

Communication Strategies: An Interplay between Proficiency and Gender

HUSSEIN SHOKOUHI

FARZAD ANGAMEH

Shahid Chamran University of Ahwaz, Iran

ABSTRACT

This paper is intended to investigate the interplay between proficiency and gender in the use of communication strategies. Sixty Iranian university male and female subjects studying English took part in the experiment and performed two tasks: word recognition and picture-story narration. The results indicate that proficiency had a more perceptible effect on the frequency and types of communication strategies. Tasks also had a strong effect on the number and type of strategies chosen. Gender did not yield any significant results except in the case of low proficiency level of female participants. The reason was attributed to the subject of study and formal educational system.

INTRODUCTION

Communication strategies (henceforth CSs) are linguistic or non-linguistic devices that learners apply to solve instantaneous, often unforeseen, problems that rise in the course of communication. They are the means that bridge the gap caused by the incongruity between the speaker's intentions and his linguistic repertoire (Færch & Kasper 1983a: 36, 1984: 47).

Research on the use of CSs is numerous. Bialystok (1983), for example, by looking into the effects of different strategies such as L2-based, L1-based, etc. used by different learners in a picture-story reconstruction found that the more proficient learners among her intermediate subjects used more L2-based strategies. Paribakht (1985, 1986) through a word and concept-identification task explored types and frequency of CSs across three groups at three different proficiency levels. She observed that there is a direct relation between the speakers' use of CSs and their level of the target language proficiency.