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The Effect of Shyness, Elicitation Task Nature on Iranian EFL Students Use of Oral Communication Strategies

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This work supports the effectiveness of the employment of communication strategies for better and more efficient communication. Communication strategies varies as a function of different factors such as personality traits, pedagogical setting, L2 context, etc. The present research aimed at delving into the relationship between shyness, task nature and the frequency and type of communication strategies used by the subjects. The subjects of the study were 168 male and female students at Ilam university and Islamic Azad University of Tehran (South Branch). The subjects took a Michigan test of language proficiency. Out of 168 subjects taking the Michigan test, 106 were found to be homogenous and qualified to take part in three different communicative activities: Free Discussion, Translation, and Story Reconstruction. Out of the 106 subjects 102 took part in the above-mentioned activities. They were also given to fill up the Stanford Shyness questionnaire.

The statistical procedure of Chi-Square was used for the purpose of the study. It was shown that shyness affects the adoption and choice of communication strategies negatively. i.e. non-shy students use more communication strategies than their shy counterparts, and also that non-shy students use more achievement strategies vis-à-vis their shy friends, while the latter group preferred to use more avoidance strategies. The study, however, couldn't establish and confirm any relationship between the type of task and the type of communication strategies used by the subjects.

Keywords: Communication strategies, Task nature, shyness, code/ conceptual strategies, avoidance/ achievement strategies

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Introduction

Anyone who has studied a foreign language has often found him/herself in a position when using it, where they had to 'improvise' in order to get their message across and overcome the momentary inadequacy of their language resources. More often, the 'obstacle' in communication seems to be a vocabulary item, which has not been learnt, or cannot be recalled. This 'improvisation' or device is a Communication Strategy, has been the object of much research in the SLA and Sociolinguistic fields since the late seventies. The use of these strategies varies as a function of different factors including L2 proficiency, personality traits and …. As shyness has been observed in actual behaviour and on a range of psychophysiological data, the most prevalent of which being measures of verbal fluency, so out of these factors, the present study is to deal with the relationship between this personality trait and the use of CSs as reliably documented aspects of communication and verbal fluency (Bialystok 1990). Also in her description of the model for language processing, Bialystok (1990) states that two components are involved in such a model - analysis of linguistic knowledge and control of linguistic processing. Specific language uses (conversation, reading, translation etc) are said to demand specific levels of skills in each of these processing components. For that matter, different tasks, as specific language uses requiring varying degrees of mastery over those components may lead to differential performance on the part of the inter lingual user. Along the same line, Bachman (1995) states that there seem to be some types of test tasks which are, to a whole degree, susceptible to the effects of the test takers' strategic competence. For that matter, task nature is another variable, the effect of which on CCs is to be delved into in this study.

Communication Strategies: Review of the Literature

The efficient use of language (an L2, in this case) to achieve successful communication in situations where there is some sort of communicative problem pinpoints one of the key areas of research in Second Language Acquisition known as communication strategies. Selinker (1972), in his seminal article titled interlanguage, identified the use of CSs as one of the processes affects SLA. Since then, there have been many important contributions that have widened the scope of this field. One may highlight two main approaches to the study of CS. The first can be said to have a linguistic basis and is to be found in the works of Tarone (1977, 1980), Faerch and Kasper (1980, 1983, 1984), Harding (1983) or Paribakht (1985). The second attempts to confer a cognitive or processing basis to the study and can be found in the works of Bialystok (1990) and Poulisse (1990).

Within the linguistic approach, the most outstanding works have been those of Tarone and Faerch and Kasper. Although they are different in their conceptualization of CS – in the sense that Tarone suggests the existence of interactional constraints while Faerch & Kasper study CS psycholinguistically, relating plans, behaviours and goals - where a linguistic basis can be observed in the final taxonomy proposed in their studies. Just like in the works of Harding or Paribakht, a great

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number of CS types is identified. A new category, too frequently, differs from another merely due to the different encoding form of the utterance used to solve the communicative problem, despite the fact that in many cases it is obvious that the same process is at work.

Within the cognitive approach, the works of Poulisse (1990) and Bialystok (1990) must be taken into account parallely. Bialystok argues that CS respond to the cognitive mechanisms that operate on mental representations in linguistic processing. Thus, she sets up a general cognitive framework where the two components of language processing - analysis of linguistic knowledge and control of linguistic processing – give rise to two cognitive CS types. While the first component refers to "the process of structuring mental representations of language which are organized at the level of meanings (knowledge of the world) into explicit representations of structure organized at the level of symbols (forms)" (Bialystok, 1990: 118), the second component implies "the ability to control attention to relevant and appropriate information and to integrate those forms in real time" (Bialystok, 1990: 125). As the author states:

"The definition of communication strategies that follows from this framework is that they are the dynamic interaction of the components of language processing that balance each other in their level of involvement to meet tasks demands" (Bialystok, 1990: 138).

In a parallel paper, Poulisse (1990) also considers that the study of CS (or compensatory strategies, which is her object of study) refers to the general study of communication. She identifies two main CS types: the conceptual and the analytic strategy. Her definition of CS is the following:

"Compensatory strategies are processes, operating on conceptual and linguistic knowledge representations, which are adopted by language users in the creation of alternative means of expression when linguistic shortcomings make it impossible for them to communicate their intended meanings in the preferred manner" (Poulisse, 1990: 192-193).

Therefore, two main strategies that respond to the cognitive processes identified in communication can be found in both studies. In the same way, both authors state that these processes deal with the concept - on the one hand - and the use of linguistic knowledge, on the other.

Faerch and Kasper (1983) have also developed a taxonomy of CSs in such a way that they place them within a model of language production. The model has two phases: the planning phase where the plan is formulated and an eecution phase where the already-formulated plans are given realization. If there are problems with the plan to be executed, the learner either avoids the problem which results in a change of the communicative goal and for that matter results in a reduction strategy, or fabricates an alternative plan upon facing the problem and appeals to achievement strategies.

Task Nature

A large number of procedures have been adopted to elicit the data for the extraction and identification of CSs (Varadi 1980). Picture reconstruction (Bialystok 1990), translation (Varadi 1980, Flyman 1997), sentence completion

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(Blum-kelka and Levenston 1983), conversation (Haastrup and Philipson 1983), narration (Dechert 1983, Keyvani 2000), instruction (Wagner 1983, Repauch 1983), word transmission (Paribakht 1985), culture-specific word description (Wongsaworth 2001) are among these procedures. A good many experts believe that these methodological differences exert an impact on a language learner's use and selection of a specific CS. (Bialystok 1990, Paribakht 1985). Bialystok (1990), for instance, states that CSs can be put within a psycholinguistic model of language use so that two underlying components affect them enormously. These two components are analysis of linguistic knowledge and control of linguistic processing. Specific language uses, she assumes, demand specific levels of skills in each of these processing components. Thus, tasks, as specific language uses required varying degrees of mastery over the two processing components lead to differential use of CSs on the part of the language users. Nevertheless there are few studies that have attempted to compare the performance of a group of subjects across different elicitation methods and usually all the researchers utilize only one elicitation procedure.

One of the few studies carried out in this respect is one carried out by Bialystok and Frolich (1980) in which they classified the subjects into three groups. In one of the groups, the subjects were shown a series of pictures and asked to write a description about it. The same picture series was given to the second group and they were required to describe it orally as their descriptions were recorded. The third group of the subjects were given the same picture series and were required to describe it orally so that other students can recreate it on a felt. The three methods produced quantitative differences in the amount of the elicited speech, the written composition producing the least and the reconstruction eliciting the most. However, the qualitative features of speech in terms of the classification of strategic choices were in all cases equivalent, that is, the students employed the same set of strategies in roughly the same proportions irrespective of the elicitation method used.

Another study done by Flyman (1997) used three kinds of elicitation methods: translation task, story telling, and free discussion. In the translation task, each subjects were given five Swedish sentences to translate. In the second task, namely, story telling, the subjects were shown a series of pictures to reconstruct the story behind it. The series of pictures was at the level that in retelling it, words a bit above the subjects' proficiency level were unavoidable. In the last task, the subjects were asked to discuss a topic with each other and for that reason; five topics of discussion were presented to the subjects out of which they were supposed to pick two up. In this study, translation task gave rise to the highest number of compensatory strategies, while story telling came in between and free discussion evoked the least number of strategies. From what was run on, one can conclude that the nature of the elicitation method is important in the evocation of the strategies that the language user employs to iron out the difficulties that he encounters over the course of his communication.

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Shyness: Definition, and Relationship with Language Learning

"To be shy is to be afraid of people, especially people who for some reason are emotionally threatening: strangers because of their novelty or uncertainty, authorities who wield power, members of the opposite sex who represent potential intimate encounters."(Zimbardo, 1977).

Social anxiety is a nearly universal experience. In a classic study in the 1970s, Philip Zimbardo found that more than 80% of the people questioned reported that they were shy at some points in their lives, while over 40% described themselves as currently shy. About 4% described themselves as extremely shy in that they felt shy all the time, in all situations and virtually with all people. Thus shyness appears to exist on a continuum with some of us feeling shy in some specific situations and a small percentage struggling with severe shyness in all situations. The situations in which people were most likely to experience shyness were being the centre of attention in a large group (such as giving a speech)or being in social or new situations.

Many people are shy at various times; but when this shyness makes it difficult for him/her to interact with their peers or authority figures like teachers, their shyness can become a major problem for them. Shyness can be a mental handicap as crippling as the most severe of physical handicaps, and along with it come the following devastating consequences:

1. Shyness makes it difficult to meet new people, make friends, or enjoy potentially good experiences.

2. It prevents you from speaking up for your rights and expressing your own opinions and values.

3. Shyness limits positive evaluations by others of your personal strengths.

4. It encourages self-consciousness and an excessive preoccupation with your own reactions.

5. Shyness makes it hard to think clearly and communicate effectively.

6. Negative feelings like depression, anxiety, and loneliness typically accompany shyness. (Zimbardo, 1977).

It had been stated that shyness, as a prominent personality trait, is more usually associated with language difficulties and the fact that students perform less well on tests of verbal fluency and vocabulary has been proven in light of solid evidence in this respect (Crozier 1997). In a study carried out by Gewirtz (1948, cited in Crozier 1997) on pre-school students with an average age of five years for the assessment of their word fluency, significant correlation was reported between shyness and all the seven sections of word fluency measure whereby the students had to generate as many words as they could within a fixed time interval in response to target questions like giving words that rhymed with the target words, providing descriptions of their home, or production of children and adults' names. A term which strongly advocates the link between shyness and language difficulties is 'communication apprehension' which is defined as 'an individual's

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level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons' (McCrosky and Beaty 1986, cited in Sepehrband 2000). A relative absence of speech usually characterizes the individual's withdrawn behavior. ' Selective Mutism' is also a vehement indicator of the link between shyness and language difficulties. It is defined as the complete lack of verbal contact in at least one specific situation, in spite of the ability to put oneself over clearly in other similar situations (Down et al 1995).

Evans (1993) goes so far as to claim that shy and reticent students have less competence in expressive and pragmatic domains of language development. She suggests that this occurs because their reticence has produced fewer opportunities for social interaction and has impeded the development of communicative skills. It is possible that reticence, in turn, is linked to the characteristics of the shy person's home that are less conducive to the development of vocabulary and language, for example, less social stimulation, or a smaller social network of friends and acquaintances. She characterizes this explanation as the 'Communicative Competence Hypothesis'. Another explanation that she alludes to as 'Anxiety Performance Hypothesis' draws upon the dominant theoretical approach to shyness, which regards it as a form of social anxiety, implying that verbal behavior is inhibited by anxiety. As there is extensive evidence that shyness is more likely in certain kinds of settings, it is more likely in situations that are interpreted by the individual to be ego-threatening or evaluative that brings about more anxiety by nature like interaction with strangers, unfamiliar people or authority figures.

Aims of the Study

The main goal of the present paper lies in the study of the relationship between communication strategies and shyness as well as communication strategies and task nature. In pursuit of these aims, the study submits the following research questions to empirical test:

1. Is there any relationship between shyness and the frequency of communication strategies used by the subjects?

2. Is there any relationship between shyness and the types of communication strategies used by the subjects?

3. Is there any relationship between the type of elicitation task used and the types of communication strategies used by the subjects?

Methodology

Participants

The subjects were 168 intermediate students of English (literature and teaching) at Ilam University and Islamic Azad University of Tehran (South Branch). The subjects were studying at third, fourth and fifth semesters. A Michigan test was used to screen out the required number of students who were supposed to take part in the main part of the thesis procedures. Out of 168 students taking the Michigan test,106 were qualified to take the interview test. Out of this number of students 102

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were interviewed and were given the shyness questionnaire. The other students either didn't appear for the interview or were reluctant to take it.

Procedure

The Michigan Test of language proficiency was given to the subjects. 106 out of 168 subjects were chosen to take part in the oral interviews. Out of 106 subjects, 102 were interviewed using three methods of elicitation (Free discussion, Translation, and Story –telling). The shyness questionnaire was, then, given to each of the subjects interviewed and asked to fill it out at their leisure time and to bring it to the researcher later. The communication samples elicited from the subjects were tape-recorded and taken for later analysis.

Data Analysis

In any empirical study on CSs, the identification and classification of strategies should be done quite cautiously. In this study, all the utterances where lexical problem could be observed were identified by one of the researchers and a second judge both relying on strategy markers and mainly on retrospective comments. The two resulting identifications were compared and after some discussion a definite evaluation of leical problematic utterances was set up by a researcher. This final identification had a correspondence of nearly 90% with the identification carried out by the second judge, a high percentage proving the reliability of the study.

The communication strategies were then extracted and classified using a typology inspired by the study. For the first two hypotheses, the sociolinguistic taxonomy of CSs was taken for granted (Corder 1683) and the strategies were divided into two groups: Achievement (such as appeal to authority, semantic contiguity) and Avoidance (likr topic avoidance and message abandonment). As for the first hypothesis, the strategies were tallied and the frequency was obtained. A one-way Chi-Square was run to test the hypothesis. For the second and third hypothesis, the strategies were divided into achievement/avoidance and conceptual/linguistic respectively. A two –way Chi-Square test was run to test these hypothesis. The third hypothesis enjoyed a psycholinguistic classification due to the nature of the independent variable and because it is more related to processing mechanisms.

Results and Discussion

In order to begin delving into the claimed relationship between CSs and the variables of the study, a typology of CSs was developed mostly inspired by the study itself dividing the variables into achievement and avoidance strategies for the first hypothesis and and another typology was developed dividing the strategies into code and conceptual ones. Also, the subjects were divided into three groups of High, Medium and Low shyness. If they fell above +0.5, in ±05 or below –05 respectively. The normality of the distribution was also ascertained through Kolmogorov –

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Smirnov test. Thus we prepared the way to investigate the research hypotheses:

Investigation and Analysis of Hypothesis 1

The first null hypothesis was: "there is no relationship between shyness and the frequency with which the subjects use CSs." In order to test the above-stated hypothesis, a one–way Chi-Square test was utilized.

Low-Shy(34)	Medium-Shy(41)	High-Shy(27)
391	453	254

CS

Because, the number of the three groups of subjects differed, and indeed, the number of CSs used by the group was a function of their numbers, the calculation was performed manually rather than by SPSS and we got at the chi square value of 6.61. The most probable value for x2 with two degrees of freedom was then spotted in x2 distribution and was found to be 5.99 at the probability level of.05. Since our x2 6.61 was larger than 5.99, we felt confident in rejecting the null hypothesis. Futting another way , we can claim that there is a significant relationship between shyness and the frequency with which subjects use CSs. This is in line with Evan's (1993) performance Anxiety Hypothesis which regards shyness as a form of social aniety, with the implication that verbal behaviour is inhibited by it and that it hinders the subjects from taking initiative.

Investigation and Analysis of Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis was: "There is no relationship between shyness and the type of CSs used by the subjects".To delve into the investigation of the hypothesis at hand, a two-way Chi –Square was run. As the number of the three groups differed, to rule out the effect of this fact on the results, the calculation was carried out twice. Once reducing the number of the groups to 27 and once more enhancing the numbers to 41. The explanation of each of the solutions follows. In the first case, the extra subjects in groups of low –shy and medium –shy subjects were randomly crossed out and in so doing , we got at three groups of 27 subjects. The calculation was performed, using SPSS 10, and finding the crosstabulation and Phi-Crammer value, we got at the following results:

Low-Shy (27)	181	158	113	Medium-Shy (27)
High-Shy (27)	133	139	141	

Achievement

Avoidance

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Strategy * Shyness Crosstabulation

			Shyness			
			Low-shy	Medium-shy	High-shy	Total
Strategy	Achievemnt	Count	181	158	113	452
		Expected Count	164.1	155.2	132.7	452.0
		% of Total	20.9%	18.3%	13.1%	52.3%
	Avoidance	Count	133	139	141	413
		Expected Count	149.9	141.8	121.3	413.0
		% of Total	15.4%	16.1%	16.3%	47.7%
Total		Count	314	297	254	865
		Expected Count	314.0	297.0	254.0	865.0
		% of Total	36.3%	34.3%	29.4%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.901[a]	2	.007
Likelihood Ratio	9.917	2	.007
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.536	1	.002
N of Valid Cases	865		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 121.27.

Our x2 value is 9.90. To know whether we can reject the null hypothesis, the probability value for x2 with 2 degrees of freedom was found in the x2 distribution table. It was 5.99.As our x2 value (9.90) is larger than the value found in the distribution (5.99), we feel sure to reject the null hypothesis. The calculation was reperformed, making the number of the three groups equal, all including 41 subjects and setting a ratio for the observed frequency of each of the cells. Running the calculation on SPSS version 10, and finding the crosstabulation and Phi-Crammer Chi Square value, the following results were foung:

	Low-Shy (41)	Medium-Shy (41)	High-Shy (41)
Achievement	263	235	172
Avoidance	209	218	214

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Strategy * Shyness Crosstabulation

			Shyness			
			Low-shy	Medium-shy	High-shy	Total
Strategy	Achievemnt	Count	263	235	172	670
		Expected Count	241.2	231.5	197.3	670.0
		% of Total	20.1%	17.9%	13.1%	51.1%
	Avoidance	Count	209	218	214	641
		Expected Count	230.8	221.5	188.7	641.0
		% of Total	15.9%	16.6%	16.3%	48.9%
Total		Count	472	453	386	1311
		Expected Count	472.0	453.0	386.0	1311.0
		% of Total	36.0%	34.6%	29.4%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.750[a]	2	.005
Likelihood Ratio	10.767	2	.005
Linear-by-Linear Association	10.385	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	1311		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 188.73.

As in the other case, in order to know if the null hypothesis can be rejected, the most probable value for x2 with 2 degrees of freedom was spotted and found to be 5.99. As our observed x2 value was larger than the value found for 2 degrees of freedom in the Chi-Square distribution table, the null hypothesis can be rejected. Put another way, it is proven that there is a significant relationship between shyness and the type of communication strategies used by the subjects. Shyness is, in fact, said to be a factor influencing the adoption of strategies and their types negatively and differently with shy subjects tending to use more reduction strategies and non-shy subjects tending to use more achievement strategies. This was epected because achievment strategies carry a ring of risk-taking with them and as shy subjects mostly refrain from taking risks, they naturally avoid thee strategies and appeal to reduction strategies instead which do not demand taking risks.

Investigation and Analysis of Hypothesis three:

The third null hypothesis was stated as follows:"there is no relationship between the type of elicitation task and the type of communication strategies used by the subjects." Because of the nature of the question which is more interpreted in

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processing terms than social factors, a psycholinguistic taxonomy of CSs was utilized dividing the strategies into code and conceptual strategies. A two –way Chi-Square procedure was run to test the above–stated null hypothesis separately in the medium-shy group of subjects. This group was selected by design in order to rule out the effect of shyness on the adoption of strategies. The calculation was run on SPSS version 10 and the following results were:

	Free Discussion	Translation	Story-Telling
Conceptual	51	48	37
Code	37	31	31

Strategy * Elicitation Task Crosstabulation

			Elicitation Task			
			Free Discussion	Translation	Story-Telling	Total
Strategy	Conceptual	Count	51	48	37	136
		Expected Count	50.9	45.7	39.4	136.0
		% of Total	21.7%	20.4%	15.7%	57.9%
	Code	Count	37	31	31	99
		Expected Count	37.1	33.3	28.6	99.0
		% of Total	15.7%	13.2%	13.2%	42.1%
Total		Count	88	79	68	235
		Expected Count	88.0	79.0	68.0	235.0
		% of Total	37.4%	33.6%	28.9%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.604[a]	2	.739
Likelihood Ratio	.604	2	.739
Linear-by-Linear Association	.156	1	.693
N of Valid Cases	235		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 28.65.

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As the calculation indicates, the row labelled Pearson Chi-Square which shows the conventional Chi-Square, is far less than the value found at 2 DF found on the Chi-Square distribution, so we feel confident in rejecting the null hypothesis.

Discussion:

The results of the present study demonstrated a negative relationship between shyness and the frequency and type of communication strategies employed by the subjects, meaning that shyness prevents students from using more strategies to obviate the hurdles in communication. Non-shy students use more achievement strategies, which, according to Corder (1983), results in language development. Shy students, on the other hand, use more avoidance strategies which, as Cordor (1983) states, does not contribute to language development and causes the interlanguage to remain at a same level. This finding is in keeping with Crozier's (1990) argument that shyness produces anxious self-preoccupation which results in attention being self-focused rather than attention being given to the tasks presented to the students. Also, it confirms the fact that shyness can produce hesitation and reluctance to respond and to take initiative. Such being the case, the shy students avoid the employment of a series of strategies which are said to facilitate communication to a whole extent and equip the learner with the required autonomy to go ahead with the language learning process. Shyness, as a personality trait, has been reported to be more related with language difficulties and with tests of verbal fluency (Crozier 1997). The results of the present study are in line with this finding, too. The corollaries gotten out also confirm Evans' (1993) argument that shy and reticent children have less competence in expressive and pragmatic domains of language development. Another interesting theory which adds a particular flavor to the findings of the present study and gets supported by the findings is "communication apprehension" which is defined as an individual's level of anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with other people (McCrosky and Beaty 1986, Cited in Sepehrband 2000).The results of the third hypothesis of the study confirmed something which is in contrast to what others claim, that task type results in different types of strategies used by the subjects. (Flyman 1997, Backman 1995). According to what was accumulated from the present research, no particular and significant relationship was found between the type of task and the type of CSs used by the subject.

Implications for Language Pedagogy:

A good many experts have elaborated on the benefits that communication strategies may have for second language development (Dornyei 1995, Faucette 2000). Learner autonomy, automatization, trouble-shooting, etc. are among different benefits they mention for communication strategies. The results of the present study showed a significant relationship between shyness and CSs. AS shy people cannot express themselves in public and in stressful situations, the teachers can create a stress-free and friendly classroom atmosphere in which the learners are encouraged to participate in life-like authentic and meaningful communication, containing structures and leical items a little above their proficiency level. The creation of such an

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atmosphere can be attained through classifying students into groups whose members are comfortable wuth each other and can epress themselves openly. CS instruction can also add to the more systematicity of conversational classes (Dornyei snd Thurell 1991). Communicative language teachers are usually unsure of which topic areas they should touch uponin their classes, and these classes are usually characterized by random, intuition-baseed communicative activities. Dornyei and Thurell (1991) include CSs among conversational teaching points around which communicative classes can be designed. To meet this purpose, one should know enough about the nature of CSs. The results of the present paper take some nominal steps in this respect.

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