy and 23.5% employ *asking for clarification* and *comprehension check* strategies. The analysis of data shows that only 5.9% of participants do not consider reciprocal strategies as an effective technique. Supporting the importance of bidirectional strategies, one of the participants states:

*When I can't overcome communication barriers alone, I share them with my communication partner.*

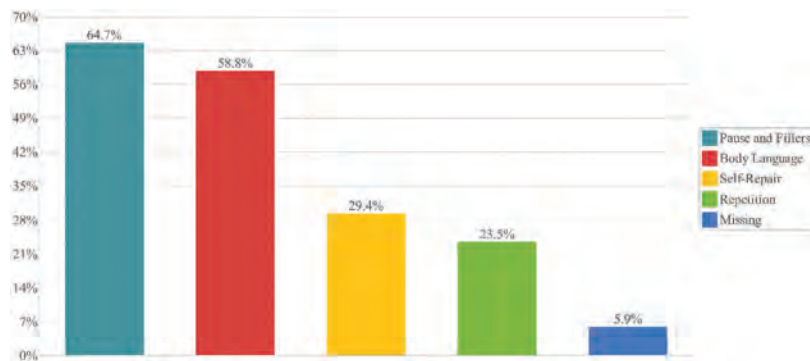
All the interviewees strongly believed that *appeal for assistance* strategies illustrates the actual concept of communication. Reciprocal strategies include 'appeal for assistance', 'asking for comprehension', 'asking for clarification', and 'confirmation check'. As Figure 3 shows, 'appeal for assistance' is the favorable strategy.

### **Implicit strategies**

Implicit communication strategies refer to the message conveyed through both verbal and non-verbal strategies such as repetition, pause and fillers, body language, and self-repair. Interlocutors



**Figure 3** The distribution of reciprocal CSs based on interview analysis in MAXQDA software.



**Figure 4** Sub-code frequency of implicit CSs based on interviews analysis in MAXQDA software.

seek to avoid conflict, tension, and uncomfortable situations through implicit CSs. Therefore, participants viewed that implicit communication strategy is an economical way of communicating several assumptions simultaneously, and it can be just as powerful and effective as explicit CSs. Sub-code frequency of implicit CSs based on interviews analysis in MAXQDA software illustrates that 64.7% of the participants employ ‘pause and fillers’ strategies as the most practical type of implicit strategies. Through ‘pause and fillers’, learners save time for thinking when they encounter communication breakdown. (e.g., uh, um, well, let’s see, I mean, etc.). On the other hand, 58.8% of the interviewees believe that ‘body language’ is an effective strategy in many contexts. With body language, people try to express their feelings and intentions through conscious and unconscious movement and postures, hand gestures, eye movements, facial expressions, and so on. ‘Self-repair’ is another type of implicit CS, and 29.9% of the participants point to it as a useful way to develop a communication process. Ultimately, ‘repetition’ is considered the least frequent implicit strategy. The analysis of data shows that only 5.9% of the participants do not point to implicit strategies as effective techniques.

To clarify the importance of implicit strategies, one of the participants states that “implicit strategies do speak as loudly as words”. The context acts as a source of implicit CSs. Needless to say, on many occasions, one would not be able to provide the same quality and quantity of information unless one chooses an implicit utterance. Along the same line, one of the participants explains:

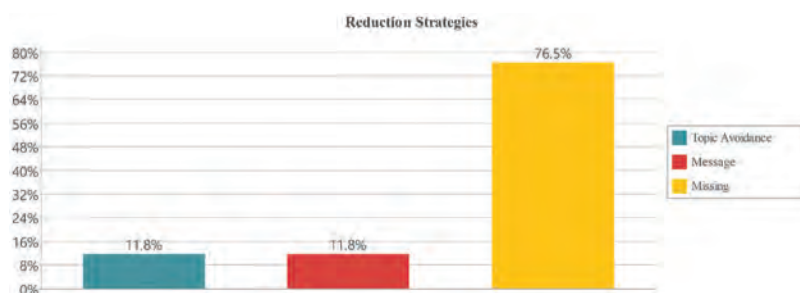
*If someone asks me ‘would you like to go to the party?’ and I indirectly answer ‘I’m tired’, I not only answer I don’t want to go to the party, but also provide a reason ‘why’.*

Therefore, participants believe that implicit communication strategy is an economical way of communicating several assumptions simultaneously. As Figure 4 shows, ‘pause and fillers’ are the most frequent strategy when it comes to implicit communication strategies.

### **Reduction strategies**

This group of communication strategies refers to the situation when the interlocutors decide to narrow down the message to a considerable extent or withdraw from their intended message. “Reduction strategies” are the least frequently used among Iranian advanced learners to overcome communication problems. Sub-codes frequency of ‘reduction strategies’ based on interviews analysis in MAXQDA software illustrates that only 11.8% of the interviewees point to reduction strategies (“topic avoidance” and “message abandonment”) as useful strategies. That being the case, 76.5% of the participants do not





**Figure 5** Sub-codes frequency of reduction strategies based on interviews analysis in MAXQDA software.

consider reduction strategies as a beneficial way to maintain communication. To clarify participants' perspectives on reduction strategies, one of the participants explains:

*I sometimes use a reduction strategy just in a formal situation because I don't want to produce an incorrect message. For instance, if someone asks me about a political subject and I don't have enough information, I usually don't speak about it and eliminate it. For example, if he asks me what my idea is about the political problems in the future, I would say that no one can predict exactly. Therefore, I try to change the subject and say that political issues are complex, and I don't explain them anymore.*

“Topic avoidance” and “message abandonment” are two types of reduction strategies. They may emerge in interaction explicitly (e.g., “let's change the topic,” “I can't talk about it,” “let's talk about it at a later time”) or implicitly (e.g., the speaker may change the topic or message without considering the main topic or message). Figure 5 shows the main types of reduction strategies.

## Discussion

Exploring the communication strategies used by advanced EFL learners was the main aim guiding this research. Information collected from the advanced EFL learners' interviews illustrated four main categories that are divided into different subcategories. The first category was explicit strategies. It can be concluded that while learners' perspectives on CSs may influence their use of these strategies, their use of the strategies may also reinforce their perception and belief about the usefulness of the CSs. This view is supported by Zhang and Goh's (2006) study, which indicated that there was a significant correlation between learners' knowledge about CSs and their perceived use of them. They emphasized that “people usually have some perceptions or thoughts before they take certain actions” (Zhang & Goh, 2006, p. 214).

The concept of learners' beliefs and perceptions about practical and effective strategies are also stated in Wenden's (1998, 2001) view about *strategic knowledge*. He proposed that strategic knowledge refers to “general knowledge about what strategies are, why they are useful, and specific knowledge about when and how to use them” (Wenden, 1998, p. 519). With respect to learners' perception of CSs, explicit CSs include approximation, circumlocution, and literal translation. The most important factors that affect using explicit communication strategies were the context and proficiency level. The findings strongly indicated that advanced EFL learners have similar opinions about these two criteria. All participants believed that explicit communication strategies were the commonest skills to prevent communication breakdown. They also proclaimed that the context and proficiency level should be considered during the interaction in order to select explicit CSs appropriately. In line with this, a number of

studies (Anwar, 2020; Habók & Magyar, 2018) have investigated the effect of context and proficiency level on selecting communication strategies.

The second category was reciprocal strategies which involve both interlocutors in the communication process. Through reciprocal strategies, communicators try to solve communication problems cooperatively. This category comprises four subcategories of appeal for assistance, asking for comprehension, asking for clarification, and confirmation check. Most of the participants proclaimed that receiving feedback from the interlocutors encourages them to maintain communication. Additionally, all the participants completely agreed with involving the listener in the conversation. They also clarified that according to the situation, reciprocal strategies are influential techniques that can be employed differently. With respect to the use of appeal for assistance strategies as the most practical reciprocal CSs, some investigators believed appeal for assistance is used in order to maintain the flow of communication (see , Bialystok, 1990; Færch & Kasper, 1984; Tarone, 1977).

The third core category of CSs used by advanced EFL learners is implicit strategies. All implicit CSs include repetition, self-repair, body language, and pauses and fillers stated by participants as effective strategies to enhance communication. But employing pause and fillers and body language are strongly supported by advanced EFL learners participants in order to prevent communication problems. Learners mentioned that pauses and fillers strategies enable the learners to save time to think and maintain the conversation when encountering communication problems. This view is supported by Dörnyei (1995), who remarked that instead of giving up messages, pause and fillers may provide the learners with a sense of security in the L2 by giving them more time to think in the time of difficulty. Furthermore, pauses and fillers strategies are included in Dörnyei and Kormos's (1998) concept of a time-gaining mechanism that L2 speakers may apply in order to "keep the communication channel open and provide more time and attentional resources" (p. 368). They proposed that L2 learners are usually aware that to remain in the conversation, they must avoid lengthy silence, which may end the conversation or put off the interlocutor. This situation is similar to the learners' perspective in the present study. They frequently employed pause and fillers when they wanted to save time to think about their expressions. Considering the reports of useful fillers by participants, the present study revealed that advanced EFL learners used word fillers such as "uh," "um," and "let's see" when they faced communication problems. They are easy to remember. Hence, learners use them in their talk. They also reported that "well," "like," and "to be honest" are the least frequently used fillers.

Additionally, body language is another kind of implicit strategy that is strongly supported by participants as a useful and practical strategy. Furthermore, it considers intercultural strategy. Body language is defined as a means of communication that contains body movements of the head, neck, eyes, arm, hands, feet, or other parts of the body to reflect opinion. These body movements transfer messages to the receiver and they are primarily used to reflect our emotions or to support the verbal message. Participants stated that body language is one of the commonest strategies when they face problems in communication. With respect to the role of body language in developing communication, the present study indicated that Iranian advanced EFL learners used mimicking and body movements frequently during communication. This view conforms to Novinger (2001) that refers to non-verbal behavior as the color of verbal messages. In other words, non-verbal gestures or behavior support verbal messages. Furthermore, Sharifiabad and Vali (2011) stated that there are many factors that affect the use of body language, including culture, gender, age, and psyche.

The fourth category regarding participants' views is reduction strategies. With reduction strategies, learners evade the subject or message. It is usually employed when learners do not want to speak about particular concepts because they may require some vocabulary and structures which they do not know. Therefore, learners prefer to change the subject or eliminate it. Regarding advanced EFL learners'

perception of useful and practical strategies, reduction strategies are the least frequent CSs. Through topic avoidance and message abandonment strategies, the learners attempt not to keep silent or give up talking when they did not know how to express their thought and emotion. However, it should be noted that the learners seemed to be unfamiliar with reduction strategies since sometimes they still kept silent and paused for a long time. With respect to participants' perspectives, reduction strategies are not practical and useful strategies to enhance communication between advanced EFL learners. This view confirms Dörnyei's (1995) statement that the teaching of CSs like reduction strategies may provide the learners with "a sense of security on the L2 by allowing them room to maneuver in times of difficulty" (p. 80). At least, using topic avoidance may encourage the learners to try and remain in the conversation and achieve their communication goals (Dörnyei, 1995, p. 80).

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The present study has explored communication strategies used by Iranian advanced EFL learners to overcome communication problems. Based on the aforementioned discussion, this study strongly supported that employing some useful and practical CSs such as approximation, circumlocution, literal translation, appeal for assistance, body language, and pause and fillers are beneficial to develop learners' communicative competence. The current study also lends support to previous communication strategies research, and gives more empirical evidence that CS awareness and instruction are desirable among language learners in particular. Furthermore, the findings of this study proposed that the sixth explored CSs in this research are fundamental CSs to enhance communication. The frequency of different CSs is calculated based on participants' interviews in MAXQDA software. Moreover, considering the results of exploring CSs, the present study considers some factors such as age, proficiency level, and context as important criteria for selecting CSs as a means to convey a message effectively. Finally, it is hoped that the present study can provide clear perspectives on communication between Iranian English language learners in order to prevent communication breakdown.

Taking the findings of this study into account, we identified the most practical and useful CSs employed by advanced EFL learners, which have precious implications for syllabus designers, English language teachers, and learners. Based on the fundamental role of communication in language learning and teaching, it is suggested that the English language syllabus designers should add CSs to the training program, and allocate a section to CSs as well as the other sections. Selecting and adding CSs to the curriculum should be based on learners' level of proficiency and age. Additionally, this study has some implications for English language teachers. Teachers should be aware of different CSs as an inevitable part of communication to teach CSs. Moreover, teachers should be able to employ different types of CSs in order to communicate elaborately. Moreover, the findings help improve learners' strategic awareness of CSs. This study has indicated that the increase in learners' strategic awareness appeared to be associated with the explicit teaching of CSs, that is, CS instruction might raise learners' strategic awareness of taught CS. Therefore, learners' strategic awareness can be raised by strategy training. This study helps language learners to recognize that there are different techniques and strategies to overcome communication breakdown and express their message effectively. Furthermore, based on important factors that affect the choice of CSs that are considered in this study, they can employ various types of CSs in different circumstances. Ultimately, based on the aforementioned discussion, reduction strategies are the least frequent CSs among advanced EFL learners; they will know how to reduce these strategies from their speech in order to speak elaborately. That said, this study also has some limitations. The small number of participants in this study endangers the generalizability of the findings to other settings. Moreover, mixed-method research can provide more information on the details of the learners' communicative strategies than just a qualitative analysis of data. That said, investigations on learners' communicative strategies

are rather new to the field and more research studies are required in this regard, for example, in line with gender differences, proficiency levels, and learners' L1 as an interfering factor in the process of learning a second/foreign language.

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