

Communication Strategies: A Psychological Analysis of Second-Language Use by Ellen Bialystok. Applied Linguistics Series, D. Crystal and K. Johnson, Eds., Cambridge, MA.: Basil Blackwell, 1990. vi + 163 pp.

Reviewed by
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Over the past fifteen years, there has been an increased interest in the cognitive processes which account for how the learner of a second language (L2) handles conceptual and linguistic input, how this learner processes this information to allow for intake, and how the newly-acquired knowledge is used to produce messages in the L2. Second-language learning strategy research focuses on the processes and strategies used to perceive, internalize and automatize new linguistic input, with emphasis on language learning. Bialystok's work, *Communication Strategies*, however, differs from other books on strategy research (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991) in that it takes a much narrower focus, concentrating on the processes and strategies a learner invokes when declarative and procedural knowledge are utilized to communicate a message. The emphasis of this book is on language use and the linguistic and cognitive processes involved in communication. Thus, in providing an in depth analysis of the processes and strategies used in language production, *Communication Strategies* provides a unique contribution to learning strategy research.

Bialystok's overall goal in *Communication Strategies* is "to find a means of explaining how strategies function in the speech of L2 learners" (p.13). The book contains a preface, eight chapters, notes, references and an index. In Chapter 1 Bialystok finds all the definitions of communication strategies commonly used in strategy research to be ambiguous. Bialystok also criticizes, although not explicitly, the undue emphasis in strategy research on definitions and proposes an approach to investigating communication strategies which fully incorporates the identification, explanation, and instruction of communication strategies. The remaining chapters of the book are organized around these three points. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 address the question of how to identify and categorize strategic behavior in the communication of L2 learners. Chapters 5,

6, and 7 explain the processes involved in L1 and L2 acquisition and use and propose a framework for language processing. Finally, Chapter 8 discusses the pedagogical issues related to communication strategy instruction.

In Chapter 1 Bialystok criticizes the definitions of communication strategies used by researchers for their focus on the features of problematicity, consciousness and intentionality. In her treatment of these definitions, she highlights their ambiguous nature such as the fact that (1) learners use communication strategies not only in problematic situations, but in non-problematic situations as well; (2) learners might or might not use these strategies consciously; and (3) these strategies could be invoked with any degree of intentionality to achieve specific communicative goals. Instead, Bialystok recommends that we investigate the strategy use by determining a means to identify and explain strategic behaviors and by assessing the teachability of these strategies for purposes of facilitating more effective language learning.

Chapter 2 examines different ways of identifying strategic behaviors and attempts to clarify the psychological construct of communication strategy. In this chapter, Bialystok situates communication strategies within the framework of language use, but unfortunately makes no attempt to relate language use to a more general model of communicative competence. Rather, she briefly describes a hierarchical structure where language use is divided into processes and strategies and where strategies are further subdivided into communication and learning strategies. She first discusses the distinction between strategies and processes and concludes that "without substantial direction in how to proceed with a distinction between strategies and process of language production, the possibility that these are ultimately not different events remains tenable" (p. 25). She then attempts to differentiate communication strategies from other types of strategies (e.g., production strategies (Tarone, 1980), learning strategies (Stern, 1983), and social strategies (Wong Fillmore, 1979)). Bialystok reports on a third attempt to identify strategic behaviors in communication which arises from the investigation of systematic differences among speakers engaged in different types of communication. Here the manipulation of messages and linguistic forms is studied to determine to what extent an original message was reduced, deleted, altered, or avoided. I found Bialystok's attempt to delineate language use in this chapter somewhat ambiguous. The language use hierarchy upon which the chapter was based seems to be inspired by disparate theoretical arguments explaining the construct

of communication strategies and, in my opinion, the chapter raises more questions than it answers.

In Chapter 3 Bialystok provides a comprehensive summary of the major taxonomies used to classify communication strategies (Tarone, 1977; Varadi, 1980; Bialystok & Frohlich, 1980; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Paribakht, 1985). Bialystok notes that researchers seem to agree on the communicative behaviors used by L2 learner but asserts that no single specific factor seems to predict the use of any one strategy. The potential of these taxonomies to describe strategies is then evaluated in Chapter 4. Here, the author reports on a study of the strategic behaviors of 18 nine-year-old English-speaking children learning French. Tarone's taxonomy was used in this study and Bialystok states that the criteria used to classify strategic categories were sometimes ambiguous and arbitrary. In Chapters 3 and 4, Bialystok provides a convincing and insightful argument illustrating the potential shortcomings of existing taxonomies, and rightfully concludes that instead of studying strategies independently through definitions or taxonomies, strategies should be analyzed within a coherent model of speech production.

In Chapter 5 Bialystok surveys the research on child and adult strategy use in L1 production and compares this to adult strategy use in L2 speech. She maintains that the communication problems faced by children in early phases of acquisition are similar to those encountered by L2 learners and remarks that aside from the adult's cognitive conceptual maturity and access to a developed lexicon in another language, the strategies used by children and adults are identical. This point, however, seems debatable, if for no other reason than the comparatively greater variety of strategies used by adults and the flexibility with which they use them. Furthermore, this assertion contradicts previous work by Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, and Campione (1983) who claim that strategic behavior develops with age. Nonetheless, this point presents an interesting line of future research to pursue. Finally, Bialystok adds that "there is no doubt that adults use these strategies more effectively, more efficiently and more flexibly than children do, but there is no evidence that the strategies themselves are any different" (p.101).

In Chapter 6 Bialystok reviews two studies focusing on children and adults' use of an L2. These studies, she claims, differ from previous ones in that "the classification [of the L2 utterances] is based on distinctions between processes" (p. 104). This reference to "process," however, is the source of considerable confusion as it is not defined. The only apparent difference between

these studies and the previous ones is that the classifications in the current studies are not solely generated from observable utterances, but are structured to require the children to process information on a metalinguistic level before attempting a task. For example, the first study investigates the ability of children to construct formal definitions. Snow and her colleagues (1989) chose this task because it provided a "decontextualized metalinguistic use of language" as a process. They found that children could identify and construct formal definitions as early as age 7. The second study examined how adults use referential strategies in both their L1 and their L2. The classification of the utterances in this study was organized according to the production processes speakers use. The taxonomy emerging from this study consisted of conceptual and linguistic strategies. The conceptual strategies involved approximation and circumlocution strategies, while the linguistic strategies involved borrowing, foreignization, transliteration, and word coinages. I felt that Chapters 5 and 6 accurately illustrated the need to go beyond research based on definitions or taxonomies and demonstrated the explanatory potential of communication strategy research based on a model of language production as well as on the definitions and taxonomies.

Bialystok describes her theoretical model of language acquisition and processing in Chapter 7. In this framework language proficiency consists of two components of language processing: the analysis of linguistic knowledge and the control of linguistic processing. The analysis component refers to how language knowledge is represented and accessed, while the control component deals with the executive procedures for performance. Bialystok applies this framework to communication strategies, stating that the analysis-based strategy allows the L2 learner to examine and shape intended meaning, while the control-based strategy permits the speaker to focus on linguistic form or some other source of information. I felt that this framework clearly illustrates the dynamic interaction between these two components because it reflects the ways all people process language production when communication requires extension or adaptation. In the case of children or L2 learners, this production system is often strained due to an inability to adjust to the communicative event.

Chapter 8 superficially discusses the potential value of learning and teaching communication strategies. Bialystok presents a strong view of instruction which maintains that taxonomic listings can be taught explicitly. In other words, learners can be taught to paraphrase, to invent new words, and the like. She also discusses

the moderate view which states that strategies can be presented as devices to be used in solving communication problems. I felt, however, that perhaps a more realistic approach to learning and teaching communication strategies would involve the combination of both views in accordance with the changing situational demands of the syllabus.

In sum, despite its shortcomings, *Communication Strategies* is an inspiring book for applied linguists who wish to pursue research in learning or language use strategies. It provides a critical analysis of research approaches used thus far in investigating communication strategies and proposes new avenues for further research by means of an articulated cognitive component. I found this book to be challenging in places, but a very informative read indeed. *Communication Strategies* is an essential source for those seeking an orientation to the current issues in learner strategies.

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