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Oral Communication Strategies from the Start in the Foreign Language Classroom.[1]

This pedagogical essay argues for the need to implement Oral Communication Strategies (OCS) in beginner level foreign language classes, as a foundation for Willingness to Communicate (WTC). Without the desire to actively participate in conversations, students' Communicative Competence (CC) can hardly develop.

To help learners build Communicative Competence, selecting an array of efficient OCS and scaffolding them into the initial curriculum are essential measures. With this in mind, this paper will define Oral Communication Strategies and introduce a model to clarify which OCS are most aptly used at complete beginner levels. It will also lay out a set of instructional tips to help teachers create a classroom environment conducive to the use of OCS. Finally, a taxonomy for OCS based on teachability and usefulness will be developed and discussed.

1   Context

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan (MEXT) has produced guidelines which clearly state that 1. developing practical communication abilities, 2. deepening the understanding of foreign cultures and 3. fostering positive attitudes toward communicating in a second language are to account for the main objectives in the study of foreign languages (MEXT, 2014). This incentive has clearly not been followed through by most instructors at all echelons of education. This situation is probably in part due to a lack of continuing education with the purpose of helping professionals modernize and reassess ingrained teaching styles dating back to grammar-translation and structural methods. Language training is indeed still widely apprehended as a knowledge-based subject, focusing on reading and sentence-producing skills tethered by grammar and vocabulary drills. These exercise contents are designed exclusively to meet standards of entrance exams, the inherent nature of which does not encourage teachers to renew their classroom practices least they drive their students to failure.

If our goal is to help students achieve a certain degree of proficiency in communication skills, intercultural awareness and willingness to communicate in the foreign language, then starting from the very first class to build new reflexes and attitudes toward language learning is paramount to success. This article advocates that teaching oral communication strategies stands out as one powerful lever to raise language learners to MEXT's postulated standard.

2   Definition

Before explicitly defining what OCS are, it is beneficial to sort out where these

strategies stand among the various competences one is required to display when communicating in a foreign language.

Canale and Swain (1980) refined by Canale (1983) defined communicative competence in terms of four components. The first two components, grammatical and discourse competence, refer to the skill in handling the rules of the linguistic system itself. Sociolinguistic and strategic competence characterize the level of proficiency in managing the rules of language use.

Table 1. Communication competence

... competence	definition	... rules
1.Grammatical	words, syntax, spelling	Linguistic
2.Discourse	cohesion and coherence	
3.Sociolinguistic	appropriateness in context	Language
4.Strategic	appropriate use of communication & learning strategies (Brown, 2014)	

Communication strategies have been initially referred to by these scholars as "strategic competence". Brown (2014) further divides strategic competence into learning and communication strategies:

-Learning strategies are according to Oxford (1990) "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations" (p.8).

-Communication strategies are defined by Brown (2014) as "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal." For the purpose of this paper, communication strategies are furthermore subdivided into written communication strategies (WCS) and oral communication strategies (OCS). The latter interests us in the context of a foreign language conversation class. Nakatani (2005) characterizes OCS as those strategies which

> *"specifically focus on oral interaction and interlocutor's negotiation behavior for coping with communication breakdowns." (p. 79)*

This definition of OCS concurs with the widely accepted view throughout the research literature, that CS are problem-oriented devices, i.e. means to "fixing" a communication problem resulting from a learner's lack of knowledge in the target language. While this established concept does highlight the interlanguage process of building linguistic knowledge and language know-how, its emphasis is on the trial and error process. It does not account for the reasons very efficient language users and native level language users still constantly resort to some of those strategies.

Empirical observation of students actively participating in class in the process of communicating in French from beginner level onward, presents many instances in which students are using CS as a communication sustaining device as much as a communication repairing device. Such use of CS can also serve the purpose of avoiding to a certain extent potential communication breakdowns by giving learners means to maintain and develop conversation. In that respect, CS use is a device that enables the student to keep the conversation flowing. This feeling of

capacity for performance is an ingredient for profound satisfaction in the process of learning through shared interaction. This distinction does not seem to have been stressed enough in CS literature. It nevertheless appears to have a positive psychological impact on the way students consider the foreign language learning process.

Drawing on these remarks, a new definition to OCS can be rendered:

> *"OCS are language devices relied on during oral interaction for sustaining conversation and handling communication breakdowns."*

This double criterion will have a direct impact on the way OCS will be categorized into a taxonomy and the way they can be taught (see 6).
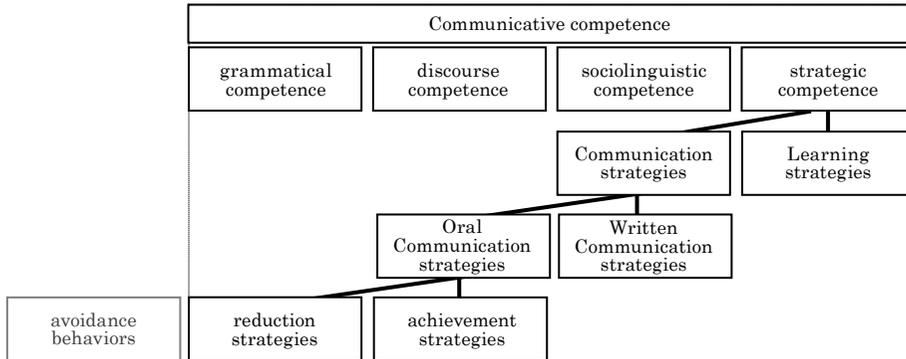
3   Typology

From Tarone (1977) to Dörnyei & Scott (1995), many taxonomies have been conceptualized alongside the emergence of various definitions of what communication strategies actually cover. For simplicity's sake, and since the purpose of this paper is not to discuss definitions and related taxonomies (for an in depth review see Burrows, 2013b; Dörnyei & Scott, 1997), CS generally fall under two main categories:

1. Avoidance / reduction strategies
   e.g. message abandonment, feigning understanding, changing topics, etc.
2. Achievement / functional strategies
   e.g. appeal for help, shadowing, clarification requests, etc.

In the research literature, avoidance strategies and reduction strategies are used exchangeably. Since a Kumamoto University experiment (Jactat, 2001), which aimed at categorizing CS used naturally by Japanese beginner level learners of French, it seems advisable to reconsider avoidance strategies as actually avoidance behaviors. Undoubtedly, this type of conduct does not fulfill the goal communication strategies are meant to reach. Faerch & Kasper define CS as "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal." (1983, p.36). Silence, avoiding or cutting short a communicative process do not constitute functional strategies to maintaining conversation. Reduction strategies on the other hand can lead to completing an interaction and reaching a communicative objective such as using generative verbs instead of more precise and appropriate verbs (do a letter for write a letter). The previous set of avoidance/reduction strategies should then be disassociated into reduction strategies and avoidance behaviors. By keeping achievement strategies as a set in itself, a new twofold set of strategies then appears, with avoidance behaviors on the margin (see Figure 1 on following page).

Instructors of second language in Japan are painfully aware of avoidance behavior in their classes and often complain about such demeanor in their students. Teachers do indeed intuitively and empirically experience how counterproductive such conduct is to the learning process. Some suggestions on how to cope with this issue will be provided when discussing instructional devices for boosting willingness to communicate (see 5.3).

Figure 1. Communicative competence

Communicative competence			
grammatical competence	discourse competence	sociolinguistic competence	strategic competence
		Communication strategies	Learning strategies
	Oral Communication strategies	Written Communication strategies	
avoidance behaviors	reduction strategies	achievement strategies	

Now that the place of achievement and reduction strategies has been embedded into the larger framework of communicative competence, let us explore what is actually happening in the Japanese FL classroom in terms of OCS use.

4   Beginner level OCS

Attempts at defining and classifying the nature of OCS used spontaneously by Japanese beginner level learners of a foreign language are close to nil. Most experiments have focused on CS used by Japanese learners of English at intermediate or higher levels of proficiency (Burrows, 2013a; Iwai, 1995, 2000; Inuzuka, 2001; Nakano, 1996; Tsuchimochi, 2001; Watanabe, 2005).

Discourse data recorded and analyzed by the author (Jactat, 2001) from classroom tasks produced by a sampling of 14 Japanese students at the University of Kumamoto, revealed recurrent patterns of spontaneous OCS use in these beginner level learners of French (over one year = 45 hours). The main, yet unsurprising finding, was that students generally resorted to avoidance behaviors over achievement strategies. Those behaviors most hindering may be summed up as:

1. Silence & long pauses: thinking of what to say without seeking support;
2. Inappropriate code switching: reverting back to L1 while in the middle of L2 Your cat is so kawaii (cute)!
3. Feign understanding: a scheme to dodge an opportunity for interaction hoping the conversation will just carry on.

Since then, the list has been supplemented by three more items:

4. message-abandonment: avoiding altogether the effort of problem-solving;
5. underelaboration: minimal speech interaction (e.g. responding in single words or word clusters like oui [yes] or oui c'est ça [yes that's right] without developing further information or arguments);
6. Linguistic avoidance: evading words difficult to pronounce, conjugate or use.

Achievement strategies that were noteworthy through the Kumamoto experiment added up mostly to:

1. Collaborative strategies e.g. Comment on dit…? [How do you say… ?]

2. Conversation regulators (renamed here Maintenance Strategies, see 6.2[3])
   e.g. Un instant , STP… [Just a moment please…]

These findings signaled for a strong need to provide formal instruction which could cut-back sterile avoidance behaviors and step-up more fruitful communication strategies. Hypothetically, this would reinforce productive learning and communication processes in the classroom.

5   Teachability

5.1   Can CS be taught?
Research has shown that teaching CS supports language acquisition. For example, Nakatani (2005) carried out a study to find out how students learn to use taught communication strategies and to examine how teaching them CS could help improve their communication competence. His conclusions are unambiguous (p87): "students became aware of how to use achievement strategies and avoid reduction strategies." . Furthermore the treatment group could produce longer utterances and scored higher in the post-test than the control group, prompting the author to suggest that improvement in students' use of communication strategies could also enhance second language acquisition. Naughton's research (2006) concurs with these findings. Teaching CS to a treatment group resulted in an increase in the mean number of turns taken and a remarkable rise in strategic participation. He states that "The willingness of students to request and provide help may be a key factor in the success of small group oral interaction and in the ability of students to aid each other's interlanguage development" (p.179). Ellis (2008) likewise claims that "strategies involving functional practice aid the development of communicative competence" (p.716). The action research intervention led by Talandis & Stout (2015) came to similar conclusions: "students benefit from explicit teaching of conversational routines. It can be productive to give samples of formulaic language containing pragmatic devices with which to carry out, simple, commonplace conversations." (p. 20). Are not these outcomes directly in line with the main purpose of teaching, i.e., that students improve their learning and communication skills?

5.2   Which classroom practices?
The next interrogation lies in the nature of which classroom practices can bring about such positive outcomes, that is an increase of CS and a decrease of avoidance behaviors, and in turn an improvement in communicative competence. Albeit a lingering controversy on the utility of including CS training in the curriculum, many advocates proclaim its usefulness based on empirical data as seen above (Nakatani, 2005; Naughton, 2006; Saito, 2016; Talandis & Stout 2015). Proponents to explicitly teaching communication strategies in the foreign language class have experimentally developed an array of instructional frameworks. The six point itemized model for CS training by Dörnyei and Scott (1997, p.80) seems most relevant. This list has been divided into three distinct groups and some of its contents reformulated to take into account the distinction

made in this paper between avoidance behaviors and CS.

Educating about CS

    1. Awareness-raising: increase understanding of the nature and potential of CS, and of the dysfunctional nature of avoidance behaviors in the communication process.

    2. Cross-cultural awareness: highlight differences in CS use between Japanese and foreign languages. Underscore how silence, long pauses and other culturally accepted communication behaviors in Japan do not fare well in other FL and abroad.

Teaching CS

    3. Direct Teaching: present linguistic devices to verbalize CS.
The question of the efficiency levels of CS arises here and will be discussed in 6.1.

    4. Modeling: provide L2 models of the use of most potentially effective CS. Modeling by the teacher as well as written models exemplifying CS use.

Training in CS

    5. Risk-taking: encourage learners to be willing to take risks and use CS by incorporating errors as a useful and necessary part of language apprenticeship.

    6. Practice: provide a variety of activities and tasks to perform strategy use.

The first four points of this model point to the ability of the instructor to pass on information pertaining to CS. Points 5 and 6 require student participation. The latter two points do not address the means by which we can make students engage in conversation (i.e. take risks and practice). Learner involvement ties in to the issue of creating an environment conducive to spoken interaction in the target language and boosting students' "Willingness to Communicate" (WTC).

5.3   Willingness to Communicate

A substantial body of research into WTC (Clément, 2003; MacIntyre, 2002; MacIntyre et al., 2003; McCroskey, 1997; Mesgarshahr, 2014) has shown a clear correlation between anxiety and performance. Lower anxiety correlates with higher self-confidence, which leads to increased WTC. Anxiety specific to learning a foreign language has been coined *foreign language anxiety*. Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128) define this type of anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process". So how can we lower *foreign language anxiety* in our classrooms in order to support "Willingness to Communicate"? Teaching CS has been shown to directly lower anxiety (Grzegorzewska, 2015). The use of CS seems to empower students, bring out a new sense of confidence and capability that sparks the desire to engage in meaningful spoken exercises. The findings of the previous researchers converge towards underlining the importance of certain features of instruction to improve WTC. These combined features contribute to reduce *foreign language anxiety*:

    1. Build on students' knowledge.

    2. Have students perform the task in pairs before they are asked to

complete tasks in a large-group setting.
3. Provide multiple means of student engagement.
4. Make sure that the activities or tasks they are given are at a level of difficulty that they find not too difficult yet not too easy.

For beginner level learners, I found most relevant to include in this list four more influential components:

5. Reduce apprehension of error-making.
   A) emphasize and show the usefulness of errors in the learning process.
   B) devise a marking system that favors communication goals over accuracy.
   C) value a not-yet-there learning process over immediate goal reaching.
   D) value personal itemized goals over native-like proficiency (e.g. disclose one or more errors to the student during punctual oral-tests so s/he can include them in their personal goals for the next oral assessment).
   E) encourage use of CS that solicit and provide help to encourage reciprocity and cooperation among students.
   F) provide tools for students to peer-tutor error resolution.
6. clearly articulate and model instructions for tasks so students are well-informed and less fretful about the objectives in order to more readily engage in them.
7. have students become at ease with constantly changing partners in pair-tasks.
8. communicate high expectations whilst assuring students can reach them.

All these tips to help students manage their own anxiety create a nurturing environment for the students, making them feel safe, valued and more competent. Their participation anxiety (Karim & Shah, 2012) will greatly diminish and their natural communication strengths will be enhanced, setting the stage for enacting communication strategies in a low-anxiety classroom environment. Hashimoto's study (2002) rallies this view: "by increasing perceived competence and reducing language anxiety, the willingness to communicate may lead to more language use in the classroom" (p.57).

6   Taxonomy

6.1   Prioritizing OCS

The previous set of 6 teaching practices to instill OCS use in the classroom (5.2) coupled with the 8 instructional devices to lower anxiety (5.3) provide the frame into which to embed specific communication strategies.

Given the limited time allotted to each course, instructors need to select those OCS which seem least time consuming, easiest, most level appropriate and most effective to teach.

The global aspect of choice to be made concerns the two types of OCS described above: the instructor's motive should be to facilitate proficiency in achievement strategies and support a fitting and parsimonious use of reduction strategies. My

contention here is that by focusing on those two aspects, avoidance behaviors will be consequentially and naturally curtailed. Nakatani's (2005) findings concur with this assumption.

The list of strategies in Table 2, has been compiled both from existing taxonomies (Selinker 1972; Tarone, 1977; Canale and Swain 1980; Canale, 1983; Faerch and Kasper, 1983; Bialystok, 1990; Dörnyei, 1995; McDonough, 1995; Cohen, 1998; Inuzuka, 2001), personal research (Jactat, 2001) and pedagogical experience. The purpose here is to provide a taxonomy of OCS that takes into account levels of teachability within the twofold set of OCS + extra set of deviant behaviors (achievement & reduction strategies + avoidance behaviors).

The listing, from top to bottom, is arranged from most useful for beginner level students of a FL to least necessary. OCS are marked in an attempt to classify them according to teachability to complete beginner level students, beginner level and pre-intermediate level (see Table 2).

It is important that instructors choose OCS that are easily acquired, readily useful, and thus trainable in class. As students progress in their language competency, more elaborate strategies can be taught. Example words and phrases are also provided. This classification is meant for teachers of any FL classroom who intend to design their own CS teaching material. The list remains descriptive and does not provide the actual pedagogical activities that need to be designed to implement OCS training.

A unique feature of this list compared to existing taxonomies is that it also provides some possible start-up answers to the OCS question devices. OCS should not be constrained to mere requests, prompts and/or gambits but should include appropriate responses to those enticers when called for. During spoken activities, one can notice that although students get a grasp to using some of the OCS tools, their interlocutor is sometimes at a lost in choosing the right reaction or phrasing. Modeling *interaction OCS* and not only *individual action OCS* is key to acquiring successful conversation skills. *Individual action OCS* is initiated by one of the speakers. *Interaction OCS* includes both action and reaction gimmicks, whether they be verbal or non-verbal. For example, collaborative OCS include both request & reply statements. Students can train to use these until it becomes habitual to resort to such skills.

Finally, it is worthwhile to recall the distinction made above in defining OCS. These are presented as devices for both sustaining conversation and fixing communication breakdowns. Some OCS actually overlap both intentions. The taxonomy in the following Table renders a detailed and exemplified list of OCS.

Table 2. Taxonomy - OCS teachability

	marking	teachability
*	Single asterisk	totally beginner level must learn OCS
**	Double asterisk	can be taught after 20-40 hours of instruction
***	Triple asterisk	pre-intermediate level
x	Exponent X	not thought worth teaching
→	Exponent Arrow	Need to draw students' attention to inappropriateness of these OCS or the need to adapt them so they become more useful

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Achievement strategies

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1. *Collaborative
   A) *Request /Provide assistance
      Excuse-me, I have a question!   *Yes, how can I help you?*
   B) *R/P information
      How do you say (that) in French?   *It's (this).*
      How do you spell (that word)?   *You spell it (a.b.c.)*
   C) *R/P repetition
      One more time please.   <Repeats and emphasizes>
      **More slowly please*   <Slows pace of talking>
   D) *Expressing non-understanding/unknowingness
      I don't understand / Pardon?   <Repeats more slowly>
      I forgot. I don't remember.   *I think it's…*
      **Sorry, I'm not sure I understand.*   *What I mean is…*
      ˣ Parroting *pickup?* (echoing a word/structure with rising intonation)
   E) *R/P clarification
      What did you say?   *I said…*
      **What do you mean?*   *What I mean is…*
   F) * R/P confirmation
      * Do you know what (thing)*   *Yes, it's (that)*
                          is/means?   *No, what does it mean?*
      ** Did you understand?*   *I'm not sure.*
      ** Can I/you say that?*   *I think so./ I don't think so…*
      *** Am I making sense?*   *Yes, I guess./Mm..not sure, can you…?*
   G) ** Interpretive summary
      ** You mean…?*   *Yes, that's it. Exactly!*
      *** So what you're saying is …?*   *No not quite but rather…*
2. *Non-verbal
   A) *Gestures: metaphoric, sketching direction of thought;
            deictic, *pointing*; iconic, *descriptif*
   B) *Mime
   C) *Sketching (drawing)
   D) *Spelling (writing out the word)
   E) *Sound imitations
   F) →Body-language / facial expressions: *raised eyebrows, blank look, eye-contact...* ³
3. *Maintenance
   A) *Time-gaining
      ① *Request for time   *Just a minute please...*   *OK.*
      ② **Hesitation Fillers   *mm…, yeah…, let me see…, good question…, that's a difficult question/one…, as a matter of fact…*
      ③ **Fillers   *so, what, well, you see, you see what I mean, you know*
      ④ **Gambits   *Guess what..!, Actually…, By the way…*
      ⑤ ˣ Repetitions   *I don't,…mmm I don't know when I will… will go there.*

B) *Sustaining
  ① *Bouncers   *How about you?, And you?*
  ② *Reactors   *Oh I see. Ok, that's great! Woah! Oh yeah?*
  ③ *Shadowing   Repeating what has been said
          A   Do you go shopping on week-ends?
          B   Do I go shopping on week-ends?...
  ④ *Feedback   *mm-hm, yeah, I see, huh-huh, cool,*
  ⑤ **Developers   to a question, expand answer by addressing
                           WH questions
          A   Do you like sports?
          B   Yes I play (what?) badmington (where?) at the club (when?) on
          Tuesdays (with who?) with my classmates.
  ⑥ **Follow-ups   to an answer, develop by addressing WH questions
          B   Yes I like music.
          A   What kind of music?
          B   rock and heavy metal.
          A   (your favorite?) (How often…?) (when?) (where?), etc.
  ⑦ ** Stretchers   *and, so, because, that's why, then, etc.*
4. ** Self-solving
  A) * Approximation (chair for bench)
  B) ** Exemplification (*for example…*)
  C) *** Circumlocution (physical description, constituent features,
       location properties, time/historical properties, functional properties)
  D) ˣ Word coinage (creating a non-existent word) *airball* for *balloon*
  E) ˣ Self-repair (restructure *what I mean is…*, rephrase/overelaborate)
  F) ˣ Retrieval (*the pha..pharm…the pharmacist*)

Reduction strategies

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1. *Appropriate code switching to L1 or L3
2. *Interlanguage-based
   A) *Generalization: the use of all-purpose words
   B) *Literal translations from L1 or L3
   C) ˣ Foreignizing
3. *** Message-switching (to maintain the conversation)
   A) Changing topics: *Talking of …, That reminds me …, By the way …*
   B) Message abandonment: *Oh, never mind…, I don't know how to explain this...*

Avoidance behaviors

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1. → Silence & long pauses
2. → Inappropriate code switching
3. → Message-abandonment *Laughter…!*
4. → Feign understanding
5. → Underelaboration
6. → Linguistic avoidance

Three aspects need to be stressed in regards to the use of this taxonomy as a reference for teaching OCS. As previously mentioned, first, achievement strategies need to be facilitated in language instruction, then reduction strategies circumscribed and finally avoidance behaviors called to students' attention.

6.2   Facilitate achievement strategies
From the outset, many such strategies can be included into the very first class. *Collaborative, *non-verbal and *maintenance strategies are all excellent ways to introduce students to a new language by modeling sets of prefabricated questions and answers. Prompted by the gesture of raising one's hand "*Excuse-me (I have a question)*" is answered with "*Yes, (how can I help you)?*" and can immediately lead into many questions for requesting information "*How do you say (that) in French?*". Course material and activities need to be designed to implement such OCS training.

Once a learner has had some amount of instruction, **self-solving strategies best suited for training are **exemplification and later on ***circumlocution.

Word coinage, self-repair and retrieval are probably not to be taught as they are meta-cognitive processes pointing to transitory interlanguage tactics. These problem-solving responses to a language deficit will subside gradually as the learner gets a firmer hold on the language.

6.3   Circumscribe reduction strategies
These account for strategies that students might be naturally prone to using. They nevertheless need formal guidance. The teacher should stress which strategies are beneficial to learning and communication and in which circumstances they should resort to them. Moreover the extent they should rely on them during interaction should be clearly delimited.

1.   *Appropriate code switching to L1 or L3
Switching to a shared language (Japanese, English, other) can be a practical communication device when used pertinently and parsimoniously. Exercises addressing this technique should be designed to raise students' awareness about its appropriateness.

2.   *Interlanguage-based
A) *Generalization: the use of all-purpose words such as *thing, stuff, whatchamacallit, thingie* is a useful device at beginner level before developing a richer repertoire of formulaic sequences and collocations. Using words preceded by adjectives such as *good/bad, big/small* or verbs such as *say/make/do* account for some practical 'lexical teddy-bears'. Nevertheless these holistic gimmicks should give way to more elaborate vocabulary as the student progresses in levels (Millar, 2016).
B) *Literal translations from L1 or L3: translating literally a lexical item, idiom, compound word or structure from L1 or L3 to L2. Resorting to another language structure such as English for example to hypothesize French sentence structure or vocabulary can help in certain instances. However drawing on learners'

previous knowledge needs careful monitoring to provide them with models that are actually relevant and function with adaptations. For example the sentence order in "I am Japanese" provides an easy model for "Je suis Japonais" in French. But "I am 18" does not transfer to French "J'ai 18 ans" (*"I have 18 years"*). Overuse of this tactic might draw too much focus on transfer techniques which are often times not suitable and may lead inadvertently to less pertinent OCS such as foreignizing or inadequate code-switching altogether.

C) [x] Foreignizing: using a native word and adjusting it so it sounds like an L2 word (i.e., with a target language pronunciation) or adjoin a L2 morphology (e.g., adding a L2 suffix). These techniques are ill-advised especially when languages such as Japanese and French are so far apart in all linguistic aspects. Spanish and French on the other hand share a close root in Latin and such a technique may prove at times handy.

3. ***Message-switching (to maintain the conversation)
***Changing topics (avoiding topic areas or concepts that pose language difficulties), and ***Message abandonment (leaving a message unfinished because of language difficulties) can be given direct instructional time once students have acquired some fluidity in conversation and a reliable bulk of linguistic knowledge. Useful gambits can serve the conversation well when the intention to switch topics or abandon a line of thought are clearly expressed (*Oh, never mind…, By the way…*). Here again, the focus is not to avoid interaction but to ensure continued exchange. Japanese are often seen chuckling or laughing their way out of embarrassment (see avoidance behaviors), a message abandonment technique that remains implicit. Explicitly mentioning there is a problem, asking for help or saying let's move on to something else is far more conducive to developing proper communication competence.

Now that we have seen which OCS are relevant to teaching in the beginner classroom, we will develop the argument by which such devices can actually help reduce unwarranted behaviors.

6.4   Reduce avoidance behaviors

As we have seen in 5.2 (see Educating about CS), calling students' attention to the fact that certain behaviors do not promote neither fruitful interaction nor learning is an important instructional device.

Furthermore, building OCS tools into the syllabus design, does in itself a satisfying job at reducing avoidance behaviors. Let's see how this has been empirically observed in the pedagogical context of teaching French at beginner level.

By providing training into collaborative and maintenance strategies, students become proficient in ways to sustain conversation rather than dropping it all together (less *message-abandonment*). When there is a breakdown in the conversation for lack of knowledge, they have an array of set questions to ask for assistance. Instead of falling silent they can rely on questions or fillers. The interlocutor does not have to wait through the dead pauses, but can intervene and offer assistance (less *silence and long pauses*). The tendency to switch back

to L1 decreases as students know they can rely on their CS to find lacking information through their peers or the teacher. They have also trained using *appropriate code-switching* and know which circumstances are most suitable to utilize their native tongue or another language. Likewise they have learned not to switch to full sentences in L1 but always to try to get the meaning across with minimal L1 interference (less *inappropriate code switching*). By resorting to *stretchers* and *developers*, students learn to produce longer utterances and as a result underelaboration tends to disappear altogether. Once trained to seek help, students will recognize learning opportunities when they are stuck with a linguistic point such as pronunciation, grammar or syntax. *Linguistic avoidance* will then naturally dwindle. Finally, by constantly negotiating meaning, students tend not to *feign understanding*. Reaching reciprocal understanding becomes the very aim of the pair task activities (*I can do it! We can do it!*). And the very process of using the target language to convey meaning entails a feeling of personal or interpersonal achievement (*I did it! We did it!*). This outcome is in itself a great source of satisfaction (*I had fun!*).

6.5   Classroom practices of OCS
The strategies presented in this taxonomy can be explicitly taught from the very first class and serve as guidance to develop training material through different levels. Activities using OSC can be thought out so that students model the teacher, repeat guided conversations, do interviews and role-play. The scope of this article does not allow for developing the array of pedagogical exercises for OCS training and use. These pragmatics will be discussed and exposed in a sequel article.

Final thoughts
This paper provides a number of guidelines which can substantially contribute to heed MEXT's (2014) incentives presented in the introduction, i.e. to 1. develop practical communication abilities; 2. deepen the understanding of foreign cultures; and 3. foster positive attitudes toward communicating in a second language.
This article professes that one of the exemplary pedagogical stratagems to meet the aforementioned goals, resides in the explicit instruction and training of OCS through pair-based activities. The use of prefabricated patterns of OCS from the outset in foreign language instruction, is meant for immediate classroom involvement in the target language. Although the morphological components of these phrases are not known to the beginner learners, these memorized stock phrases and words empower students to use the new language with a certain degree of confidence and enthusiasm. Engrossed in the very act of communicating in a foreign language from the start, their willingness to communicate unfolds throughout the first weeks of the curriculum.
All the tools presented in this paper play a role in creating a space where students are empowered to explore language through actual communication without the over apprehension of failure. As MacIntyre et al. (1998) put it, "the ultimate goal of the learning process should be to engender in language education students' willingness to communicate". The instructional devices

presented here contribute to optimize teaching expedients and raise student participation and motivation. In line with this, Oxford (1990) holds that highly motivated learners will adopt "a significant greater range of appropriate strategies than do less motivated learners" (p. 13).

It is important however to note that the effectiveness of the approach (to keep the conversation afloat and engender significant learning) is not exclusively by virtue of the implementation of teaching OCS but rather emerges from the various constituting parts of a holistic language immersion program. Some of these are: providing whole-group/individual feedback, getting student feedback, having frequently and routinely formative assessment, designing well-thought learning material, using multi-modal instruction, etc. One example for the latter component has been detailed in a paper (Jactat, 2017) which discusses the neurological implications in supporting memorization and OCS competence through *gestures*.

It is my hope that this paper offers teaching professionals some indications as to what OCS can be adopted as a pedagogical instrument to ensure students make significant progress in spoken foreign language proficiency. Moreover that significant ideas and tips provided here will support teachers in not underestimating the importance of providing an environment which enhances students' ability to participate in class. In any case, to ensure students do enjoy the experience of learning a foreign language, keeping the conversation flowing is essential.

Endnotes

[1] This paper stems from a presentation entitled "Stand and Talk: Communication Strategies from the Start". This workshop was delivered at the 5th Faculty Development Seminar by the Foreign Language Education Division of the University of Tsukuba on July 19th 2016. Participants engaged right up-front in a hands-on simulation of how university students are introduced to their first French conversation classes: standing and using communication strategy phrases propped by gestures. Video footage of actual classroom situations illustrated the teaching and learning procedure.

[2] Author's *italics*. Current scholars still use the term "reduction strategies". This paper makes a clear distinction between "reduction strategies" and "avoidance behaviors" initially embedded into the former. The latter terminology encloses those types of attitudes unproductive towards positive learning, sustaining or repairing communication.

[3] These mostly unconscious messages need to be brought to the student's awareness and supplemented for example by request/provide clarification CS.

[4] The talk (see endnote 1) concluded on a survey carried out among 28 students from the Social and International Studies Basic French BI class. The results captured the students' perceptions of their learning and language use at the end of their first semester (10 hours of instruction). About 95% of the students converged in assessing the role of tasks using OCS in a positive and constructive light, as regards to their learning experience and competency.

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