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ROLES OF LEARNER AUTONOMY AND WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN COMMUNICATION STRATEGY USE OF EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at investigating the possible relationships among learner autonomy (LA), willingness to communicate (WTC), and communication strategy (CS) use, and examining the predictive power of WTC and LA in accounting for CS use. To do so, 102 available Iranian EFL learners were recruited, and three questionnaires were employed to tap into their LA, WTC, and CS use. Conducting Pearson correlation revealed that there was a weak, positive, yet statistically significant relationship between LA and CS use, and there was a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between WTC and CS use. In addition, multiple regression analysis was conducted several times (eight times to examine the roles of LA and WTC in the eight components of CSs, and once to examine their roles in the prediction of CSs as a whole composite construct). The results of data analysis revealed that WTC was found, by and large, to be a better predictor of CSs than LA. More specifically, WTC could significantly predict these components of CSs: fluency-oriented strategies, negotiation for meaning while speaking, accuracy-oriented strategies, message reduction and alteration strategies, nonverbal strategies while speaking, and message abandonment strategies. LA, on the other hand, was a significant predictor of the social affective strategies component of CSs. The results of this study demonstrated the impact of LA and WTC on CSs, and thus call for due attention to the LA and WTC in L2 learning contexts.

Contribution/ Originality: The paper's primary contribution is finding that WTC can better account for CS than LA, and that such of the components of CS as fluency-oriented strategies, negotiation for meaning while speaking, accuracy-oriented strategies, message reduction and alteration strategies, nonverbal strategies while speaking, and message abandonment strategies could be predicted by WTC. On the other hand, the only CS component which could be predicted by LA was social affective strategies. In a nutshell, the contribution of the present study lies in the fact that it investigated the roles of WTC and LA in the components of CSs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Strategies are defined as "activities consciously chosen by learners to regulate their language learning" (Griffiths, 2008) and communication strategies (CSs) refer to different verbal and nonverbal strategies employed by

a speaker to meet his/her communicative needs. The importance attached to the study and use of CSs is evident in the works of many L2 scholars (e.g., Dörnyei and Scott (1997); Faerch and Kasper (1983) and writers such as Tarone (1977) who were well cognizant over and versed with the intricacies and subtleties of CS, and attempted at establishing typologies of CSs.

CSs and learner autonomy (LA) have become subjects of great interest of recent studies in the field. We all need either to state our feelings, ideas and opinions or to share all these with people around us. All these represent our natural need to communicate. Learning a new language means to have the ability to communicate with people speaking that language. As teachers, we have both the duty and the responsibility to help our students in the learning process to promote and foster their communication strategies to help them become more proficient communicators. Research evidence has underscored the importance of encouraging the sense of responsibility on the part of the learners and performing teaching-learning activities to build up the learners' autonomy. The learners need to be able to take control over their own learning, to learn independently with little (or even without) intervention of teachers' impact on their development towards autonomy. Autonomous learners are characteristically knowledgeable of the strategies and the efficacious control over their use (Manchon, 2000). As stated by Byram (2004) autonomy is the means by which learners surpass the limits of their immediate learning environment. An autonomous language learner thus is one who supposes responsibility for his/her own learning and does so without teacher help or outside a formal curriculum (Dickinson (1987) as cited in Kaltenbock (2001)). "Autonomous learning seeks to equip learners with tools that will best serve them once they are on their own and to facilitate their self-directed learning outside the classroom" (Faucette, 2001). This implies that autonomous learners have the skills to help them solve communicative problems that may appear in the flow of communication. Putting this implicit inference to test is one of the intents of the current study.

Another individual attribute, which might be closely related to CSs, is WTC. "Willingness to communicate can be conceptualized as a readiness to speak in the L2 at a particular moment with a specific person, and as such, is the final psychological step to the initiation of L2 communication" (Doucette and MacIntyre, 2010). (Cao and Philp, 2006) found that factors such as "group size, familiarity with interlocutor(s), interlocutor(s)' participation, familiarity with topics under discussion, self-confidence, medium of communication and cultural background" work together to influence one's WTC. Having recognized the preponderant importance of WTC (Dornyei, 2005) went so far to state that "developing WTC is the ultimate goal of instruction."

Baker *et al.* (2003) believed "Despite the emphasis on communication in modern language pedagogy and the well accepted view that learners require practice in speaking in order to learn, some language learners habitually choose to remain silent" (cited in MacIntyre (2007)). In the domain of foreign language learning, there is a concern for students who study the language, but remain unwilling to use it. There are many learners who know how to speak in the second language, but prefer to keep silent. There is no doubt that language teachers wish to have language learners who seek out EFL communication by themselves; those learners who are willing to communicate when the opportunities arise, whether inside or outside the classroom. All this boils down to the proposition that WTC might be related to the use of CSs; testing such a conviction is also another intent of the present study.

In fact, the investigation of the relationship between WTC, LA and CSs seems to be rare in the literature. Previous studies solely examined the relationship between WTC and CSs or LA and CSs, but the present causal-comparative study attempted to examine the roles and relationships of both WTC and LA in CS use among Iranian EFL learners. More specifically, attempts were made to find if there was a relationship between (a) LA and CS use, and (b) WTC and CS use. Furthermore, this study sought to see if LA and WTC could contribute to the prediction of communication strategy use or not.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Communication Strategies

CSs have commonly been observed as efforts made by learners to prevail over communication problems due to insufficient linguistic repertoire, specifically lexical incompleteness. They are subsumed under communicative competence, marked as 'strategic competence' in Canale and Swain (1980) communicative competence framework and in Bachman (1990) communicative ability model. They originate from the ability to use different ways and means of solving communicative problems or improving the effectiveness of communication via the use of strategies.

Tarone explains the process of communication when a speaker wants to convey a particular message to a listener. However, the speaker understands that there is a gap in the communication process. As a result, she/he may avoid bridging this gap or resorts to alternative ways to convey her/his message. Communication strategies then "…relate to a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared" (Tarone, 1980). The topic of CSs has received a great deal of ink in second language learning literature. Faerch and Kasper (1983) explain CSs as "…potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal" (p. 36). Nakatani (2010) highlights that "communication strategies can be regarded as any attempts by learners to overcome their difficulties and generate the target language to achieve communicative goals in actual interaction" (p. 118). CSs are viewed as a means of meaning negotiation between two interlocutors that implies the *interactional perspective* of communication strategies (Faerch and Kasper, 1984; Dörnyei and Scott, 1997).

2.2. Learner Autonomy

The notion of learner autonomy has absorbed much consideration and interest within the context of L2 learning, specifically in the last couple of decades. Holec (1980) provided the definition of learner autonomy as, "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3). It means that the learner has authority to control his learning by selecting what, when and how to learn which is based on his or her own interests, need and capacities.

Many researchers have already done extensive studies on the topic of LA since the 1990s. Deci and Vansteenkiste (2004) maintain that autonomy is one of the basic needs for L2 learners to gain a sense of self-fulfillment. Actually, L2 learners are autonomous when they are quite willing to perform an activity. Paiva (2006) discusses that autonomy is a sociocognitive system that is closely interrelated with the L2 learning system. Therefore, it might be plausible to claim that autonomy involves the learner's mental processes and social dimensions.

However, the implementation of learner autonomy faced with many kinds of limitations including the learners' intrinsic factors and extrinsic ones, which led to unsatisfactory results in the present situation of students' autonomous learning ability.

2.3. Communication Strategies and Learner Autonomy

Faucette (2001) summarizes the relationship between CS instruction and LA as follows: The connection between a learner autonomy approach and communication strategy instruction should be clear. Using the common metaphor of 'bridge', Faerch and Kasper (1983) argue that "by learning how to use communication strategies appropriately, learners will be more able to bridge the gap between pedagogic and non-pedagogic communicative situations" (as cited in Faucette (2001)).

With regard to autonomy and use of strategies, Simons (1996) conducted a study. The aim of the study was whether strategy training would be able to help the student to be more independent owners of their own learning process. It was concluded that the students proved to manage their autonomous learning by applying the strategies that suited them the best.

2.4. Willingness to Communicate

Clement *et al.* (1998) have suggested a conceptual "pyramid" model designed to account for individual differences in the resolution to begin L2 communication (see Figure 1). At the top of the pyramid is the intention to communicate with specific persons at a specific time (WTC) and this is regarded as the last step before starting to speak in the L2. The rest of the model supports this intention to begin communication with influences tied to the specific situation and influences that are more permanent as well. The model refers to situations in which there is a specific person with whom to communicate, and both the tendency and self-confidence to speak to him or her. This tendency comes from affiliation or control motives, or both. Affiliation motives are directed toward persons who are attractive in some way or frequently faced, such as one's friends. Control motives refer to any situation in which people attempt to influence each other's behavior. The other major immediate effect, self-confidence, is composed of perceived competence and a lack of anxiety (Clement, 1980;1986). In this conceptualization, WTC reveals a more direct influence on communication than does either anxiety or perceived communicative competence, allowing for explication of cases wherein competent speakers prevent to use the L2 and where learners attempt along with whatever competencies they have as a means of talking in order to learn. Some evidence has been collected to propose that WTC predicts the beginning of communication in both the L1 (Babin *et al.*, 1999) and the L2 (Carre and MacIntyre, 2000) in cases where the influences of competence and anxiety are highly inconsistent. For example, one task used by MacIntyre and Carre was "count to 10 in the L2 in front of the class," which some speakers abstained to do in spite of more than adequate competence. This supports the claim that WTC is not isomorphic with perceived competence or anxiety about communicating, though the three variables should be correlated (Charos and MacIntyre, 1996). The model also suggests several layers of permanent influences on WTC based on several variables including motivation, intergroup issues, and the social situation.

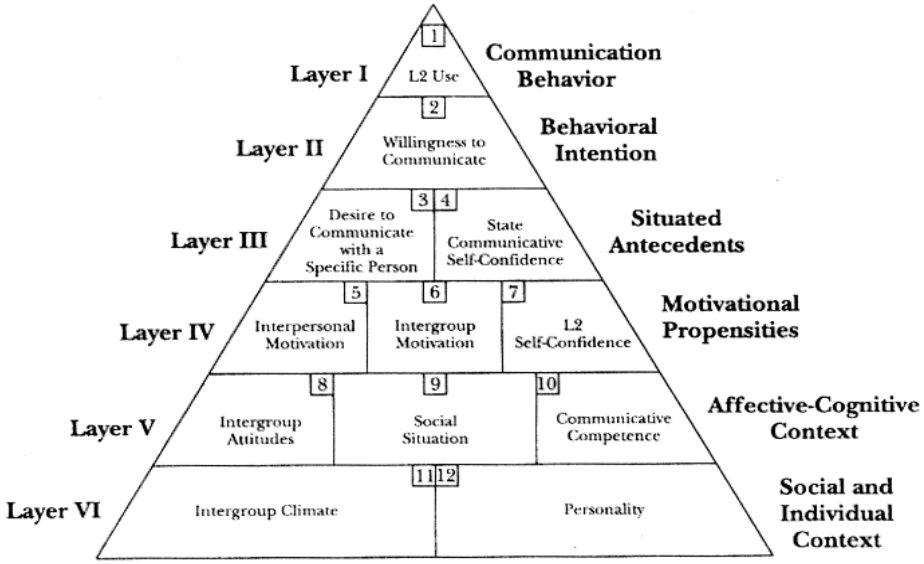

Figure-1. A heuristic model of variables which influences WTC (adopted from MacIntyre *et al.* (1998))

2.5. Willingness to Communicate and Communication Strategies

The investigation of the relationship between WTC and CSs seems to be rare in the literature. In the frequently expressed heuristic model of WTC by MacIntyre *et al.* (1998) communicative competence is considered as one of the affective and cognitive variables having stable and enduring effect on WTC. Although a certain level of all the other competences (e.g., linguistic, discourse, sociolinguistic) is required for effective communication to take place, they believe that a speaker can go a long way by relying primarily on strategic competence, which is mainly the knowledge of CS.

Besides, there is much evidence that the links between communication apprehension, self-perceived communicative competence, and WTC are strong; if communication apprehension recedes, an individual's perceived competence is likely to be higher, leading to a greater level of WTC (Barraclough, 1988; MacIntyre, 1994; MacIntyre and Charos, 1996; McCroskey, 1997; MacIntyre *et al.*, 1999; MacIntyre *et al.*, 2001; Donovan and MacIntyre, 2004). Therefore, for improving learners' willingness to interact, we need to allay their apprehension at the time of communication and enhance their confidence regarding their communicative competence to initiate and maintain the interaction. Moreover, since using language learning strategies has long been viewed as an asset in the process of learning a second language, it is crucial to explore whether WTC and LA (among many other potential factors) contribute to the use of communication strategies by EFL learners. The proposed study, thus, is going to examine the relationship that LA and WTC might have with communication strategy use among the EFL learners. The studies reviewed above show that the relationship between LA and CSs and the relationship between WTC and CSs were separately investigated by previous researchers. However, investigating the interrelationships and impacts of both LA and WTC on CSs (and its subcomponents) has remained untouched, and thus requires due attention. Hence, the following research questions were posed to help achieve the objectives of the study: (1) Is there a significant relationship between learner autonomy and communication strategy use among Iranian EFL learners? (2) Is there a significant relationship between willingness to communicate and communication strategy use among Iranian EFL learners? (3) Of learner autonomy and willingness to communicate, which one can better predict (which components of) communication strategy use of Iranian EFL learners?

3. METHODOLOGY

The design of present research, the description of the participants and instruments, and an account of the data collection procedures phase of the study are described in what follows:

3.1. Research Design

In the present cross-sectional study, quantitative data were collected from MA students of TEFL at IAU, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch. The design of the present research was ex-post facto. As Hatch and Farhady (1982) maintain, "Ex-post facto designs are often used when the researcher does not have control over the selection and manipulation of the independent variable. In this design, researchers look at the type and/or the degree of relationship between two variables rather than a cause and effect relationship." They also add we may use the ex-post facto strategy when we wish to investigate the influence of variables like home environment, sex, motivation, intelligent, and parental reading habits. A subject possesses these characteristics before the study begins. As researchers, we have no direct control of these variables and can only try to determine the effect of their incidence on an observed consequence.

3.2. Participants

The population from which this study drew its sample was MA students of TEFL at IAU, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, from whom 102 students, both male (n = 24) and female (n = 78), whose age range was between 18 and 35, were selected. The participants' mother tongue was Persian, and the number of years they had studied English was between 4 and 7 years. Participants' sample selection procedure adopted in this study was availability sampling. The questionnaires were filled in at university and during scheduled time periods.

3.3. Instruments

The data-gathering instruments of the study were three distinct measures: learner autonomy questionnaire, WTC questionnaire, and communication strategy use questionnaire, as elaborated on below:

3.3.1. Learner Autonomy Questionnaire

The first instrument used in this study was a modified version of the learner autonomy questionnaire developed by Kashefian (2002). The questionnaire consisted of 25 items in a five-point Likert scale. Learners chose an answer for each item on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 about the extent to which they thought they were autonomous (where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). This learner autonomy questionnaire was validated by five professors of IAU, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch. Out of the 40 items in the original questionnaire, 15 items of this questionnaire were eliminated for reasons of redundancy, ambiguity, and irrelevance to the aims of this study (Appendix 1). The reliability of this scale was measured through applying Cronbach's alpha, and the internal consistency coefficient turned out to be .78, showing that the questionnaire functioned well in terms of consistency.

3.3.2. WTC Questionnaire

The participants were also invited to fill out the WTC questionnaire. The questionnaire included 25 items on different situations in which a person might strike a conversation with someone else. The participants were asked to indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 how willing they were to communicate (where 1 = almost never willing, 2 = sometimes willing, 3 = willing half of the time, 4 = usually willing, and 5 = almost always willing). This questionnaire was a modified version of WTC questionnaire developed by McCroskey (1992) (Appendix 2), widely used in previous research (e.g., (McCroskey and Richmond, 1991; Hashimoto, 2002)) and previously demonstrated to have high reliability (Asker, 1998) and strong content and construct validity (McCroskey, 1992). The original questionnaire had a scale based on percentages, but for reasons of consistency in the measurement of the data obtained from different questionnaires in this study, it was modified so that each item was measured on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5. The reliability index of this questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha formula, and it was found to equal .91.

3.3.3. Communication Strategy Use Questionnaire

The third questionnaire was also distributed among the participants; it was mainly based on the Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (Nakatani, 2006). It embodied 32 statements examining communication strategy use of EFL/ESL learners. This questionnaire was organized into 8 different subsections: (a) coping with speaking problems (6 items), (b) fluency-oriented strategies (6 items), (c) negotiation for meaning while speaking (4 items), (d) accuracy-oriented strategies (5 items), (e) message reduction and alteration strategies (3 items), (f) probing into nonverbal strategies while speaking (2 items), and (g) message abandonment strategies (4 items), and (h) attempt to think in English strategies (2 items). This questionnaire also used a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = never use, 2 = hardly ever use, 3 = sometimes use, 4 = often use, and 5 = always use. Each category was assigned the value of one to five respectively. All the This questionnaire had been validated by three professors of IAU, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch (Appendix 3).

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

For this research, having access to 102 participants, the researchers needed to administer three questionnaires to investigate the role of learner autonomy and WTC in communication strategy use. The first session, the participants were asked to fill out the learner autonomy questionnaire. A week later, the researchers distributed the second questionnaire, which was the WTC questionnaire. Then, after a week, the participants answered the third questionnaire about communication strategy use. The researchers distributed these three questionnaires to participants once a week in order not to cause any feelings of fatigue and carelessness on the part of the participants. While the students were filling out the questionnaires, the first researcher of the current study was present in the class to clarify any possible ambiguities or misunderstandings for the participants. In these questionnaires,

identities of the participants were not revealed and they were assured about the confidentiality of their identities to feel comfortable and answer the questions without stress and embarrassment. Then, the collected questionnaires were made ready, through coding, for data analysis.

4. RESULTS

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was run between the scores of autonomy and communication strategy use in order to discover the strength and direction of association existing between the mentioned variables, and thus to answer the first research question. Likewise, Pearson correlation was conducted to find out the relationship between WTC and communication strategy use to come up with the answer to the second research question. Finally, multiple regression analysis was used to find out the contributory roles of learners autonomy and WTC in communication strategy use.

4.1. Results for the First Research Question

The first research question addressed in the present study was: Is there a significant relationship between learner autonomy and communication strategy use among Iranian EFL learners? In order to answer this research question, as it was mentioned above, Pearson correlation was conducted between the scores obtained from the LA questionnaire and the CSs questionnaire. The results of the correlation analysis are presented in Table 1:

Table-1. Relationship between learner autonomy and (components of) communication strategies use.

		Autonomy
Social Affective Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.27*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005
	N	102
Fluency-Oriented Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.20*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.03
	N	102
Negotiation for Meaning While Speaking	Pearson Correlation	.07
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.43
	N	102
Accuracy-Oriented Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.19*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.04
	N	102
Message Reduction and Alteration Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.09
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.36
	N	102
Nonverbal Strategies While Speaking	Pearson Correlation	.01
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.85
	N	102
Message Abandonment Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.19*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.04
	N	102
Attempt to think in English Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.02
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.77
	N	102
Communication Strategy Use	Pearson Correlation	.28*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003
	N	102

* shows a significant relationship at $p < .5$

Table 1 shows the relationships between LA and (components of) CSs. As it could be seen, the relationship between LA and social affective strategies was found to be a weak positive relationship ($r = .27$). Based on Pallant (2010) a relationship, which ranges from ±.01 to ±.30 is weak; one which falls between ±.30 and ±.50 is moderate, and a correlation coefficient greater than ±.50 shows a strong relationship. This weak positive relationship turned

out to be statistically significant since the *p* value in front of the *Sig.* (2-tailed) row for this correlation was less than the significance level (.005 < .05). In addition, the relationship between LA and fluency-oriented strategies was also weak, positive, and statistically significant (r = .20, p = .03).

However, the relationships between LA and negotiation for meaning while speaking (r = .07, p = .43), LA and message reduction and alteration strategies (r = .09, p = .36), LA and nonverbal strategies while speaking (r = .01, p = .85), LA and attempt to think in English strategies (r = .02, p = .77) were weak, positive, and non-significant.

Like the first two components of CSs, accuracy-oriented strategies (r = .19, p = .04) and message abandonment strategies (r = .19, p = .04) had weak positive and statistically significant relationships with LA.

Finally, the relationship between LA and communication strategy use (as a composite variable) was weak, positive and statistically significant (r = .28, p = .003). This weak positive relationship is graphically depicted in the scatterplot in Figure 2.

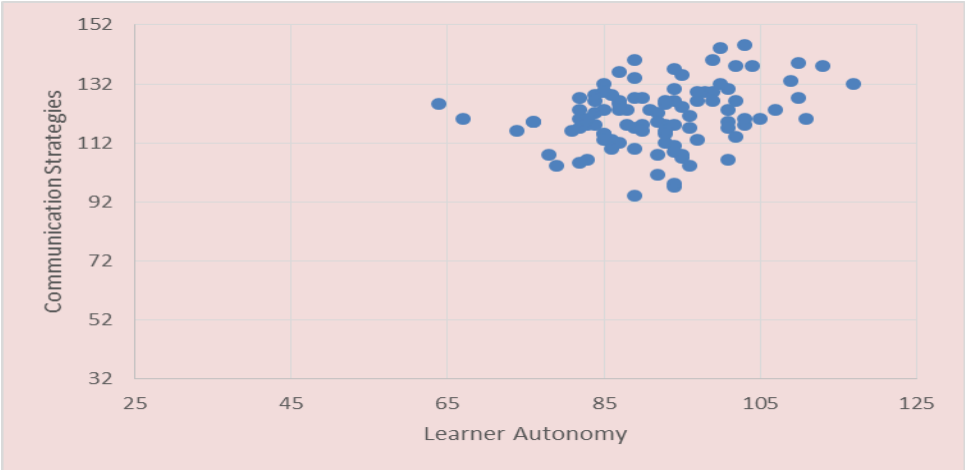

Figure-2. Relationship between LA and CS use

In Figure 2, the hypothetical trend line shows the existence of a weak positive relationship between LA and CS use as this line experienced a slight ascending move on the graph.

4.2. Results for the Second Research Question

The second research question posed in this study was: Is there a significant relationship between WTC and communication strategy use among Iranian EFL learners? Pearson correlation was employed again to answer this research question:

In Table 2, it could be seen that the relationship between WTC and attempt to think in English strategies (r = .14, p = .15) was found to be weak, positive, and non-significant, but the relationships between WTC and social affective strategies (r = .24, p = .01), WTC and fluency-oriented strategies (r = .27, p = .006), WTC and accuracy-oriented strategies (r = .21, p = .03), WTC and nonverbal strategies while speaking (r = .22, p = .02), WTC and message abandonment (r = .25, p = .009) were found to be weak, positive, and statistically significant.

Additionally, the correlations between WTC and negotiation for meaning while speaking (r = .31, p = .001), and between WTC and message reduction and alteration strategies (r = .33, p = .001) indicated moderate, positive, and significant relationships.

Table-2. Relationship between WTC and (components of) communication strategies use.

		WTC
Social Affective Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.24*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.01
	N	102
Fluency-Oriented Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.27*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006
	N	102
Negotiation for Meaning While Speaking	Pearson Correlation	.31*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	102
Accuracy-Oriented Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.21*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.03
	N	102
Message Reduction and Alteration Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.33*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	102
Nonverbal Strategies While Speaking	Pearson Correlation	.22*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.02
	N	102
Message Abandonment Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.25*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009
	N	102
Attempt to think in English Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.14
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.15
	N	102
Communication Strategy Use	Pearson Correlation	.47*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	102

Finally, the relationship between WTC and communication strategy use (as a composite variable) was moderate, positive, and statistically significant ($r = .47$, $p = .00$). This moderate positive relationship is graphically represented by the scatterplot in Figure 3.

Figure-3. Relationship between WTC and CS use

The scatterplot in Figure 2 clearly indicates a moderate positive relationship between WTC scores and CS use scores of the participants in this study.

4.3. Results for the Third Research Question

The third research question of the present study was: Of learner autonomy and WTC, which one can better predict communication strategy use of Iranian TEFL learners? To compare the effect of LA and WTC on the use of

CSs by the learners in this study, multiple regression analysis was conducted several times (eight times to examine the roles of LA and WTC in the eight components of CSs, and once to examine their roles in the prediction of CSs as a whole composite construct).

Table-3. Model summary for multiple regression.

Model	*R*	*R* Square	Adjusted *R* Square	*Std.* Error of the Estimate
SAS	.32	.10	.09	2.61
FOS	.30	.09	.07	3.47
NFMWS	.31	.09	.07	2.41
AOS	.25	.06	.04	2.74
MRAS	.33	.10	.09	1.91
NSWS	.23	.05	.03	1.48
MAS	.28	.08	.06	3.11
ATIES	.14	.02	.00	1.68
CSs	.50	.25	.23	9.08

Abbreviations: Social-Affective Strategies (SAS); Fluency-Oriented Strategies (FOS); Negotiation for Meaning While Speaking (NFMWS); Accuracy-Oriented Strategies (AOS); Message Reduction and Alteration Strategies (MRAS); Nonverbal Strategies While Speaking (NSWS); Message Abandonment Strategies (MAS); Attempt to Think in English Strategies (ATIES)

In Table 3, the value given under the *R* Square column shows how much of the variance in communication strategy use is accounted for by LA and WTC. In fact, LA and WTC accounted for 10% of the variance SAS, 9% of the variance in FOS, 9% of the variance in NFMWS, 6% of the variance in AOS, 10% of the variance in MRAS, 5% of the variance in NSWS, 8% of the variance in MAS, and 2% of the variance in ATIES scores of the participants. In addition, LA and WTC accounted for 25% of the variance in CS use scores of the learners participating in this study. To find out whether these models reached statistical significance or not, one had to take a look at the following table (Table 4):

Table-4. Statistical significance of the multiple regression results.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
SAS	Regression	81.94	2	40.97	5.97	.004
	Residual	678.57	99	6.85		
	Total	760.52	101			
FOS	Regression	319.54	2	59.77	4.94	.009
	Residual	1196.03	99	12.08		
	Total	1315.57	101			
NFMWS	Regression	61.88	2	30.94	5.29	.007
	Residual	578.63	99	5.84		
	Total	640.52	101			
AOS	Regression	52.88	2	26.44	3.49	.03
	Residual	748.45	99	7.56		
	Total	801.34	101			
MRAS	Regression	44.61	2	22.31	6.06	.003
	Residual	364.40	99	3.68		
	Total	409.02	101			
NSWS	Regression	12.46	2	6.23	2.82	.06
	Residual	218.70	99	2.20		
	Total	231.17	101			
MAS	Regression	86.32	2	43.16	4.45	.01
	Residual	958.66	99	9.684		
	Total	1044.99	101			
ATIES	Regression	5.78	2	2.89	1.02	.36
	Residual	279.68	99	2.82		
	Total	285.46	101			
CSs	Regression	2733.73	2	1366.86	16.56	.00
	Residual	8171.25	99	82.53		
	Total	10904.99	101			

In Table 4, the *p* values under the *Sig.* column for all the analyses (except for ATIES, $p = .36$) were smaller than the significance level (i.e., .05), indicating that all the models (except for ATIES) reached statistical significance. In other words, LA and WTC could significantly predict SAS, FOS, NFMWS, AOS, MRAS, NSWS, MAS, and CSs, but not ATIES. Now Table 5 should be checked to see which of the independent variables (LA or WTC) contributed more to the prediction of CSs and its components.

Table-5. Predictive power of LA and WTC for (the Components of) CSs

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Confidence Interval for B	
		B	***Std.* Error**	**Beta**	***t***	***Sig.***	**Lower Bound**	**Upper Bound**
SAS	LA	.06	.02	.22	2.25	.02	.008	.12
	WTC	.04	.02	.18	1.86	.06	-.003	.08
FOS	LA	.05	.03	.14	1.40	.16	-.02	.13
	WTC	.06	.02	.23	2.29	.02	.009	.12
NFMWS	LA	-.003	.02	-.01	-.12	.90	-.05	.05
	WTC	.06	.02	.31	3.15	.002	.02	.10
AOS	LA	.04	.03	.15	1.47	.14	-.01	.10
	WTC	.03	.02	.17	1.67	.09	-.007	.08
MRAS	LA	-.001	.02	-.005	-.04	.96	-.04	.04
	WTC	.05	.01	.33	3.34	.001	.02	.08
NSWS	LA	-.008	.01	-.05	-.49	.62	-.04	.02
	WTC	.02	.01	.24	2.36	.02	.005	.05
MAS	LA	.04	.03	.13	1.32	.18	-.02	.11
	WTC	.05	.02	.21	2.18	.03	.005	.10
ATIES	LA	-.002	.01	-.01	-.13	.89	-.03	.03
	WTC	.01	.01	.14	1.40	.16	-.008	.04
CSs	LA	.18	.10	.16	1.83	.07	-.01	.38
	WTC	.35	.07	.42	4.70	.00	.20	.50

To compare the predictive power of LA and WTC, the values under the *Beta* column under standardized coefficients should be checked. Looking down this column, one could notice that for SAS, the larger value was the one for LA (.22). This shows that LA made a stronger contribution to SAS than did WTC (.18). For each of these independent variables, the value under the column marked *Sig.* must be checked. This shows whether this variable was making a statistically significant contribution to predicting SAS or not. The *Sig.* values for LA ($p = .02$) indicated its significant role in SAS, yet the *p* value for WTC ($p = .06$) implied it could not be a significant predictor of SAS.

Regarding FOS, it could be observed that WTC made a stronger contribution than did LA, and the contribution of WTC was of statistical significance, while that of LA was not. This result also recurred in the cases of NFMWS, MRAS, NSWS, and MAS. That is, WTC had a greater role in accounting for NFMWS, MRAS, NSWS, and MAS that did LA, and the role of WTC reached statistical significance while that of LA did not.

As for AOS, it was revealed that neither WTC nor LA could significantly predict AOS although WTC had a stronger contribution to predicting AOS. The same result was also found for ATIES. Differently put, WTC had a greater role in ATIES than LA, but neither of the two independent variables could significantly predict ATIES.

Finally, considering CS use as a composite variable, it was found that WTC (.42) could account more for CSs than could LA (.16), and it was revealed that WTC was a significant predictor of CSs, while LA failed to be so.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Addressing the First Research Question

The first research question addressed the relationship between LA and CSs among Iranian EFL learners. Results with regard to the each category of CSs separately indicated that a weak, positive and statistically significant relationship was reported between LA and social affective strategies. The autonomous learners try to

control their stress and encourage themselves to use English and challenge themselves to communicate smoothly. It is also valuable mentioning that the potential of social-affective strategy instruction is not limited to proficiency. Training learners in the use of social-affective strategies has been shown to play a key role in improving learner autonomy and self-confidence (Chamot, 1999) self-direction (Gan, 2004) motivation and positive attitudes (Dornyei, 2003; Kao and Oxford, 2014) and learner self-evaluation (Nikolov, 2006).

In addition, autonomous learners try to pay attention to the rhythm, intonation, pronunciation, and clarity of their speech to improve the listener's comprehension (which is one of the subcomponents of CSs). They also take responsibility for their speaking context and take their time in order not to send inappropriate messages to their interlocutors. This can lend support to another piece of evidence found in this study: the relationship between fluency-oriented strategies and LA was weak, positive and statistically significant, too.

However, the relationships between LA and negotiation for meaning , LA and message reduction and alteration strategies, LA and non-verbal strategies while speaking, LA and attempt to think in English strategies were weak, positive and non-significant. The reason behind this might be that these factor might be affected by other personal attributes than LA, and might have been altered through some kind of training.

The relationships between LA and accuracy-oriented strategies depend on learners' attempt to learn and use the accurate form by their own. In Politzer (1983) questionnaire study, his students reported using strategies similar to those found in the current study. The same was the case with the relationship between LA and message abandonment strategies; when these EFL learners face difficulties executing their original verbal plan, they tend to give up their attempt to communicate, and leave the message unfinished. As Bialystok (1990) reported, foreign language learners tend to use familiar words and avoid taking risks by using new or unfamiliar words, even though they sometimes realize that the utterance is far from their communication goal. In line with what was found in the present study, Salehi *et al.* (2015) did a research on the relationship between LA and speaking strategies and concluded that there was a positive correlation between speaking grades of the students and reported degree of autonomy and use of coping strategies while speaking English. Griffiths (2008) conducted a similar experiment and reached results identical to those of Salehi *et al.* (2015).

5.2. Addressing the Second Research Question

The relationship between WTC and communication strategy use (as a composite variable) was moderate, positive, and statistically significant. In the same line, MacIntyre and Legatto (2010) asserted "when vocabulary items do not flow easily to mind, WTC declines" (p. 165). In such situations CSs, circumlocution for instance, help learners compensate for the evasive word and keep their WTC unscathed.

Moreover, the relationship between attempt to think in English and WTC was weak, positive, and not significant because willing learners attempt to communicate and express their idea immediately. They are willing to express what they want to say as soon as possible, and in so doing, they may have recourse to grammatical structures and lexical patterns of their L1, which are more readily available to them.

However, it was found out that those who have willingness to communicate in a second language make use of socio-affective strategies. They also behave socially in such a way as to give a good impression and avoid silence during interaction. Because EFL learners tend to have little experience speaking English in authentic interactional contexts, they control their feelings during oral communication is an important issue.

In addition, willing learners attempt to practice and heed their pronunciation and intonation to assure the listeners' understanding. In addition, being conscious of accuracy in speech seems to be another characteristics of learners who have WTC. When learners have WTC and they are not able to convey their message by the use of words, they use facial expressions or gestures to give hints and help the listener guess what they want to say. Moreover, when these willing learners face difficulties executing their original verbal plan, they leave the message unfinished, or seek help from others to continue the conversation. Consequently, the relationship between social

affective strategies and WTC, fluency-oriented strategies and WTC, accuracy-oriented strategies and WTC, nonverbal strategies while speaking and WTC and message abandonment strategies and WTC were found to be weak, positive and significant.

Since negotiation with interlocutors is required to maintain an interaction and avoid communication breakdowns, interlocutors are expected to conduct modified interaction. These speakers need to check listeners' understanding of their intentions. They sometimes repeat their speech and give examples of terms until the listener is able to figure out their intended meaning. They also pay attention to the reaction of their interlocutor to see whether they can understand each other (negotiation for meaning while speaking). It is argued that the use of these strategies could enhance students' opportunities to learn the foreign language through interaction (e.g., (Pica, 1996; Williams *et al*., 1997)).

As it was found in this study, the relationship between message reduction and alteration strategies and WTC and also, between negotiation for meaning while speaking and WTC were moderate, positive and significant. Evidence supporting this result could be found in what Somunca (2016) maintained: "Message reduction and alteration strategies are used when learners do not try to solve a problem in communication by giving up on conveying the message. Obviously, this category obstructs the interaction, and is generally preferred by low-proficiency learners" (p. 188).

5.3. Addressing the Third Research Question

Taking the third question into account (Of learner autonomy and WTC, which one can better predict communication strategy use of Iranian EFL learners?), multiple regression analysis was conducted several times. Regarding fluency-oriented strategies, it could be observed that WTC made a stronger contribution than did LA, and the contribution of WTC was of statistical significance, while that of LA was not. This result also recurred in the cases of negotiation for meaning while speaking, message reduction and alteration strategies, non-verbal strategies while speaking, and message abandonment strategies. That is, WTC had a greater role in accounting for negotiation for meaning while speaking, message reduction and alteration strategies, non-verbal strategies while speaking, and message abandonment strategies that did LA, and the role of WTC reached statistical significance while that of LA did not.

As for accuracy-oriented strategies, it was revealed that neither WTC nor LA could significantly predict accuracy-oriented strategies although WTC had a stronger contribution to predicting accuracy-oriented strategies. The same result was also found for attempt to think in English strategies. Differently put, WTC had a greater role in attempt to think in English strategies than LA, but neither of the two independent variables could significantly predict attempt to think in English strategies.

Finally, considering CS use as a composite variable, it was found that WTC could account more for CSs than could LA, and it was revealed that WTC was a significant predictor of CSs, while LA failed to be so.

In a rather similar study, Somunca (2016) investigated the predicting effect of WTC and cognitive flexibility on oral communication strategies by also examining the relationships between oral communication strategies, WTC, and cognitive flexibility. It was found that WTC contribution to the prediction of the use of strategies was not significant despite similar orientations with cognitive flexibility.

6. CONCLUSION

As might be recalled, the present study aimed at unearthing the relationship between LA and CSs, examining the relationship between WTC and CSs, and investigating the predictive power of LA and WTC in accounting for CSs use. In the wake of data analysis and the discussion of the obtained results, the following conclusions were made.

Very broadly speaking, with regard to the relationship between learner autonomy and communication strategies, it can be concluded that there was a weak, positive and statistically significant relationship between learner autonomy and communication strategies. In addition, the relationship between willingness to communicate and communication strategies was moderate, positive and statistically significant. Moreover, willingness to communicate could better predict communication strategies than could learner autonomy.

More precisely, from among the components of CSs, WTC could significantly predict fluency-oriented strategies, negotiation for meaning while speaking, accuracy-oriented strategies, message reduction and alteration strategies, nonverbal strategies while speaking, and message abandonment strategies, while LA was only a significant predictor of the social affective strategies.

As with previous studies on LA, WTC and CSs, this study demonstrated an agreement in the impact of LA and WTC on CSs. What made this study stand out among the studies on the same topic was the meticulous attention paid to the subcomponents of CS, and how they were affected by LA and WTC. The results of this study, thus, make apparent a need for more attention to the LA and WTC, and particularly WTC, as these two factors could, to a large extent, account for the use of communication strategies by Iranian EFL learners. Along the same lines, the following pedagogical implications can be drawn from the results of this study.

As TEFL teachers and practitioners, it is high time we reflected on such questions as: What is the most suitable pedagogical approach to autonomy in the foreign language classroom? Should we teach it? Or should we expect our students to be automatically equipped with the features of autonomy, gained throughout their educational life. This means, as teachers, we need to identify how and to what extent autonomy helps our learners to use communication strategies. Among several issues that can be raised regarding the effectiveness of autonomy, one issue is how the concept of autonomy, identified in terms of the control of the learning process, makes it possible for learners to become efficient and successful communicative strategies users; how the ability to take responsibility for their learning enables learners to negotiate meaning and solve problems stemming from the international use of English.

Once we have been able to describe this, as teachers and students, then teachers can start to integrate some meaningful instructional activities into students' learning process. Some believe that these activities should come as a part of the curriculum, and be implemented throughout the whole course of teaching activities, as well as teaching administration systems (Vesisenaho, 2010). Others suggest that the learners should be given more opportunities for interaction among themselves, and with their teacher as well, since this will create a more cooperative climate, leading to the development of autonomy. Eventually, this will help learners to extend their autonomy. It should not be forgotten that the teacher should apply any model of learner autonomy only after the careful appraisal of its relevance to a specific educational setting has been achieved.

As WTC is a direct predictor of frequency of communication, it seems vital for language teachers to realize the interaction and interdependence between various individual, environmental, and linguistic factors and the effect of that interaction on WTC. It is inappropriate for teachers to attribute a learner's WTC to a sole factor such as his/her personality or WTC behavior in the previous encounter. Teachers should understand that there is much more involved in the learner's WTC behavior at a particular point of time in class, given the range of individual, environmental, and linguistic factors that might actually affect WTC. The recognition of WTC as an important learner variable and of its role in communication strategy use should remind practitioners of attending to their students' WTC behavior systematically and in a context-appropriate manner. In the L2 classrooms, it is crucial for teachers to promote facilitating factors of WTC as much as possible (Kang, 2005) and they should be mindful of the interactions between the factors when planning learning activities (Cao and Philp, 2006).

To recap, this study helped prove the necessity of improving learners' LA and WTC for developing learners' communication strategy use. L2 teachers should pay attention to learner autonomy, help learners to be activate in classrooms, make L2 learners more responsible for their own learning, and also promote the willingness to

communicate in learners by providing an appropriate environment in the classroom to encourage students to share their feelings, ideas, and opinions towards a subject.

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Appendix 1

Learner Autonomy Questionnaire

Name (optional): Sex: Major: Marital Status:

Number of years you have studied English: Age: Level of education:

Directions: *please show how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling the numbers that match your answers.*

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1	The teacher should offer help to me.	1	2	3	4	5
2	The teacher should tell me what my difficulties are.	1	2	3	4	5
3	The teacher should tell me how long I should spend on an activity.	1	2	3	4	5
4	The role of the teacher is to tell me what to do.	1	2	3	4	5
5	The teacher should always explain why we do an activity in class.	1	2	3	4	5
6	The role of the teacher is to help me to learn effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
7	The teacher knows best how well I learn.	1	2	3	4	5
8	The role of the teacher is to create opportunities for me to practice.	1	2	3	4	5
9	The role of the teacher is to set my learning goals.	1	2	3	4	5
10	The teacher should be an expert at showing learners how to learn.	1	2	3	4	5
11	The teacher should give me regular tests.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I need the teacher to tell me how I am progressing.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Having my works evaluated by others is helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Having my works evaluated by others is scary.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I have a clear idea of what I need of English.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I like trying out new things by myself.	1	2	3	4	5
17	My language learning success depends on what I do in classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
18	My own efforts play an important role in successful language learning.	1	2	3	4	5
19	I myself can find the best way to learn the language.	1	2	3	4	5
20	I know how to plan my learning.	1	2	3	4	5
21	I know how to ask for help when I need it.	1	2	3	4	5
22	I know how to set my learning goals.	1	2	3	4	5
23	I know how my language learning progresses.	1	2	3	4	5
24	I know how to study languages well.	1	2	3	4	5
25	I know how to study other subjects well.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 2

WTC Questionnaire

Name (optional): Sex: Major: Marital Status:

Number of years you have studied English: Age: Level of education:

DIRECTIONS: Below are 25 situations in which a person might choose to communicate or not to communicate in English.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1	I like to talk with an acquaintance in an elevator.	…….
2	I am eager to talk with a stranger on the bus.	……
3	I enjoy speaking in public to a group (about 30 people) of strangers.	……
4	I prefer to talk with an acquaintance while standing in line.	……
5	I like to talk with a salesperson in a store.	……
6	I try to volunteer an answer when the teacher asks a question in class.	……
7	I enjoy talking in a large meeting (about 10 people) of friends.	……
8	I prefer to talk to my teacher after class.	……
9	I like to ask a question in class	……
10	It is interesting for me to talk in a small group (about five people) of strangers.	……
11	I like to talk with a friend while standing in line.	……
12	I am willing to talk with a waiter/waitress in a restaurant.	……
13	I feel comfortable talking in a large meeting (about 10 people) of acquaintances.	……
14	I am interested in talking with a stranger while standing in line.	……
15	I feel comfortable presenting my own opinions in class.	……
16	I like to talk with a shop clerk.	……
17	I feel confident when I speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of friends.	……
18	It is interesting to talk in a small group (about five people) of acquaintances.	……
19	I do prefer to participate in group discussion in class.	……
20	I enjoy talking with a garbage collector.	……
21	I feel at ease when talking in a large meeting (about 10 people) of strangers.	……
22	I am willing to talk with a librarian.	……
23	I like to help others answer a question.	……
24	I enjoy talking in a small group (about five people) of friends.	……
25	I am willing to speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of acquaintances.	……

Appendix 3

Communication Strategies Questionnaire

Name (optional): Sex: Major: Marital Status:

Number of years you have studied English: Age: Level of education:

Directions: *please show how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling the numbers that match your answers.*

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1	I try to relax when I feel anxious.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I try to enjoy conversations.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I try to give a good impression to the listener.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I don't mind taking risks even though I might make mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I actively encourage myself to express what I want to say.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I try to use fillers when I cannot think of what to say.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I pay attention to my rhythm and intonation.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I pay attention to my pronunciation.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I pay attention to the conversation flow.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I change my way of saying things according to the context.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I take my time to express what I want to say.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I try to speak clearly and loudly to make myself heard.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I make comprehension checks to ensure the listener understands what I want to say.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I repeat what I want to say until the listener understands.	1	2	3	4	5
15	While speaking, I pay attention to the listener's reaction to my speech.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I give examples if the listener doesn't understand.	1	2	3	4	5
17	I pay attention to grammar and word order during conversation.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I correct myself when I notice that I have made a mistake.	1	2	3	4	5
19	I notice myself using an expression which fits a rule that I have learned.	1	2	3	4	5
20	I try to emphasize the subject and verb of the sentence.	1	2	3	4	5
21	I try to talk like a native speaker.	1	2	3	4	5
22	I replace the original message with another message because of feeling incapable of executing my original intent.	1	2	3	4	5
23	I use words which are familiar to me.	1	2	3	4	5
24	I reduce the message and use simple expressions.	1	2	3	4	5
25	I try to make eye-contact when I am talking.	1	2	3	4	5
26	I use gestures and facial expressions if I can't communicate how to express myself.	1	2	3	4	5
27	I leave a message unfinished because of some language difficulty.	1	2	3	4	5
28	I ask other people to help when I can't communicate well.	1	2	3	4	5
29	I give up when I can't make myself understood.	1	2	3	4	5
30	I abandon the execution of a verbal plan and just say some words when I don't know what to say.	1	2	3	4	5
31	I think first of a sentence I already know in English and then try to change it to fit the situation.	1	2	3	4	5
32	I think first of what I want to say in my native language and then construct the English sentence.					