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The Effects of a Triggering Instruction on Communication Strategy Transference

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Research on communication strategies (CSs) has been drawing much attention in the area of psycholinguistics and applied linguistics. This study examined if triggering instruction can accelerate the cognitive aspects of CSs transference from L1 to L2. In the first part of the experiment, all participants, twenty-one Japanese university students, looked at pictures and were asked to say anything that came to their mind in English. In the second part, half of them (an experimental group) were instructed to begin the task by saying likes and dislikes of the picture. The other half (a control group) did not receive such an instruction. Participants also answered a questionnaire asking about self-evaluation of the task performance in order to examine their affective and cognitive state. Their utterances were classified as either objective descriptions of what was shown in the picture or subjective expressions of what they imagined or felt. The results of the experimental group clearly demonstrated the effect of instructional intervention; subjective expression increased and objective description decreased, and also their anxiety decreased from the first part of the experiment to the second. These findings suggest that more attention should be paid to the cognitive aspects of CSs such as change of viewpoint from objective to subjective, which we may call 'self-expression switching,' and its transference from L1.

Keywords: communication strategy, instructional intervention, Japanese EFL learners, self-expression switching, transferability

1 Introduction

Communication strategies (henceforth CSs) are generally defined as strategies that speakers use to solve communication problems, which could occur in both the L1 and L2 environments. Much research has been done especially focusing on CSs that L2 learners need to know in order to compensate for their L2 deficiencies and keep conversation going. Since the notion of CSs was first introduced by Selinker (1972) as one of five distinct processes which are

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central to L2 learning, research has been accumulated on the nature of CSs, taxonomies of strategic language devices, variation in CSs use, and the teachability of CSs (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). There have been two competing approaches with a perspective on CSs. Yule and Tarone (1997) characterized one of them as being rather profligate ('the Pros'). The Pros are originally reflected in Tarone's (1977) and Færch and Kasper's (1983) theory, follow a primarily linguistic approach to define CSs, and are prompted by their investigation to propose additional categories, maintaining and expanding existing taxonomies. Some of the compensatory strategies they proposed include circumlocution, word-coinage, foreignizing, and code-switching, which are alternative plans for the learners to carry out their original communicative goal by manipulating available language. They have also been arguing the benefit of teaching CSs in L2 and trying to obtain empirical data for the teachability of CSs (e.g., Dörnyei, 1995; Færch & Kasper, 1986; Rabab'ah, 2016; Tarone, 1984).

The teachability, however, has been a controversial issue among CSs researchers. The other group, characterized as being rather conservative ('the Cons'), follows a psycholinguistic approach and insists that CSs research should investigate the cognitive processes underlying strategic language use. Bongaerts and Poulisse (1989) argued that research on the use of CSs by L2 learners has tended to treat L2 referential communication as an isolated phenomenon, and CSs in L2 users have generally been described in terms of categories stemming from taxonomies which largely reflect surface features of learner's utterances rather than the processes leading to such utterances. The Cons categorized the compensatory strategies only into two basic types; the conceptual and linguistic/code strategies, which are a process-oriented classification rather than product-oriented one that is regarded as the Pro's topology. Kellerman (1991) indicated that CSs have already been developed in L1, and there is no need to teach CSs since the strategic competence is transferable from L1. Bongaerts and Poulisse (1989) and Kellerman et al. (1990) investigated the similarity of CSs use in L1 and L2 utterances through experiments using a concrete picture description task. Their results showed L1 speakers and L2 learners handle their referential problems in much the same way. Yoshioka and Kellerman (2006) reported transfer from L1 to L2 in narrative occurred both in speech and gesture.

Our previous study (Aotani & Takahashi, 2019) examined qualitative difference between L1 and L2 utterances of Japanese learners of English. Participants of the study looked at pictures and were instructed to say anything that came to their mind either in Japanese or in English. Their utterances were analyzed in terms of the ratio of objective descriptions of the picture and subjective expressions about the picture. The result revealed that they made more objective descriptions than subjective expressions in English, while they did the opposite in Japanese. For example, when they were exposed to a picture that shows two people enjoying skydiving, they tended to say 'It's cool and I

want to try it someday' in Japanese, while 'The sky is blue, and two people are skydiving' in English. What makes these differences? They seem not be caused by linguistic deficiencies, because participants, university students who have learned English for more than ten years, should have knowledge for making such an easy expression. Thus more psychological factors should be considered. If 'using subjective expressions freely' could be regarded as one of the CSs in L1, it's transference to L2 utterance was not found in our results. A change of viewpoint, from objective to subjective in this case, may be necessary for this kind of CSs to be activated, when it is cognitive rather than linguistic in nature. Therefore, even if strategic competence can transfer from L1 to L2 as Kellerman (1991) argued, we have presupposed that there may be some way to accelerate its transference.

In this study, we explored if simple instructional intervention works as a trigger to accelerate the cognitive aspects of the CSs transference. In the same way as in our previous study, participants, twenty-one Japanese university students, looked at pictures and were asked to say anything that came to their mind in English. Half of them (an experimental group) were instructed to begin the task by saying 'I like (or I don't like) this picture.' The other half (a control group) did not receive such an instruction. If this simple intervention works, participants in the experimental group are expected to make more subjective expressions as a result of CSs transference from L1. In addition to the utterance indices, self-evaluation indices of the task performance were also analyzed in order to examine participants' affective and cognitive state.

2 Methods

2.1 Participants

Twenty-one Japanese university students (17 males and 4 females, mean age 21.3 years old, mean TOEIC score 442.9), all majoring in education, participated in the experiment. They were divided into a control group (8 males and 2 females, mean TOEIC score 445.0) and an experimental group (9 males and 2 females, mean TOEIC score 440.9). There was no statistical difference between TOEIC score of two groups (t (19) = .195, ns).

2.2 Materials

Ten pictures, collected from copyright-free materials on the Internet, were used as stimuli (Figure 1). They were five pairs of the same subjects, skydiving, cake, party, couple, and monkey. Two sets of these five pictures were used in the first and the second parts of the experiment. Pictures were projected on a whiteboard (29 × 39 degree).

Figure 1. Pictures used as stimuli in the experiment

2.3 Procedure

Participants sat on a chair in front of the whiteboard and looked at pictures one by one for one minute each. In the first part of the experiment, all participants (i.e., in both the control and the experimental groups) were given the same instructions. The points were "the experimental task is to say in English what you feel or think by looking at the picture," "please utter anything that comes to your mind, without trying to arrange them in a sophisticated sentence," and "please make as many utterances as possible, which can include simple words and exclamation as well as complete sentences." After looking at five pictures, participants answered 17 questions asking about self-evaluation of the task performance and their feelings (see Table 1) on a 5-point Likert scale.

Then, at the beginning of the second part of the experiment with no interval from the first part, participants in the experimental group were given the additional instruction as follows, "please begin the task by saying 'I like this picture' or 'I don't like this picture,' and after that you are free to say anything." Participants in the control group did not receive the additional instruction. After looking at five pictures, all participants answered the same questionnaire as in the first part and were asked to give any impressions of the experiment he or she might have.

2.4 Data processing

Participants' utterances were recorded, transcribed, and segmented into meaning units, the minimum unit of words that make sense. Then, each unit was classified by the authors as either an objective description of what is shown in the picture (e.g., 'they are drinking alcohol') or a subjective expression of what participant imagined (e.g., 'they are maybe company colleagues'), what he or she was impressed about (e.g., 'what a beautiful cake'), and a feeling of his or her own (e.g., 'I want to go to a hot spring'). It should be noted that the initial utterance ('I like this picture' or 'I don't like this picture') by participants in the experimental group in the second part of the experiment, that was mandatory for them, was excluded from the data. We also gathered self-related items from the subjective expression units, such as 'I want to do it once in my life,' 'I've seen it before,' and 'I don't like sweets.'

3 Results

3.1 Utterance indices

One participant in the control group (a male) was excluded from the analysis because of an inaudible recording. For each of remaining 20 participants, the number of objective units and subjective units in utterances for five pictures were summed separately for the first part and the second part of the experiment. Figure 2 shows the results of the control group (A) and the experimental group (B). Three-way (Group × Part × Unit-type) analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant three-way interaction (F (1,18) = 9.68, p = .006, η^2 = .350). A simple interaction between Part and Unit-type was significant in the experimental group (F (1,18) = 14.20, p = .001, η^2 = .441), but not in the control group. Moreover, a simple main effect of Part was significant for the objective unit (F (1,18) = 16.27, p = .001, η^2 = .475) and the subjective unit (F (1,18) = 5.75, p = .028, η^2 = .242) in the experimental group and for the subjective unit in the control group (F (1,18) = 6.31, p = .022, η^2 = .260), but not for the objective unit in the control group.

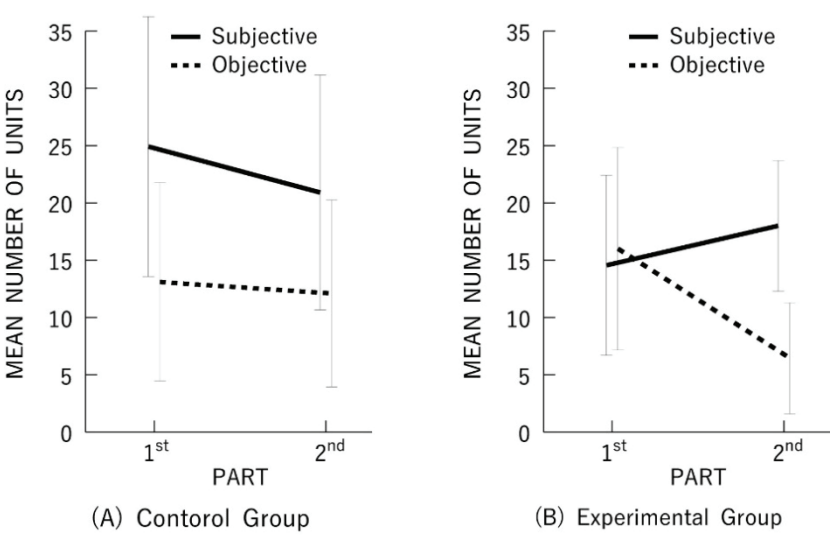

Figure 2. Mean number of subjective and objective units in the control group (A) and the experimental group (B)

Considering the small number of data samples, we conducted additional statistical analysis using a nonparametric test. In each participant, variation (increase or decrease) of number of the objective units between the first part and the second part and that of the subjective units were calculated, and the group difference was tested by the Mann-Whitney U test. For the objective

units, the score of the control group (Mean -1.00, SD 5.15) was significantly higher than that of the experimental group (Mean -9.55, SD 9.47; $U = 21.00$, $p = .031$, $r = -.49$). For the subjective units, the score of the experimental group (Mean 3.45, SD 5.73) was significantly higher than that of the control group (Mean -4.00, SD 3.20; $U = 87.00$, $p = .003$, $r = .64$). Again, these tests confirmed that the objective utterances decreased and the subjective utterances increased in the experimental group in comparison with the control group.

Figure 3 shows mean number of self-related utterance units in each group and in each part. Two-way (Group × Part) ANOVA did not show any significant interaction or main effects. Although the graph suggests a Group × Part interaction, it did not reach the statistical significance (F (1,18) = 3.78, $p = .068$, $\eta^2 = .174$).

In addition, we examined the quantitative aspect of the results. Number of words in each meaning unit (regardless of its unit type, subjective or objective) was counted and averaged for each participant and each part of the experiment. Figure 4 shows mean words per meaning unit in each group and in each part. Two-way (Group × Part) ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Part (F (1,18) = 21.77, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .547$). Again, despite an appearance of the graph suggesting a Group × Part interaction, it was not significant (F (1,18) = 2.40, $p = .139$, $\eta^2 = .118$).

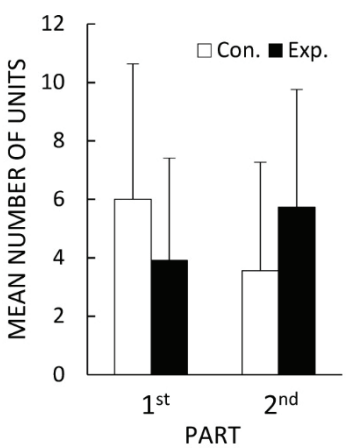

Figure 3. Mean number of self-related utterance units in each group

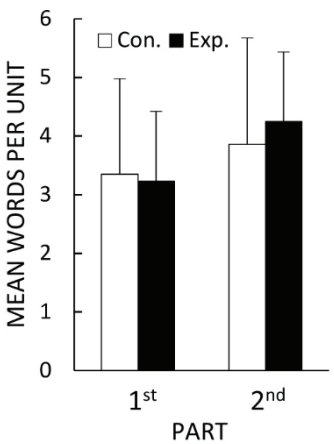

Figure 4. Mean words per unit in each group

3.2 Self-evaluation indices

The results of the self-evaluation questionnaire answered by 21 participants underwent the factor analysis (principal factor method, Promax rotation), which yielded six factors; *anxiety*, *self-relating*, *dissatisfaction*, *positiveness*, *powerlessness*, and *lack of capacity* (Table 1). In each participant, mean rating of items with highlighted factor loading in Table 1 was calculated to give a representative value of each factor, separately for the first and the second parts.

Figure 5 shows mean score of each factor in the control group and the experimental group in each part. Two-way (Group × Part) ANOVA was conducted for the result of each factor. For *anxiety*, a Group × Part interaction was shown to be significant (F (1,19) = 6.52, p = .019, η^2 = .255), and a simple main effect of Part was significant in the experimental group (F (1,19) = 12.64, p = .002, η^2 = .400), but not in the control group. For *self-relating*, a Group × Part interaction was significant (F (1,19) = 6.67, p = .018, η^2 = .260), and a simple main effect of Part was significant in the experimental group (F (1,19) = 8.37, p = .009, η^2 = .306), but not in the control group. For *positiveness*, only a main effect of Group was shown to be significant (F (1,19) = 4.49, p = .047, η^2 = .191). For *lack of capacity*, a Group × Part interaction was significant (F (1,19) = 4.47, p = .048, η^2 = .191), but a simple main effect of Part was not significant in both groups. For *dissatisfaction* and *powerlessness*, any interaction or main effects were not significant.

Table 1. Results of a Factor Analysis for the Self-Evaluation Data

ITEMS	Anx	S-R	Dis	Pos	Pow	L-C
I worried about making grammartical mistakes.	**.939**	-.100	.195	-.011	-.023	-.259
I was embarrassed when speaking English.	**.879**	.064	-.007	-.242	.098	.136
I felt nervous when speaking English.	**.671**	-.086	-.156	.332	-.063	.203
I tried to say something in relationship to my experience.	-.024	**.899**	.278	-.258	.027	.205
I tried to say something in relationship to my wish.	-.088	**.700**	.110	.230	.073	-.134
I tried to say whether I like the picture or not.	-.017	**.626**	-.013	.144	.052	.151
I am satisfied with what I have said.	-.128	.114	**.695**	.227	-.155	.058
I could have done even better if I'd had a bit more time.	.159	-.097	**.648**	.132	.409	.261
I was able to speak better English than I expected.	.110	.212	**.610**	-.042	-.002	.012
I think I could do better if I tried the task again.	-.094	-.123	.200	**.767**	.215	.129
When I cannot think of the correct expressions to say, I tried to find a different way to express the idea.	.098	.125	.170	**.708**	-.301	-.105
This task was pleasant to do.	-.093	.044	-.131	**.478**	.326	.031
I think I could do better if I tried the task again.	-.202	-.140	.079	.021	**-.578**	.071
I gave up speaking because I could not find the correct expressions to say.	.267	-.013	-.199	.020	**-.514**	.262
I tried to explain everthing shown on the picture.	-.035	-.040	-.248	.019	.110	**-.565**
I had things that I wanted to say, but I could not find proper words to express them.	.006	.362	-.276	.087	-.062	**.553**
I tried to explain a subject of the picture.	.230	.310	-.159	.295	.292	**-.354**
Correlation between factors: Anx	.187	-.250	.188	.121	-.083	
S-R		.033	.317	.225	-.073	
Dis			.166	.346	.025	
Pos				.366	-.176	
Pow					.184	

Note: Anx. anxiety, S-R. self-relating, Dis. dissatisfaction, Pos. positiveness, Pow. powerlessness, L-C. lack of capacity

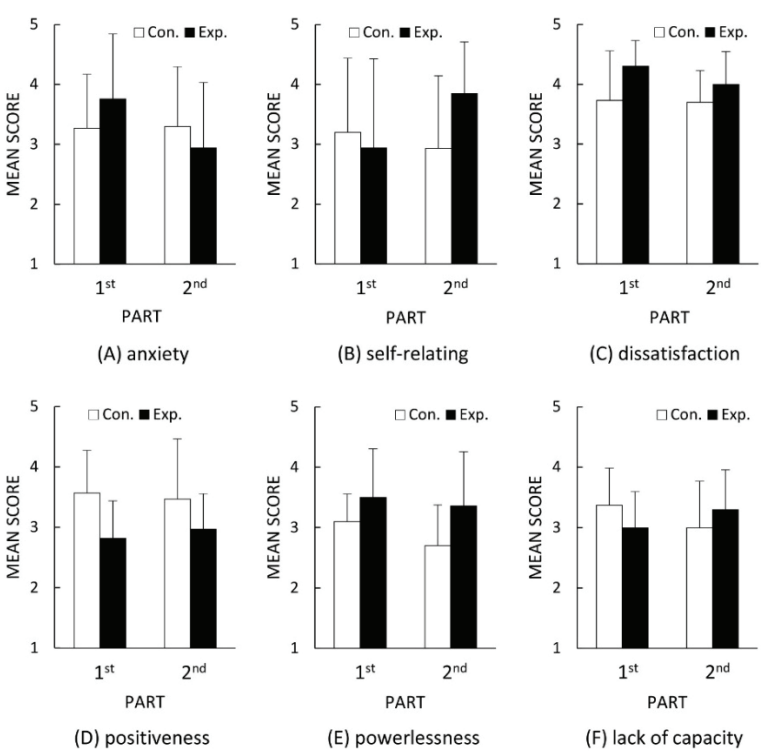

Figure 5. Mean score of each factor of self-evaluation data in each group.

4 Discussion

The results of the experimental group of this study clearly demonstrated the effect of experimental manipulation, that is an instructional intervention. Figure 2B shows an increase of subjective expression and a decrease of objective description from the first part to the second. Such a simple instruction as "please say 'I like this picture' or 'I don't like this picture' at the beginning of the task" functioned as a trigger to make participant's viewpoint change from objective to subjective. This effect was typically shown by some participants who used a phrase 'because …' immediately after the mandated phrase about likes and dislikes of the picture (two samples of transcription are shown in Table 2). It is assumed that the use of subjective expressions increased because they noticed expressing their feelings and experiences stirred by the picture worked well to continue the task.

Table 2. Samples of Utterances (not corrected) by Participants in the Experimental Group

Picture	First Part	Second Part
Skydiving	Two people in the sky. A man is looking at the camera with smile. They are wearing glasses. I can see lake or sea and rice field. A man wearing white clothes. The second man is wearing black clothes. The first man have rucksack, maybe parachute.	I like this picture, because if I have a chance I try this skydiving. But I cannot high place, so maybe I should have challenge mind. But I can see two people look happy, so I want to do this. Skydiving can a lot of view, sea, cloud, and city. So I want to do in Japan or other countries.
Party	They are enjoying the party. They are holding glasses. One woman is watching me.	I like this picture, because I always go to Izakaya (NOTE; Japanese tavern). So I like this picture. I want to go there. I want to drink beer. I think they are enjoying.

Note. The first and the second parts for each picture are utterances by the same person.

Moreover, such a change of viewpoint may also have influenced participant's mental state. Figure 5A shows a dramatic decrease of anxiety reported by participants in the experimental group from the first part to the second. In the first part, they may have felt pushed into the situation that they have to say something in a language they do not use often without any clear instructions about what is to be said. As a result, they struggled to describe what was seen in the picture, but stopped speaking when they felt nothing else could be described. They may have been frustrated when they could not continue speaking and think of how to broaden the topic that the pictures provided. However, in the second part, they seemed to be released from such a hardship by changing their viewpoint and being reminded of the

communication strategy they usually use in their L1. This result shows the importance of analyzing an internal change of the learner's mental process as well as an external change manifested in his or her utterances.

In contrast, the results of the control group, both in utterance indices and in self-evaluation indices, did not change largely from the first part to the second. They indicate that only repeating the same task is not enough to cause participant's viewpoint to change or to influence their mental state. Unexpectedly, the number of subjective expressions was higher than that of objective descriptions all through the experiment. Because, as Figure 5D shows, participants in the control group were relatively positive for the task, they may have already transferred their CSs in L1 to continue speaking and broaden the topic from the beginning of the experiment.

Kellerman (1991) stated "there is no justification for providing training in compensatory strategies in the classroom. ... Teach the learners more language and let the strategies look after themselves" (p.158), but he also mentioned "There might be some point in creating situations in the classroom which would encourage learners to use strategies and thus overcome inhibitions arising from having to operate in the L2" (p.160; Notes 13). To see the results of the present study in light of CSs transference, we can conclude that communication competence is transferable from L1 to L2, however, such a transfer is not likely to occur based only on learner's spontaneous awareness or tactfulness. The findings of this study demonstrated a possibility that a small trigger can start the transfer, which suggests educational implications in classroom instruction.

5 Conclusion

This study suggests that more attention should be paid to the cognitive aspects of CSs such as the changing of viewpoint from objective to subjective, which we may call 'self-expression switching.' Studies on CSs have been mainly focused on grammar and lexis, which is 'how to say' things in L2, but most participants of this study, especially in the first part of the experiment, had trouble with 'what to say' in L2. Rampton (1997) argued investigation on CSs should consider sociolinguistic and interactional perspective. In that regard, self-expression switching could be classified as one of the sociolinguistic CSs that encourage speakers to share their opinion and experiences with others that is indispensable to make a better conversation. This strategy, which is about 'what to say' in communication, is used by people in their L1 in everyday life, and for L2 learners, noticing such CSs is important to improve both their communication skills and self-efficacy in L2.

Finally, some limitations of this study should be mentioned. First, findings here are based on the results from specific samples, education-majoring students and mostly males. So in order to generalize our knowledge,

it is necessary to examine more participants with various backgrounds. In addition, it is important to overcome considerable individual differences of the data, which may be a chief reason for no statistical difference of the results shown in Figures 3 and 4. One possible improvement would be requiring participants to make utterances to a certain amount without time limitation. Therefore, further studies are necessary to accumulate evidence for CSs transfer triggered by self-expression switching that would be helpful for L2 learners to make better communication.

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