



**Universidad**  
Zaragoza

# Undergraduate Dissertation

Trabajo Fin de Grado

An Exploratory Study of Spanish Learners' Use of Communicative  
Strategies in Informal Language Exchange Encounters

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2018/2019

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relation between the attitude and the frequency of use of Communicative Strategies in Spanish learners that learn English as a second (foreign) language. The selected population was administered a questionnaire that they had to fill in at the end of an informal language exchange. Also, short interviews were conducted to find out the reasons why they used communicative strategies. In order to compare the students' attitudes and frequency of use of communicative strategies a statistical analysis was carried out. Overall, results showed, firstly, that students were aware of their use of communicative strategies, in particular, the use of achievement strategies. Secondly, the analysis revealed a relationship between attitudes and strategy use. The study sheds light on some factors that seem to determine their choice of strategies, above all, the learner's personality and the situational context.

## Resumen

El propósito de este estudio fue el de investigar la relación entre la actitud y la frecuencia de uso de Estrategias Comunicativas entre los estudiantes españoles que aprenden inglés como segundo idioma o lengua extranjera. La muestra poblacional cumplimentó un cuestionario al final de encuentros informales de aprendizaje de la lengua. Asimismo, se llevaron a cabo entrevistas para conocer las razones por las que los estudiantes utilizaban as estrategias. Para comparar los resultados de las percepciones de los estudiantes con su uso de estrategias comunicativas se llevó a cabo un análisis estadístico. En general, los resultados muestran que los estudiantes son conscientes del uso que hacen de estas estrategias, en particular de las estrategias de consecución. El análisis también indica correlación entre actitudes y frecuencia de uso de estrategias. El estudio aporta también datos sobre posibles factores que parecen determinar la elección de estrategias, tales como la personalidad del estudiante y el contexto situacional.

**Key words:** communicative strategies; interaction; Second Language Acquisition; attitude; perceptions; frequency of strategy use

**Palabras clave:** estrategias de comunicación; interacción; adquisición de segundas lenguas; actitud; percepciones; frecuencia de uso de estrategias

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## Introduction

Over the past decades there has been a progressive change in the field of language teaching, from language teaching methodologies, ranging from Skinner and Chomsky theories about language learning in early childhood, to social perspectives in second language acquisition and learning processes. The introduction of the notion of *communicative competence* (Hymes, 1972), the so called Communicative Approach, and the idea that real communication as means and final objective for learning a language (Richards, 2006), have resulted in communication as primary concern in foreign language learning and teaching.

In order to perform what Krashen called “meaningful interaction in the target language” (Krashen, 1995) the concept of communicative strategy has run parallel to the Communicative Approach. There are different approaches to communication strategies, such as, Tarone, Brown or Færch and Kasper. In this dissertation I took into account the interactional communicative strategies proposed by Tarone, together with the psychological approach proposed by Færch and Kasper.

The aim of this Final Degree Dissertation is to explore the communicative strategies (heretofore CSs) used by L2 learners in a non-formal setting. Specifically two main goals were set: examine the attitude that Spanish learners of English have towards use of CSs and, secondly, to explore their reported frequency of use. It seeks to provide data to identify possible relationships between both, attitudes and actual use of Cs, as well as, some factors that may account for strategy use. This dissertation will provide a response to the following questions.

1. Regarding communicative strategies, do Spanish speakers show a positive attitude to its use? If not, what are the reasons that account for it? Can we relate the use of communication strategies and its positive use? If not, is there any negative relationship with respect to its use? And what are the reasons behind it?
2. According to the students’ reported frequency of strategy use, how often do these Spanish speakers use Cs? Is there any relationship between their level of English and its frequency of use?

## 1. Literature Review

As Ellis (2008) points out, second language acquisition refers to the acquisition of any language that takes place after the acquisition of the mother tongue. Moreover, he differentiates it from foreign language acquisition since the second language “plays an institutional and social role in the community.” For this reason, it is argued that language is not learnt only in the classroom context, but also outside of it, hence the environment and situational circumstances play a role too.

The field of second language acquisition is very wide, but it basically vertebrates in the objective of characterizing how learners learn a second language. The main perspectives that have explained second language acquisition processes are the linguistic perspective, the cognitive perspective and the social perspective (see e.g. Ellis, 2008; Mitchell, 2004; Myles, 2004). Since the 1970s, there has been a progressive change toward new forms of language teaching. This new approach is called Communicative Language Teaching, which main idea is that communication is the mean and final objective for learning a language.

Krashen’s theories of language acquisition and learning set the pillars of this theoretical approach, in particular, the ‘Input Hypothesis’ (Krashen, 1995). This author attempted to explain how learners acquire second languages. In his view, a learner progresses along the “natural order” when they received input in their second language that is one step beyond their knowledge (comprehensible input is  $i+1$ ). Some years after Krashen’s theories, Michael Long (1996) set a theoretical account for second language acquisition. This author states that interaction and negotiation of meaning are crucial for adapting the input. Processing and generating new content in communication, as well as transferring meaning, eventually leads to the acquisition of language (Long 1996).

There are some similarities between Krashen’s hypotheses and Long’s approach. For Long it is important to ensure that the interaction occurs in the L2 since interactional modifications of the input are crucial for acquisition. This interaction leads to an automatization of their L2 knowledge along with an increase in their fluency using L2. These two theories set the basis of the so called Communicative Approach in second language teaching and foreign language teaching. In this dissertation I took into account both theories since they focus on meaning and interaction rather than on the study of grammar.

Merrill Swain (1985) was the originator of the so called ‘Comprehensible Output Hypothesis.’ This hypothesis states that we learn a language when we notice the gap in our performance of the second language. Not any kind of output, but a comprehensible one.

This means that learners have to push themselves to create elaborated sentences. Nevertheless, Swain claims that noticing the gaps of knowledge does not result in acquisition but rather facilitates the acquisition of the second language (Swain and Lapkin, 1995). One of the problems of Swain's hypothesis is the fact that when learners used the wrong utterances, it is likely that their interlanguage fossilizes.

The concept of 'fossilization' was developed by Selinker (1998). It is used to refer to the fact that the transition between the L1 and L2 may stop at some point, in other words, the grammar knowledge of the learner stops developing. On the other hand, Selinker (1998) coins the concept interlanguage to describe an "idiolect" developed by the learner that is in between the L1 and L2, and that has characteristics of both languages. This theoretical framework will be crucial in the present study in order to establish the relationship between the attitude of the participants and the frequency of use of each communicative strategy.

### 1. Definition of Communicative Strategy (CS)

There have been numerous approaches by researchers to understand the repertoire of communicative strategies used by the learners in their target language. The first one to coin the term 'communicative strategy' was Selinker (1972) as one of the five processes he identified in the development of interlanguage. From the 70s onwards, other descriptions and taxonomies were created, such as Tarone, Cohen and Dumas' (1976), who recognized the problem-solving relation during communication as a "communicative strategy". One of the main reasons for this new current of study is the fact that many researchers (for example, Dadour and Robbins, 1996; Labarca and Khanji, 1986) had recognized that learners may improve their communicative competence with the development of new strategies. This is the case of some strategies such as negotiation of meaning (e.g. Long, 1983; Pica, 2002; Varonis & Gass, 1985). But it will be in the 80's when the communicative strategies gain momentum with the studies developed by Færch and Kasper (1983), they collaborated to carry out studies that emphasized the execution and planning phases in language production.

Færch and Kasper (1983) argued that in order to solve communication problems the participant does not only have to interact and collaborate with the interlocutor, but also to find personal mechanisms to support and maintain effective communication. Continuing with this line of work some authors like Poulisse (1987) studied the development of the cognitive activities performed by the learners when choosing communicative strategies. Broadly, researchers agree that CSs are any attempt that learners make to overcome the difficulties

that appear while having a conversation in order to achieve communicative goals. To put it succinctly, the use of these communicative strategies leads to mutual understanding.

### 1.1 Færch and Kasper's psychological strategies

Through observation of learners Faerch and Kasper (1983, 1984) established a classification of CSs that comprises two main types of strategies: achievement strategies and reduction strategies. According to these authors, reduction strategies can be said to be those that learners use to "attempt to avoid a problem", whereas in using an achievement strategy, the original goal is to achieve a solution. This can prompt the acquisition of the language. Below I provide an explanation of the subcategories that are included in this classification.

#### 1.1.2. Achievement strategies

By using achievement strategies, the goal of the learner is to find a solution to that linguistic resource of which they lack. Færch and Kasper (1983) subcategorized the achievement CSs into the following types: code-switching, inter-lingual strategies, L1-based strategies, cooperative strategies and nonverbal strategies.

a) Code-switching: Depending on the actual communicative situation, there will be a change between the L1 and the L2. The actual scope of code-switching depends on the learners' own analysis of the situation.

b) Inter-lingual transfer: this strategy is seen as a combination of linguistic features in the learner's interlanguage and the L1. This normally leads to a generalization of a rule applied to the interlanguage, but it is mixed with the structural characteristics of the L1.

c) Cooperative strategy: this communicative strategy is based on asking for help from the interlocutor when the message is not understood. As Færch and Kasper (1983: 67) point out, "although problems in interaction are necessarily shared problems and can be solved by joint efforts, they originate in either of the interactions, and it is up to him (the speaker) to decide whether to attempt a solution himself or to signal his problems to his interlocutor and attempt to get the problem solved on a cooperative basis."

d) Nonverbal strategy: refers to those body actions that are used for communication, such as gestures, mime, etc. and that help in the effectiveness of the message.

#### 1.1.3 Reduction strategies

Using 'reduced' systems means adapting the learner's knowledge of the language so that the speaker feels "safe", and avoid being non-fluent or incorrect in his/her utterances.

This means that learners mostly use the implied knowledge they have about the language. This strategy has a great impact since it limits language acquisition.

## 1.2 Tarone's social strategies

Tarone's classification stems from a social perspective. The typology of communication strategies proposed by Tarone includes strategies such as avoidance, paraphrase, conscious transfer, appeal for assistance and mime. We can see that there are certain similarities between Faerch and Kasper's (1983) and Tarone's model. For example, both include the categories of avoidance strategies and cooperative strategies. Some critics like Cook (1993) argue that "to some extent Tarone's social communicative strategies and Faerch and Kasper's psychological strategies are complementary ways of coping with the problems of communication in a second language." We could then conclude that Tarone's strategies are included in Faerch and Kasper's classification as achievement strategies, except for the case of avoidance.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Data Collection

As mentioned in the previous section, this dissertation was based on Krashen's theory of language acquisition and learning and placed the main focus on the taxonomy of communicative strategies proposed by Tarone and Færch and Kasper. To collect reliable information and figures, this study was based on Dörnyei *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* (2007) and was designed as a quantitative study, which means that the variables adopt numerical values.

For the analysis of data, two main procedures were carried out. The first one was the average value and the second one was the standard deviation. On the one hand, the average mean or value shows the objective data of the language exchange groups, and in turn serves to compare it with the different groups that met in different dates. On the other hand, the degree of deviation was expected to show how much the data was dispersed with respect to the average means; in other words, the lower the standard deviation, the lower the fluctuation of the answers is in comparison to the average.

#### 2.1.1 Data Collection tools

The main tool used to collect data was a questionnaire. As Parrot (1993) states, questionnaires are used to provide data about attitudes and perceptions of the learners. In



this study the questionnaire deal with communicative strategies, using the description given by Færch and Kasper (1983). One of the questionnaires dealt with the attitude of the participants towards communicative strategies (Appendix 1). The participants had to answer from 1 (I do not agree to use this CS) to 5 (I am in favour of using this CS). The second questionnaire that I designed sought to enquire into the students' self-perceived (reported) frequency of use of the different communicative strategies (Appendix 2), the participants had to answer from 1 (I never use this strategy) to 5 (I always use this strategy). All the data was collected in an Excel spreadsheet.

## 2.2 Sample Population

The participants in this study were 55 graduates who attended the language exchange meetings organized by *Association des États Généraux des Étudiants de l'Europe* (AEGEE). It is one of Europe's biggest interdisciplinary student organisations, it empowers students and young people in Europe to take an active role in society.it. In the individual questionnaire they were asked to provide information about the level of English they had acquired. All the participants had studied English since primary school, which means that they must have had English language learning experiences for over 10 years. It can thus be assumed that they have acquired linguistic knowledge over a long period of time. Even though their age might vary, all of them were, at the time the study was conducted, university students or graduates. In addition, being an activity in which they regularly participate, they were aware of their main weaknesses and their strengths in communicative environments.

## 2.3 Procedure

The first step was bringing together the target population for conducting this study in an informal language exchange encounter, the setting used was a pub. One of the main appealing aspects of the activity was that the students were able to practice languages with students from other foreign countries. The participants were informed previously about the nature of the project and showed interest in it. These meetings took place between pairs, and lasted an hour, the interaction took place always Spanish – non-Spanish, but the partner of the interaction could change during the course of the activity. Secondly, once the social interaction was over the students had to fill both questionnaires. If they had an Internet connection, they could do it online with Google Forms. If not, the questionnaire was administered in paper form.

The last methodological step was to collect all the data of the questionnaires. The first part of the questionnaire concerned with attitudes towards communicative strategies and the second part about the self-perceived frequency. Basically, the analysis was statistical between the learners' attitude towards CSs and their self-perceived frequency of use. In order to identify the possible reasons for the students' choice of strategies, a short personal interview with the participants was also carried out and everything was written on a notebook.

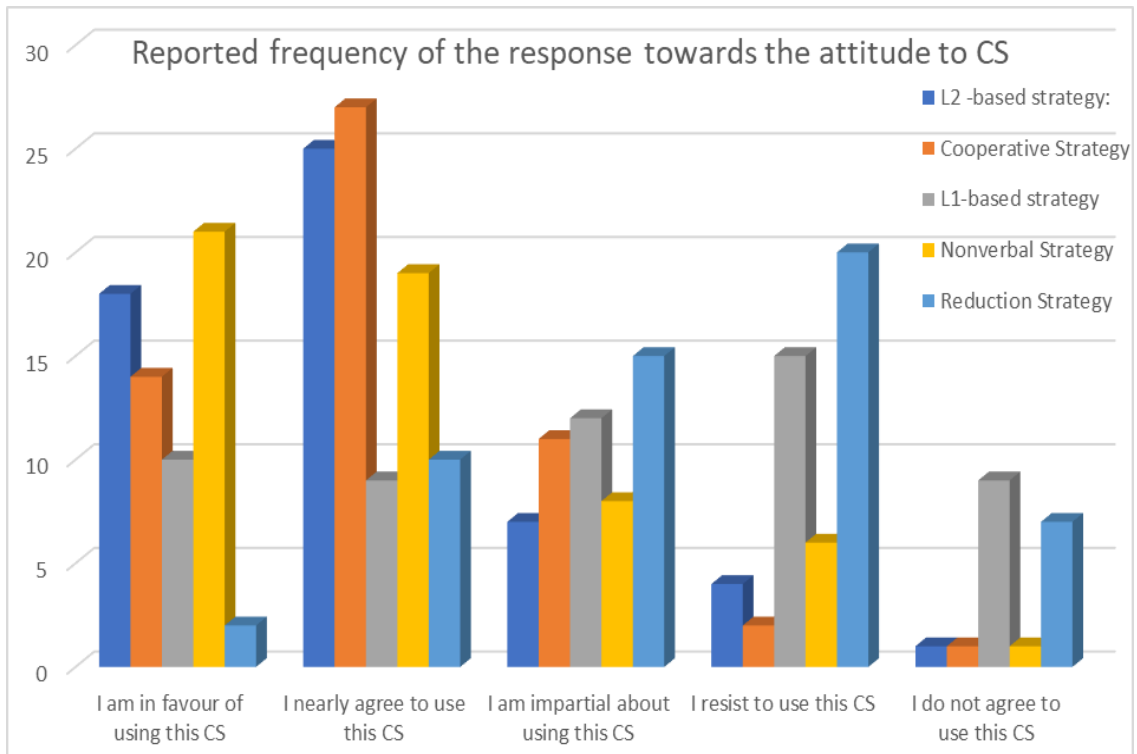
### 3. Results and discussion

Bar charts 1 and 2 are used for presenting the data. The first one shows the attitude towards communicative strategies. Meanwhile, the second one provides information about the students' self-perceived frequency of use of strategies. Taking into account these two charts, in the first part of the discussion I will carry out a general analysis of the results obtained, and then both tables will be compared so as to correlate them with the level of language proficiency of the participants. Moreover, a critical reflection will be carried out about the environment in which the interactions took place.

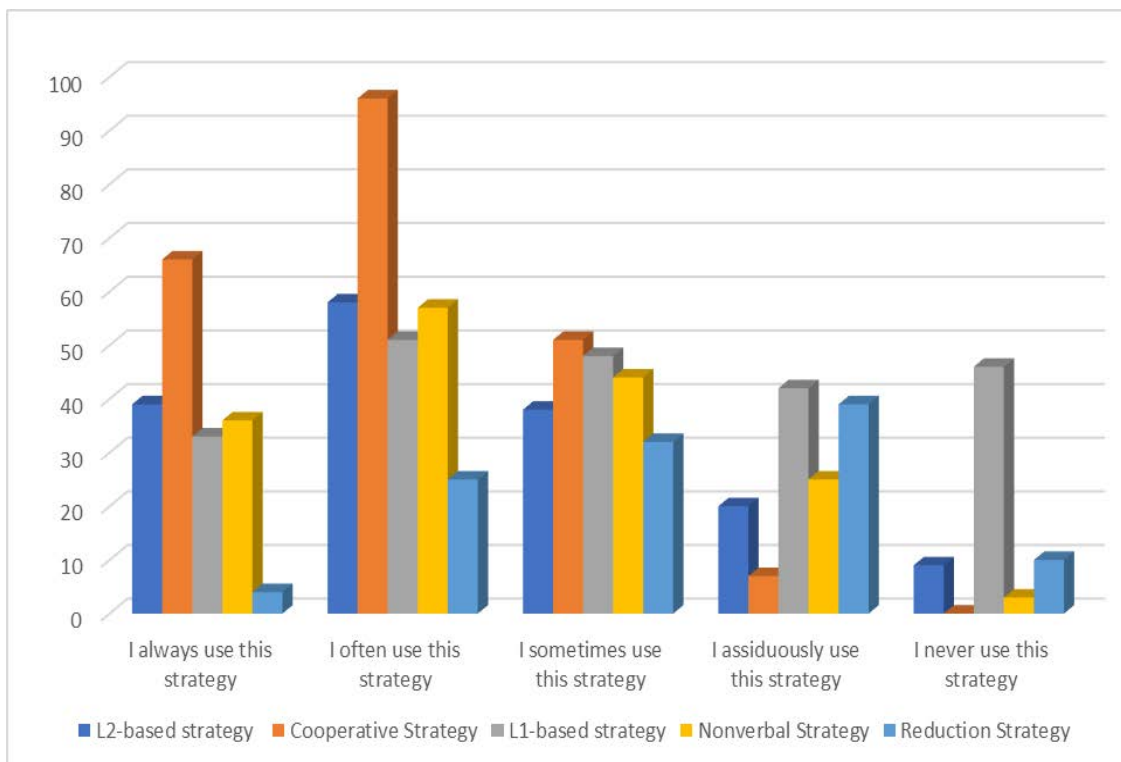
The communication strategies that were gathered from the students' responses to the questionnaires were the following:

- L2-based strategy: Strategy based on my second language (using translation, exemplification, explanation, or synonym etc to the target term )
- Cooperative Strategy: Directly asking for a particular correct expression.
- L1-based strategy: using my mother tongue in the communication.
- Nonverbal Strategy: using gestures, facial expression and vocal imitation to help communication.
- Reduction Strategy: abandoning a particular topic or avoiding a particular term or rule.

Bar chart 1. Overall Results of "Questionnaire on attitudes towards communicative strategies"



Bar Chart 2. Overall Results of "Questionnaire on reported frequency of using communicative strategies"



### 3.1 Results of learners' attitudes toward CSs

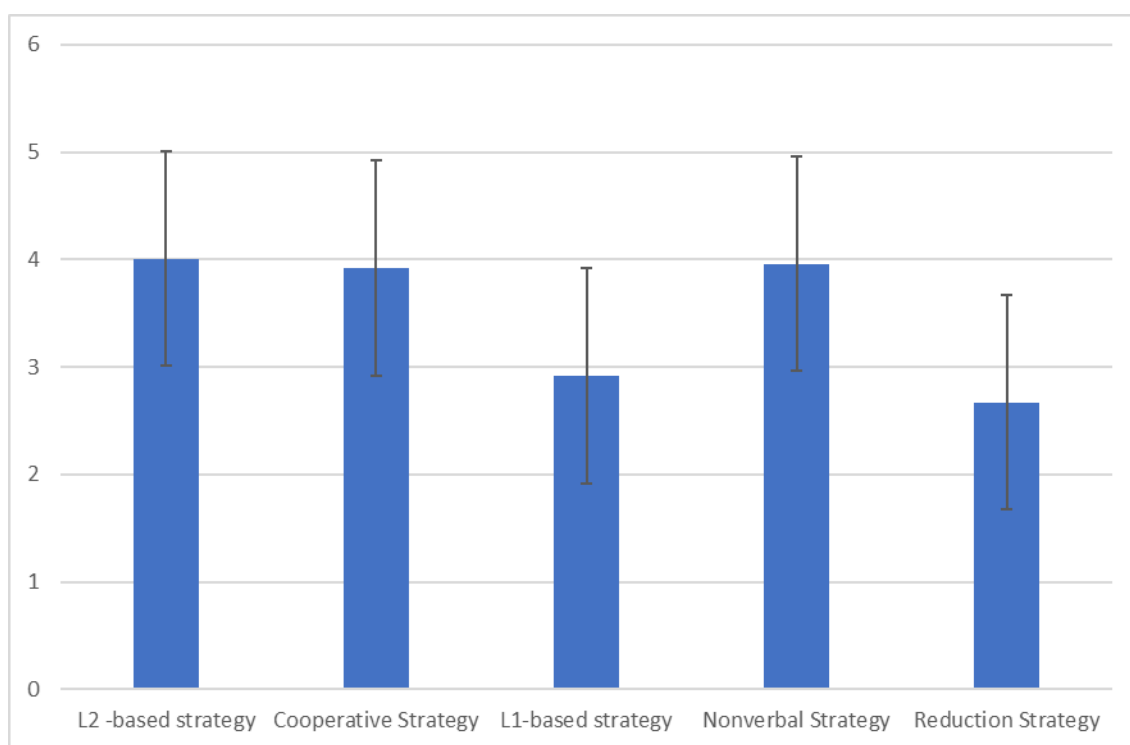
Table 3 below shows the average value and standard deviation found in the use of communication strategies, they range from 1 (I do not agree to use this CS) to 5 (I am in favour of using this CS). From it, we can see that there is a statistically significant difference between cooperation strategies and the degree to which they use the L-1 based strategy. In other words, most Spanish speakers have a positive attitude with respect to asking directly for a particular word or expression with their interlocutor meanwhile, they try to avoid using words in Spanish in order to being understood.

Table 3 Average value and standard deviation for attitude towards communicative strategies

|   | Average Value | Standard Deviation |
|---|---------------|--------------------|
| <b>L2 -based strategy:</b> Strategy based on my second language (using translation, exemplification, explanation, or synonym etc to the target term ) | 4.01          | 0.97               |
| <b>Cooperative Strategy:</b> Directly asking for a particular correct expression  | 3.92          | 0.87               |

|  |      |      |
|--|------|------|
| <b>L1-based strategy:</b> using my mother tongue in the communication                                | 2.92 | 1.3  |
| <b>Nonverbal Strategy:</b> using gestures, facial expression, vocal imitation to help communication. | 3.96 | 1.07 |
| <b>Reduction Strategy:</b> abandoning a particular topic or avoiding a particular term or rule       | 2.67 | 1.05 |

Bar Chart of Table 3



In this Table we see that the use of cooperative strategies ranges from 3.92 to 4.49, which means that most of the learner's attitude towards this strategy moves within the highest levels of almost agreeing. On the contrary, the value for L-1 strategies is only 2.92, certainly lower if we compare it with the cooperative strategies. That is to say, most learners' attitudes towards the use of L1 strategies range from the opposition to have certainly a neutral attitude. The standard deviation, which tells us how measurements for a group are spread out from the average, shows a range from 0.87 to 1.3 within the five groups, which means that the five groups' scores differ in the means respectively, with a remarkable gap. Furthermore, this suggests that most of the Spanish learners are aware of the value of using

cooperative strategies to maintain successful communication. However, they do not entirely realize the role that L1 strategies play and try to avoid them while communicating with others. The strategies that scored lowest were reduction strategies, from 'I am impartial about using this CS' to 'I resist to use this CS'.

Another issue that can be observed in the data obtained concerns the relationship between the use of communicative strategies and the students' language competence level in English. As mentioned in the sample population subsection, this study focused on graduates and university students who participated on a regular basis in these informal language learning encounters (speaking in English in a pub).

Table 4 Analysis of discrepancy of CS - A2 level

|                      | Average Value | Standard Deviation |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| L2-based strategy    | 3.25          | 0.95               |
| Cooperative Strategy | 3.2           | 0.83               |
| L1-based strategy    | 2.2           | 0.83               |
| Nonverbal Strategy   | 4             | 1                  |
| Reduction Strategy   | 3             | 0.7                |

Bar Chart Table 4

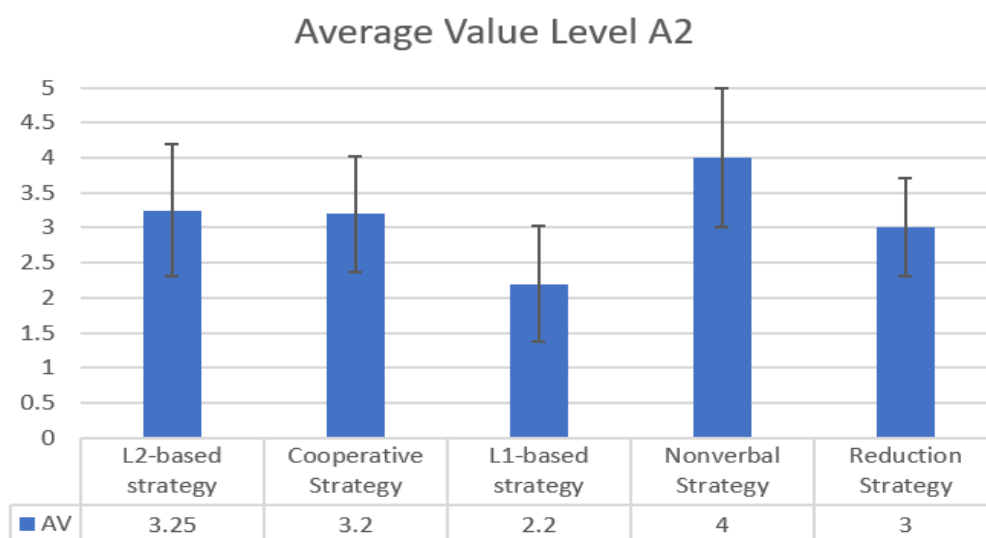
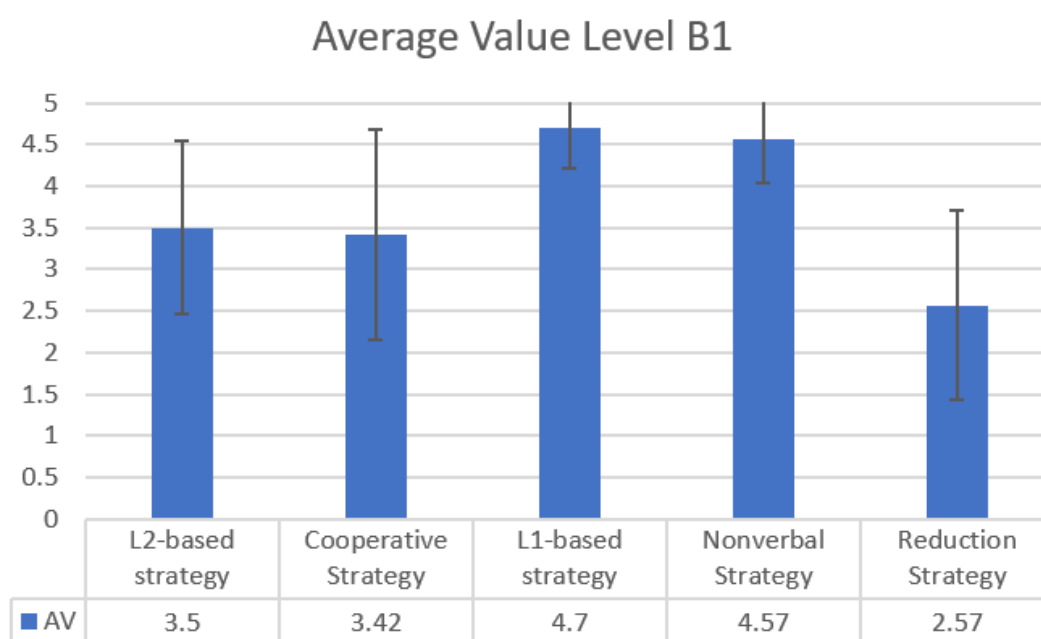


Table 5 Analysis of discrepancy of CS - B1 level

|                      | Average Value | Standard Deviation |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| L2-based strategy    | 3.5           | 1.04               |
| Cooperative Strategy | 3.42          | 1.27               |
| L1-based strategy    | 4.7           | 0.48               |
| Nonverbal Strategy   | 4.57          | 0.53               |
| Reduction Strategy   | 2.57          | 1.13               |

Bar Chart Table 5



**Table 6. Analysis of discrepancy of CS - B2 level**

|                      | Average Value | Standard Deviation |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| L2-based strategy    | 3.85          | 0.98               |
| Cooperative Strategy | 3.95          | 0.75               |
| L1-based strategy    | 2.65          | 1.09               |
| Nonverbal Strategy   | 3.85          | 1.08               |
| Reduction Strategy   | 2.55          | 1.05               |

**Bar Chart Table 6**

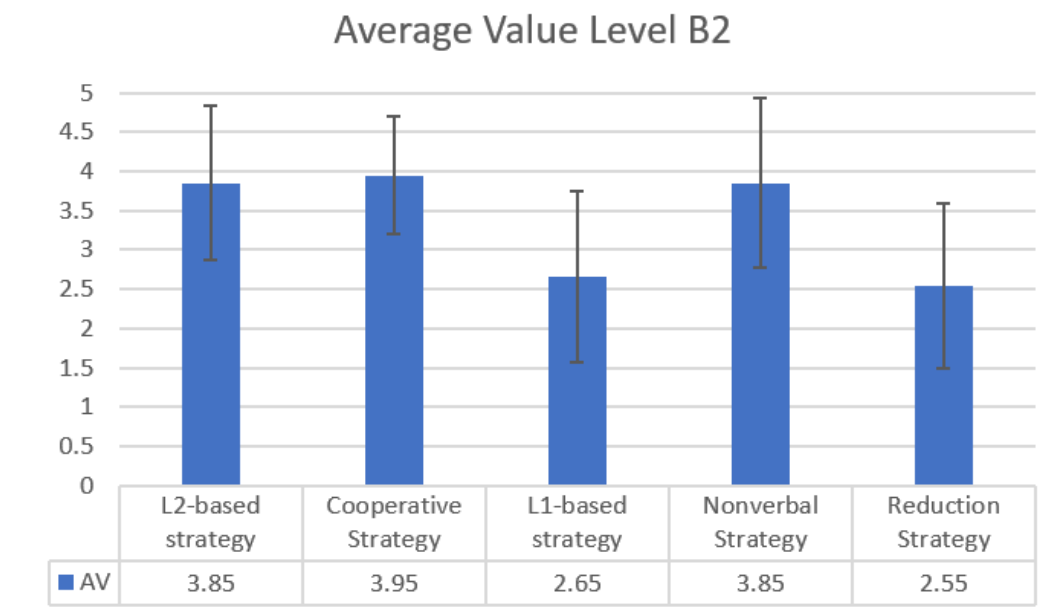




Table 7 Analysis of discrepancy of CS – C1 level

|                      | Average Value | Standard Deviation |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| L2-based strategy    | 4.35          | 0.86               |
| Cooperative Strategy | 4.11          | 0.75               |
| L1-based strategy    | 2.94          | 1.39               |
| Nonverbal Strategy   | 3.83          | 1.2                |
| Reduction Strategy   | 2.72          | 1.22               |

Bar Chart Table 7

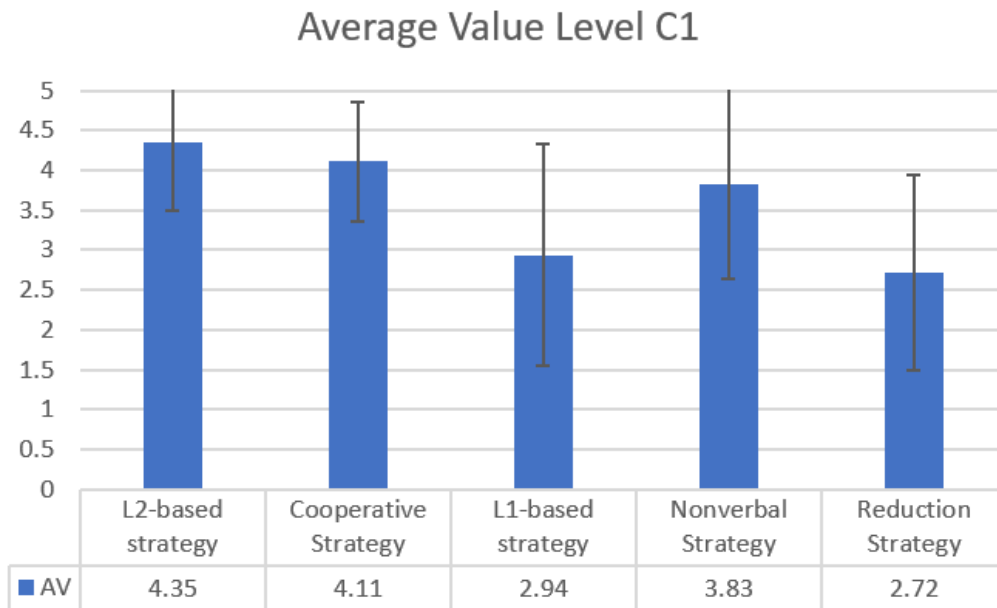
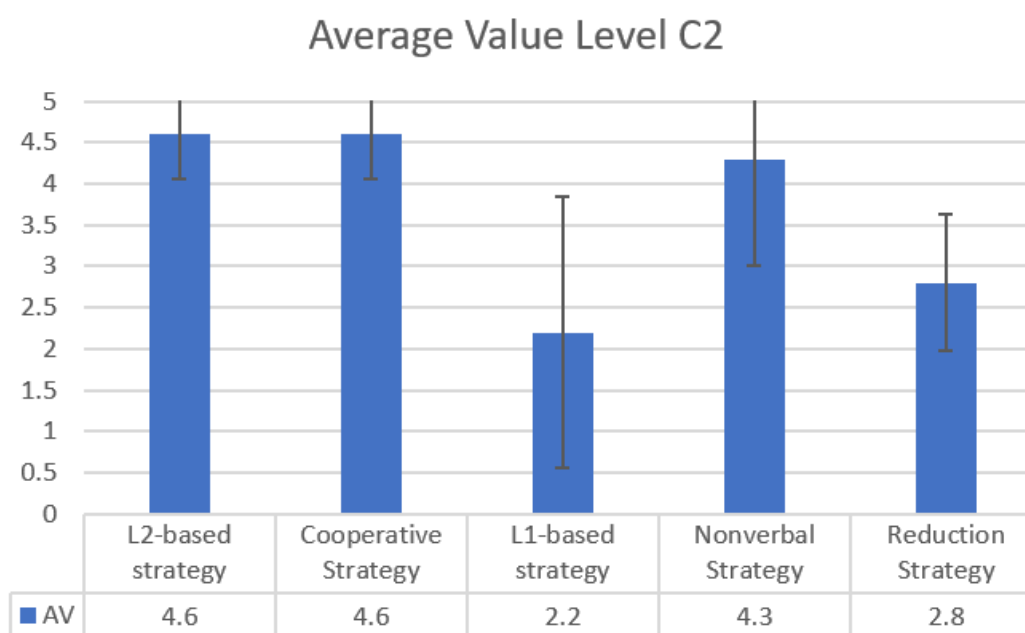


Table 8. Analysis of discrepancy of CS – C2 level

|                      | Average Value | Standard Deviation |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| L2-based strategy    | 4.6           | 0.55               |
| Cooperative Strategy | 4.6           | 0.54               |
| L1-based strategy    | 2.2           | 1.64               |
| Nonverbal Strategy   | 4.3           | 1.3                |
| Reduction Strategy   | 2.8           | 0.83               |

Bar Chart Table 8



As can be seen in the tables above, the results of discrepancy regarding the use of L1 strategies have its highest value with the lowest level (A2), whereas advanced learners have neutral attitude towards the L1 strategies. Not only is this predisposition to use this strategy observed in its average of the participants with a level A2 but also the standard deviation is the lowest of all with 0.7. This indicates in general terms that those students who do not have

an advanced knowledge of the language, feel more comfortable relying on their mother tongue. It is interesting to note that the standard deviations between the students with higher level and those with lower level differ very little. In addition, this shows a tendency to impartiality about using this particular CS. Moreover, the students with an advanced level (C1) were those that differed most in their answers with a standard deviation of 1.22. In other words, with the analysis of the data we cannot establish a relationship between the level of English and the use of the communicative strategy based on the L1 since, as observed previously, in participants with level C1 there exists high variability.

Turning to the data gathered from the students' personal interviews, it was possible to identify one of the reasons why this communicative strategy is not well received by the participants. Based on their own experience studying English, they agreed that they do not have a proper space to have spontaneous communication in English. As they reported in the interviews, one of the problems derives from not having enough time for conversation during the English classes taught in schools. They showed a negative attitude towards the L1 strategy, that is to say using their mother tongue in the communication, because normally participants do not have a space in which they can converse freely in English. Then, the participants made an effort to practice it without using their mother tongue in communication because this situation was perceived as an opportunity to improve their second language knowledge. On the other hand, the participants considered that the use of this strategy somewhat delayed their acquisition of English, because switching their language involved making a constant effort.

If we analyse achievement strategies across the different language competence levels we will see that more or less the range is similar, from "I resist to use this CS" to an almost "I nearly agree to use this CS". Nevertheless, the standard deviation of the language proficient students ranged from 1.64 to 0.54 and the standard deviation of the basic users of English was from 1 to 0.7. This indicates that there are considerable discrepancies in those users who have a higher level of English. Furthermore, it can be deduced that the language level matters and influences their perceptions with regard to the use of achievement strategies, since they have different views.

Analysing the opinion of the interviewees about their attitude towards communicative strategies, two important factors can be noted. Firstly, most of the interviewees were not aware about the relevance of communicative strategies, as they had not been taught how to communicate effectively. Generally, teachers did not encourage their students to know how

to overcome the difficulties arising from insufficient command of the target language. Partly this was due to lack of practice in real conversations in their English classes, so they were unaware of its importance. Furthermore, there was lack of interference of their mother tongue. Since they did not have enough opportunities for practising, they tried to make their best when they had the chance to. On the other hand, by presenting them the issue of communicative strategies in this study, they started to become aware the importance of its use. Not only has their knowledge been strengthened, but also their awareness of the strengths and weaknesses they have with respect to their use. Secondly, all the participants showed a very positive attitude towards the use of cooperative strategies. As for this aspect, there was a generalized opinion that cultural differences play a relevant role. Spanish speakers were not afraid of asking if they did not know the meaning of a word or an expression. They believed that this was a way to feed their previous knowledge and that this facilitated language acquisition.

### 3.2 Results of the learners' reported frequency of using CS

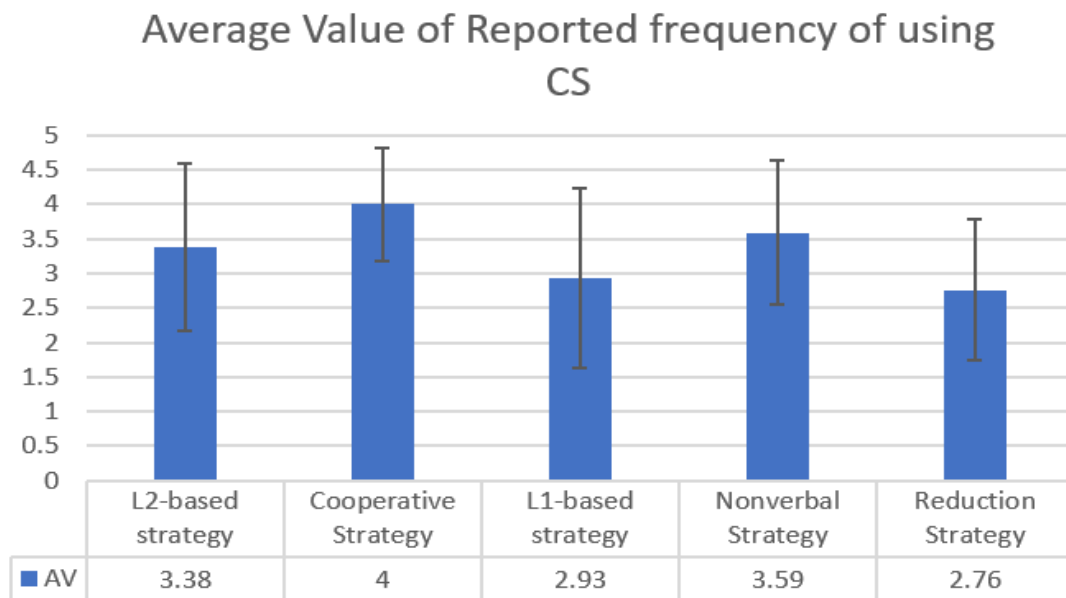
In the previous section I dealt with the first question of the analysis, which was the participants' attitude towards communicative strategies. They ranged from 1 (I never use this strategy) to 5 (I always use this strategy). In this section, I aim to answer the second research question, observing and analysing the frequency with which the communicative strategies are used.

Table 9. Reported frequency of using CS

| Type of Communicative Strategy  | Average Value | Standard Deviation |
|---|---------------|--------------------|
| <b>L2 -based strategy:</b> Strategy based on my second language (using translation, exemplification, explanation, or synonym etc to the target term ) | 3.38          | 1.21               |
| <b>Cooperative Strategy:</b> Directly asking for a particular correct expression  | 4.0           | 0.81               |

|   |      |      |
|---|------|------|
| <b>L1-based strategy:</b> using my mother tongue in the communication                                 | 2.93 | 1.3  |
| <b>Nonverbal Strategy:</b> using gestures, facial expression, vocal imitation, to help communication. | 3.59 | 1.04 |
| <b>Reduction Strategy:</b> abandoning a particular topic or avoiding a particular term or rule        | 2.76 | 1.02 |

Bar Chart **Table 9**



As seen in Table 9, the reported frequency of using achievement strategies ranges from 2.93 to 4.0, which shows that they move from "I sometimes use this strategy" to "I often use it". In contrast reduction strategies move from "I assiduously use this strategy" to "often use this strategy" with an average value of 2.76. The standard deviation of achievement strategies ranges from 1.3 to 1.04 which shows that there is little difference and if we compare it with the reported frequency of use of reduction strategies we can see a continuity on its deviation, with 1.2. We can observe a kind of predisposition in the participants to use more frequently achievement strategies rather than reduction strategies. Overall, the cooperation strategies are those most often used, with the highest average value 4.0 and the lowest standard

deviation 0.81. The reason why Spanish learners often use cooperative strategies comes from the Spanish culture itself. There is a tendency not to be embarrassed when asking for help from the person you are communicating with. This communicative strategy relates to Kasper and Kellerman's view (1997: 7) which CSs assist L2 acquisition. As they put it,

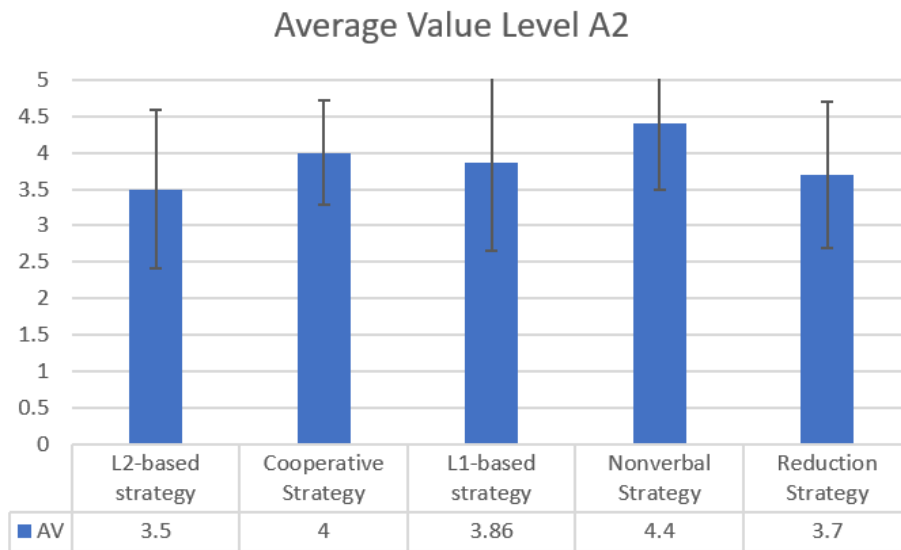
whether conceptualized as cooperative venture or a purely cooperative process, the increased need to solve problems in stabilising reference is both characteristic of language learners and instrumental in propelling their interlanguage forward.

The data also revealed a relationship between the frequency of use of communicative strategies and the level of English.

**Table 10 Analysis of discrepancy on frequency of CS - A2 level**

|                      | Average Value | Standard Deviation |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| L2-based strategy    | 3.5           | 1.08               |
| Cooperative Strategy | 4             | 0.71               |
| L1-based strategy    | 3.86          | 1.21               |
| Nonverbal Strategy   | 4.4           | 0.9                |
| Reduction Strategy   | 3.7           | 1                  |

Bar Chart Table 10



**Table 11 Analysis of discrepancy on frequency of CS – B1 level**

|                      | Average Value | Standard Deviation |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| L2-based strategy    | 3.6           | 1.19               |
| Cooperative Strategy | 4.10          | 0.67               |
| L1-based strategy    | 3.14          | 1.21               |
| Nonverbal Strategy   | 3             | 1                  |
| Reduction Strategy   | 3.07          | 1.02               |

Bar Chart Table 11

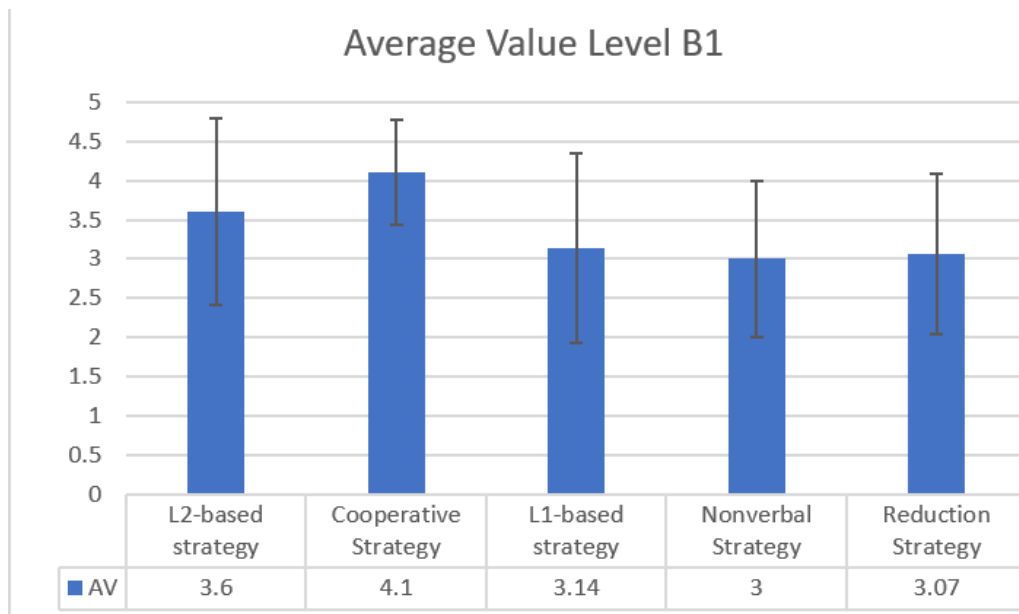


Table 12 Analysis of discrepancy on frequency of CS – B2 level

|                      | Average Value | Standard Deviation |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| L2-based strategy    | 3.96          | 0.99               |
| Cooperative Strategy | 4.11          | 0.69               |
| L1-based strategy    | 2.94          | 1.18               |
| Nonverbal Strategy   | 3.55          | 1.02               |
| Reduction Strategy   | 3             | 1                  |



Bar Chart Table 12

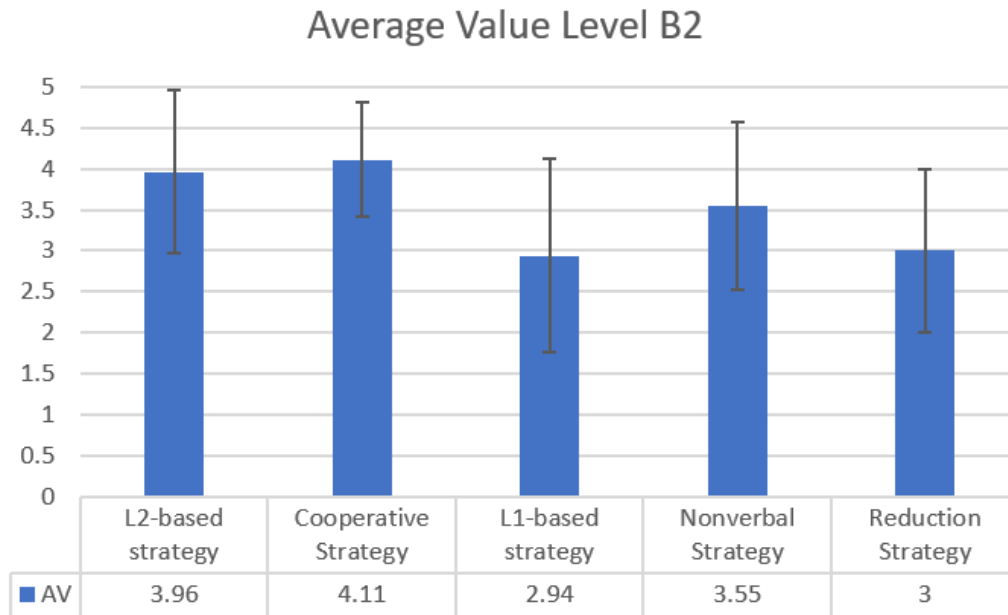


Table 13. Analysis of discrepancy on frequency of CS – C1level

|                      | Average Value | Standard Deviation |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| L2-based strategy    | 3.78          | 1                  |
| Cooperative Strategy | 4.02          | 0.69               |
| L1-based strategy    | 2.59          | 1.18               |
| Nonverbal Strategy   | 3.61          | 1.02               |
| Reduction Strategy   | 2.3           | 1.02               |

Bar Chart Table 13

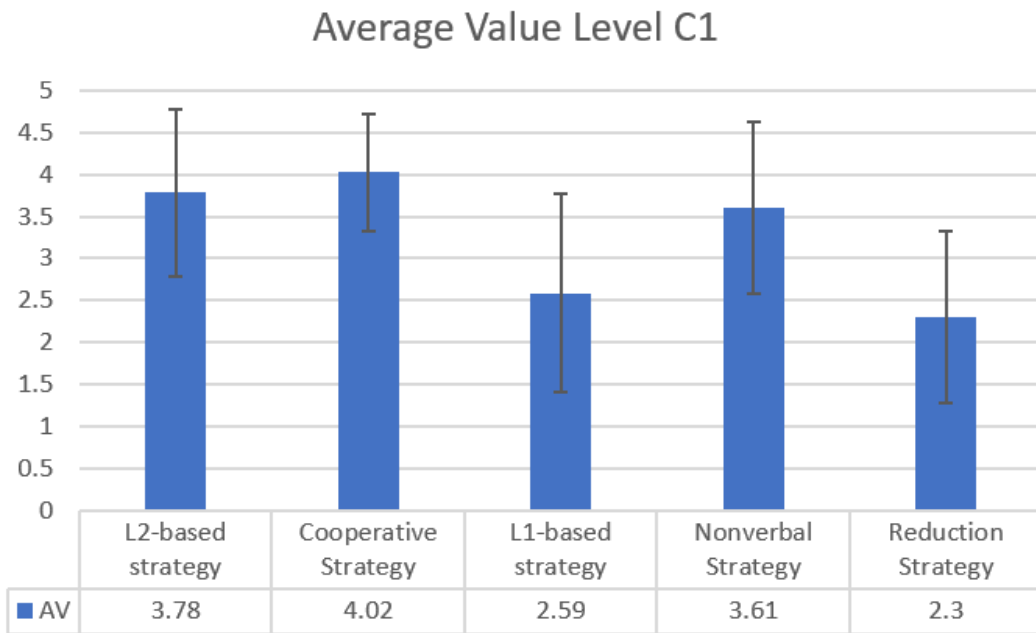
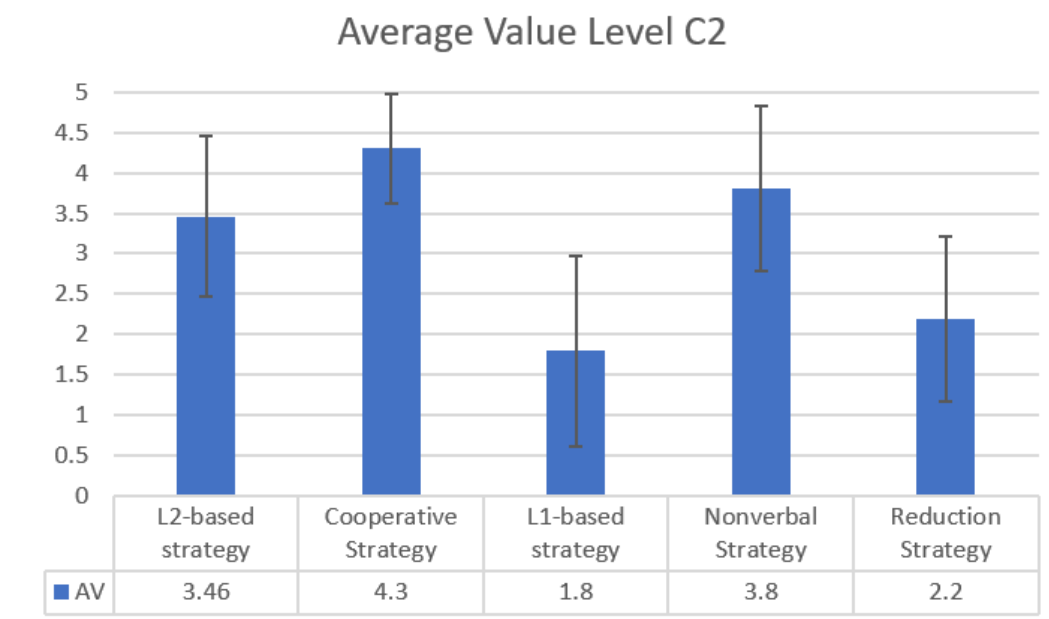


Table 14. Analysis of discrepancy on frequency of CS – C2 level

|                      | Average Value | Standard Deviation |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| L2-based strategy    | 3.46          | 0.99               |
| Cooperative Strategy | 4.3           | 0.67               |
| L1-based strategy    | 1.8           | 1.18               |
| Nonverbal Strategy   | 3.8           | 1.02               |
| Reduction Strategy   | 2.2           | 1.02               |

Bar Chart Table 14



As can be seen, the self-perceived frequency of communicative strategies depends on the level of language competence. In basic users of language, the frequency of use of the L1 strategy ranged from the level “sometimes use this strategy” to “often use it” with an average value of 3.86. In contrast, the advanced students reported their frequency between “never use it” and “I assiduously use this strategy” with an average value of 1.8. With the standard deviation we can see that both types of learners have a greater dispersion in the data with a range value of 1.18 to 1.21. On the other hand, the frequency of use of the cooperative strategy was the highest in the most advanced students in the language. This shows us that the cooperation strategy is frequently used by those students with a higher level of English. Also, it can be noted that there is a continuity, as they advance in the acquisition of English the students use it more. In general, achievement strategies are often used by Spanish speakers, no matter their level, whereas reduction strategies were hardly used. Thanks to the interview, we can suggest some reasons that may lead us to explain the reported frequency of this widespread use of achievement strategies. Spanish learners use more frequently achievement strategies and, in particular, cooperation strategies, possibly due to the communicative context in which the English classes take place. In other words, the focus on written activities and grammar while communicative situations had been limited. On this occasion, the students were free to practice freely with their peers in a low-stress

environment. When we talk about low-stress environment we limit ourselves to three fundamental factors, as expressed by one of the participants:

There are no teachers so we feel free to make mistakes without limiting ourselves. The environment in which the interaction is taking place is a pub, a place we are familiarize with and where we have the chance to speak. And, of course, we are having spontaneous conversation with English learners with whom we share a similar profile.

As mentioned above, Spanish schools do not offer a context for which communicative skills can be developed. This idea of using more communicative strategies in a natural environment was argued by Ellis (2008, 186); moreover, he added that in a classroom environment the focus needs be to the correct use in L2 rather on fluent communication.

### 3.3 Relation between the attitudes of the learner's and their self-perceived frequency of use

From Table 3 and Table 9 we can observe a relationship between the learners' attitudes toward communicative strategies and its reported frequency. At the same time, when we see the discrepancy between the different levels of students, we see that the frequency of use of the most positive strategies is higher. This means that students, although they are not specifically trained in communication strategies, are aware that it is important to use them and that it is a benefit to acquire language.

Moreover, there seems to be a correlation also between the negative attitude towards the reduction strategies and its low frequency of use. In a similar study carried out by Lin Wei (2011) at Kristianstad University with Chinese learners, reduction strategies were those most often used. The author relates this frequency of use to Chinese culture, since their teaching of English has overemphasized accuracy. Furthermore, Lin (2011) states that communication in the English classroom lacks of an information gap. Therefore, learners abandon a particular topic with ease. As far as the group of Spanish learners involved in the present study is concerned, they were not worried about making mistakes, since their interlocutor was someone of their same profile. In other words, they did not see themselves in the need to avoid or abstain their thoughts during the conversation. In sum, from the analysis we find that the frequency of using CSs appears to relate to the attitude of the learners towards those strategies.

### 3.4 Factors affecting the learners' choice of communicative strategy

In the section on the frequency of use of communication strategies, the opinion of one of the participants highlighted some of the factors affecting communication. Færch and Kasper's (1983) analysed some of the factors that the students may have when choosing one strategy or another. These may range from the place where the conversation takes place, also the problem in the interaction they are trying to solve, knowledge of the topic, and so on. There are many factors that play an important role in communication, but in what follows two main factors will be discussed, namely, the learners and the communicative context.

#### Learners

The student's attitude, their proficiency level and overall their personality are key 'ingredients' for the impact of the development of the communicative competences. From what has been observed in these language gatherings, the participants had a very positive attitude. Taking into account that they have not been forced to go to the activity, and that they have helped in the study in an altruistic way, their attitude has always been very positive. It can be clearly seen that there is a relationship between this positive attitude and an increased frequency of use, particularly when it comes to achievement strategies. In Generally speaking, everyone had an extroverted profile, they were all accustomed to interacting with people on a regular basis. This important factor that is personality has been studied by some experts such as Tarone (1977), who suggests that personality is intimately related to the choice of communicative strategies. In this study, we can at least tentatively conclude that the strategy that has been repeated most and for which they have shown the most positive attitude is the cooperative strategy.

#### Situational context

There is a very important difference with respect to the environments in which Spanish speakers usually interact to practice English. The situational context in this study is not being carried out in a classroom, but in a pub. This is another reason why students choose one communication strategy or another. For example, the stress level is kept to a minimum, being an experience in which they feel comfortable. Moreover, they have no teacher to supervise them. Communication in a classroom with a teacher is totally different from this

experience. A difference on language is used, and the application of communication strategies will be different. This highlights that fact students are able to adapt their discourse to the communicative needs of their environment, regardless their level of English. This situation contrasts with Nakatani's (2010) study of strategies in Japanese college students. This author states that low-proficiency students were not able to maintain their interaction during the conversations. In order to explain it, Nakatani relates it with the affective filter since they lack of experience using English in authentic context.

Along the language encounters of this dissertation Spanish students were able to adapt their discourse. Furthermore, students were motivated to perform and have a positive self-image and seek more input. Being in a pub promotes a low risk (low affective filter), and according to the design of the Natural Approach, most of the practices in the classroom should look to supply a "good comprehensible input and lower affective filter" (Krashen, 1995).

To conclude, according to Ellis (2008), "there is only speculation". In other words, there are a lot of factors involved, and this is due to the interaction of them which gives a choice of strategies that will facilitate the acquisition of language.

#### 4. Conclusion and implications

This study was carried out in order to examine Spanish learners' attitude and frequency of use of communicative strategies in relation to their language proficiency level. Moreover, it has been examined the relation between the learners' attitude and their reported frequency of using CS. I also investigated two of the factors affecting the choice of communication strategies by the learners, since one of the most remarkable factors is that spontaneous conversation was made since they had the exchange in a bar, a naturalistic language learning environment. Since there was not a control group the findings are only tentative.

In order to carry out this study, data have been collected in two questionnaires and a short interview with the participants, thanks to which the influence that communicative strategies have on language acquisition has been identified. Communicative strategies keep the channel open in the interaction and move the conversation forward. According to their definition, communicative strategies are those plans that the learners use in order to solve communicative problems. They do not only have to interact and collaborate, but also find personal mechanisms, which leads to the creation of input.

The classification of communicative strategies used in the present study corresponds to the psychological perspective developed by Faerch and Kasper. As explained earlier in this dissertation, these authors classified the strategies into two groups: achievement and reduction strategies. The first ones correspond with cooperative strategies, L2-based strategies, L1-based strategies and functional reduction strategies. It should be noted that the use of specific communicative strategies is restricted to other factors, in this case two were observed, the learners and the situational context.

By investigating the relationship between the attitude towards communicative strategies and the reported frequency of use of those strategies in actual communication, two tentative conclusions have been drawn. First of all, we find the Spanish learners' overall attitude toward the communicative strategies. It shows that most Spanish learners have a good predisposition to the use of achievement strategies whereas they have a rather negative perception with regard to the use of reduction strategies. In addition, there is continuity with this data with respect to its frequency of use between achievement and reduction strategies. Secondly, within the achievement strategies there is a clear differentiation between the attitude of the participants towards the L1 strategy and the cooperative strategy. The one with the lowest value was the L1 strategy and the highest was that of the cooperation strategy. This means that there is a tendency for students to avoid the use of their mother tongue when interacting in English. In addition, cooperation between students is encouraged to help each other maintain a fluent conversation. We also find that learners with a lower language proficiency are more likely to agree and use frequently the L1 strategy than those learners with a higher level of proficiency. The reason for this, those students with a low level feel more comfortable using their mother tongue as they are restricted by their limited language resources while for students with a higher level this implies an impediment in the acquisition of language. The factors affecting Spanish learners' view of cooperative strategies include cultural background, the learners' attitude and the degree to which learners are aware of the role of achievement strategies in second language acquisition and communication.

Finally, we have discussed the factors affecting the learners' attitudes toward communicative strategies and their reported use of the communicative strategies, such as learners' attitudes, learners' personal level of language proficiency, and situational context. Special mention should be made to the situational context and, in this respect, the extroverted profile of the participants facilitated a low-stress environment and motivated the participants to practice English.

Carrying out this project with Spanish students has meant a good approach to better understand how English can be learned outside the classroom. The good reception by Spanish and foreign students shows that there is a latent need to create these spaces to improve English. This need also responds to the study since it is the cooperation strategies that are most welcome among students. As shown in this exploratory study, communicative strategy learning raises metacommunicative awareness of communicative strategies.

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## Appendix 1 Questionnaire on the attitude towards communicative strategies

Age:

Sex:

Linguistic Level:

Please write 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 in the 5 [ ]

1=I do not agree to use this CS

2=I resist to use this CS

3=I am impartial about using this CS

4=I nearly agree to use this CS

5=I am in favour of using this CS

(1) Strategy based on my second language (using translation, exemplification, explanation, or synonym etc to the target term) [ ]

(2) Reduction strategies (abandoning a particular topic or avoiding a particular term or rule) [ ]

(3) Cooperative strategies (Directly asking for a particular correct expression) [ ]

(4) L1- based strategy (using my mother tongue in the communication) [ ]

(5) Non-verbal strategies (using gestures, facial expression, vocal imitation, to help communication) [ ]

## Appendix 2 Questionnaire on self-perceived frequency in the use of communicative strategies

Age : Sex: Linguistic Level :

Please write 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 in the 5 [ ]

1= I never use this strategy

2= I assiduously use this strategy

3= I sometimes use this strategy

4= I often use this strategy

5= I often use this strategy

### Part A

(1) I use general an alternative word to replace some specific word which is similar (e.g. ship for sailboat) [ ]

(2) I create new words in order to express something (e.g. airball for ballon.) [ ]

(3) I describe the characteristic or elements of an object instead of using the appropriate structure (e.g. She is eating ... I don't know what its name but...it is like ...) [ ]

(4) If I don't know the word, I give an example [ ]

### Part B

1. I translate literally word for word from my native language [ ]

2. I switch into my native language without bothering to translate (e.g. lunes instead of Monday) [ ]

3. I think the form in Spanish and try to translate it into English [ ]

### Part C

1. I use eye contact to help my communication [ ]

2) I try to use gesture and mime to augment or replace verbal communication (e.g. put your hand in your mouth instead of 'eating') [ ]

3) I use paralinguistic (laughing, yelling ...) to express my emotion in communication [ ]

### Part D

1) I try not to talk about a topic whose concepts and vocabulary are not known to me. [ ]

2) I begin to talk about a concept but I abandon due to my lack of knowledge, I stop in mid-utterance. [ ]

## Part E

- 1) If I do not understand something, I ask the other person to slow down
- 2) If I do not understand something I ask the interlocutor to repeat the same thing in other words
- 3) I say an answer beforehand without the other person finishing the question by guessing thanks to the communicative context
- 4) I ask for clarification if I need it.