

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the literature on CS from its earlier works to recent trends. The two main approaches in CS research are Tarone's (1980) interactional definition and Færch and Kaspers's (1983b) psycholinguistic definition. Recent studies with the interactional approach as their focus include contributions from Dornyi in collaboration with Scott (1997), Celce-Murcia and Thurell (1995). Studies related to CS from the interactional perspective will be the focus of this chapter.

2.2 Communication Strategies

Anyone who uses languages, whether it is a first language, a second language or a foreign language, would somehow or rather, have at some point in their lives experienced difficulty in expressing themselves in a communication situation. This difficulty is probably due to memory lapse, lack of knowledge or vocabulary of a certain topic of discussion, possessing a totally different semantic system from their interlocutors or simply lack of proficiency in the language of communication. When encountered with such difficulty, one usually resorts to whatever 'means' that one knows, to convey one's intention in the communication. These so called 'means' are what CS is all about.

The term “communication strategy” was coined and introduced by Selinker (1972) about 3 decades ago in his paper *Interlanguage* (IL) in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Since then, many researchers (e.g., Varadi, 1973; Tarone, 1977; 1980; Canale and Swain, 1980; Bialystok, 1984; Færch and Kasper, 1983b) have studied and formulated their own definitions on the notion of CS. Increased interest in CS led to a growing number of studies focusing primarily on identifying and classifying CS and their teachability (e.g.; Bialystok, 1984; Paribakht, 1985; Bialystok and Kellerman, 1987; Tarone and Yule, 1989; Dornyei and Thurell, 1991). Most studies were also limited to proficiency-related and task-related inquiries.

2.3 Definitions

CS has been defined by many as problem solving devices in communication arising from linguistic inadequacies of the language user. Although CS could be employed by anyone including a native speaker in any language situation, studies conducted on CS and its use have been primarily focused on non-native (particularly L2 and FL learners) language users' IL. This is evident in the definition of CS in The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1992).

Communication Strategy is a way used to express a meaning in a second or foreign language, by a learner who has a limited command of the language. In trying to communicate, a learner may have to make up for a lack of knowledge of grammar or vocabulary.

Other CS definitions by some of the renowned researchers include:

...a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his meaning when faced with some difficulty...

Corder (1983:16)

...verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence...

Canale and Swain (1980:30)

...strategies which a language user employs in order to achieve his intended meaning on becoming aware of problems arising during the planning phase of an utterance due to his own linguistic shortcomings...

Poulisse et al. (1994:72)

Most researchers basically agree to Bialystok's (1990:116) statement that "communication strategies are an undeniable event of language use, their existence is a reliably documented aspect of communication, and their role in second language communication seems particularly salient". CS are however divided into two main theoretical perspectives: psycholinguistic perspective and interactional perspective (Dornyi and Scott, 1997).

2.3.1 Psycholinguistic Definition

Færch and Kasper (1983b:36), define CS as:

...potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal...

According to them, "...CS are related to individual language user's experience of communication problems and the solutions (cooperative or non-cooperative) they pursue." (Færch and Kasper, 1984:45). This means, problems in communication are intra-individual problems which the individuals themselves try to solve in their own way. Færch and Kasper characterized CS as a two-phased plan, the first as the *planning phase* and the second the *execution phase*. CS can occur at both planning and execution phase. CS occurring at the planning phase are caused when the language user has no knowledge or lacks knowledge of the linguistic structure while CS occurring at the implementation phase are caused by the language user's intention to produce fluent and correct utterances.

2.3.2 Interactional Definition

Tarone's (1977:195) original view on CS was that, '...conscious communication strategies are used to overcome the crisis which occurs when language structures are inadequate to convey the individual's thought...'. However, in 1980, she re-formulated her definition of CS to:

...a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared...

(Tarone, 1980:420)

The *interactional definition*, also referred to as the *sociolinguistic definition*, puts negotiation of meaning as the central function of CS. In other words, problems in communication are perceived as inter-individual problems that need to be solved cooperatively by both interlocutors through meaning negotiation. This revised definition broadens Tarone's framework allowing the inclusion of various repair mechanism she considers as CS (Dornyei and Scott, 1997).

Tarone (1983: 65) stated that there are 3 necessary criteria for defining CS:

- 1) the speaker's desire to communicate meaning X to a listener;
- 2) the speaker believes the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure desired to communicate meaning X is unavailable, or is not shared with the listener;
- 3) the speaker chooses to:
 - (a) avoid -- not attempt to communicate meaning X; or,
 - (b) attempt alternate means to communicate meaning X.

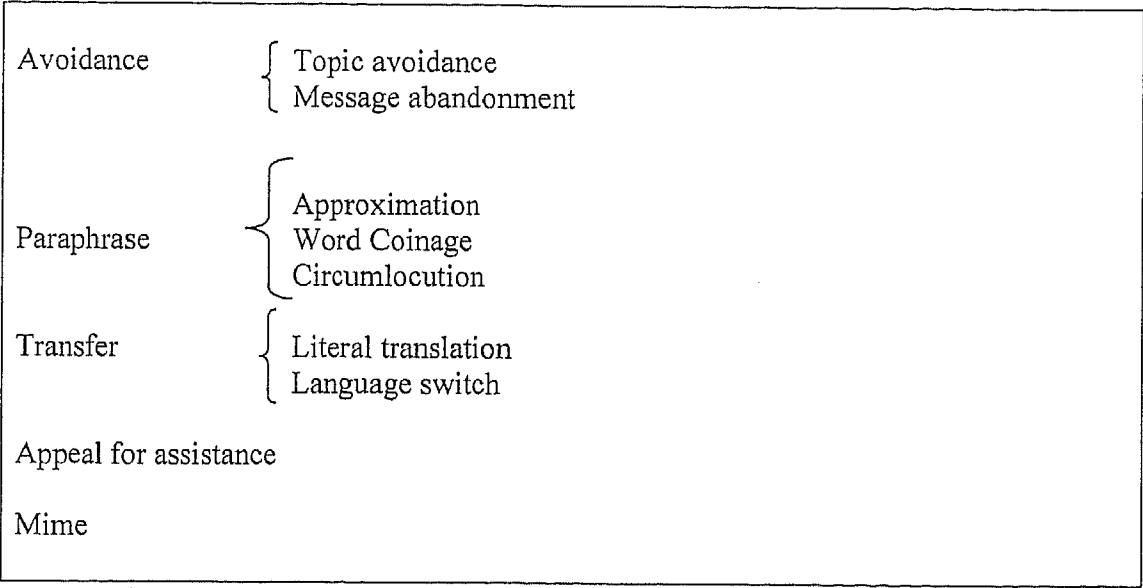
The speaker stops trying alternatives when it seems clear to the speaker that there is shared meaning.

Tarone (1983) pointed that the above are the defining criteria that differentiate CS and other strategies associated with SLA namely, *Production Strategies* (PS) and *Learning Strategies* (LS). PS are viewed as attempts made by a language learner to use his linguistic system efficiently and clearly and with minimum effort. Criterion 3(b) is

absent in PS, which means, the language user does not need to use an alternative attempt to communicate. Whereas in LS, the basic motivation is to learn and not to communicate, therefore, criterion 1 is not a necessary element.

When a speaker chooses to avoid or not attempt to communicate meaning X, he chooses to employ the *Avoidance* or *Reduction Strategy*. If he decides to attempt to communicate meaning X using alternate means, that means he has chosen to employ the *Achievement* or *Compensatory Strategy*. Figure 2.2 presents Tarone’s (1977) typology of CS.

Figure 2.2 *Communication Strategies (Tarone, 1977)*



According to Bialystok (1990), the two definitions (psychological and interactional) converge on three features, which are: problemacity, consciousness and intentionality.

The speaker chooses to use CS when there is a problem. Problems include those faced by the speaker and problems indicated by his interlocutor. He is aware of the problem;

therefore he is intent on employing CS. It is necessary not to view CS from the psychological perspective alone, but to incorporate both the cognitive-psychological and interactional perspective in CS research, as the solution of a certain problem in communication does not rely on a one-way basis, but rather on a two-way basis. Every trigger from a speaker will have a different reaction from a different interlocutor in every single situation. Problems in communication are rectifiable by collaboration of efforts of participating interlocutors. Although the attempt to solve the problem is mutual, it is not however for the strategy use (Trosborg, 1982).

CS is a very prominent element in speech production and therefore an important element of natural discourse. As such it deserves to be studied within a broader remit, one that specifically and centrally includes the interactional facets as well as the cognitive.

(Wagner and Firth, 1997:342)

2.3.3 Dornyöi and Associates' Extended View

Further to his argument that stalling strategies be included in CS framework, Dornyöi and his associates (Dornyöi, 1995; Celce-Murcia, Dornyöi and Thurell, 1995; Dornyöi and Scott, 1997) propose that the scope of CS definition be extended to include 'every potentially intentional attempt to cope with any language-related problem of which the speaker is aware during the course of communication'. The extension includes what he and his associates define as *interactional strategies*. The interactional strategies that Dornyöi and his associates suggested are similar to the elements found in 'interactive strategies' that are used when miscommunication occurs. This kind of 'interactive strategies' for example, repair mechanism and negotiation of meaning, are studied by

conversational interactions researchers such as Varonis and Gass (1985) and Pica et al. (1989). Although there are disagreements among researchers on whether or not these types of interactional strategies should be considered as CS, this study contends that they should. In this way the collaborative efforts of two interactants in achieving the **agreement of meaning** are enhanced; which is the key element in Tarone's Interactional Definition. Dornyei and Scott (1997:199), describe interactional strategies as situations whereby "the participants carry out trouble-shooting exchanges cooperatively (e.g., appeal for and grant help, or request for and provide clarification), and therefore mutual understanding is a function of the successful execution of both pair parts of the exchange".

2.4 Empirical CS Research

The very first CS research was a pilot study conducted by Tamas Varadi (1973) who introduced the picture description task. However, studies by Tarone and others (Tarone, 1977; Tarone, Cohen and Dumas, 1976) were pioneering as they provided the first definition of CS and offered a taxonomy which is still considered as one of the most influential in the field to date. In 1983, the first collection on CS research were published and edited by Færch and Kasper (1983a). Early studies on CS were small-scaled and could not allow for a quantifiable analysis.

The first major study attempting to quantify data was by Paribakht (1985). Using 60 subjects of 20 English NS and 2 groups of 20 Iranian learners of English, she compared NS-NNS CS in a task requiring the subjects to describe concrete and abstract concepts. Paribakht concluded that CS and L2 proficiency level are related.

Another major study was conducted by Nanda Poulisse (1990) under the University of Nijmegen project. The aim of the study was to investigate compensatory strategies at different L2 levels, in L1 and L2, and in terms of efficiency. 45 Dutch learners of English at 3 levels of acquisition were asked to do 4 tasks: photo description, description of drawings, in L1 and L2, retelling stories and interviews. Results indicated that proficiency effects are more subtle than suggested by previous studies but they vary according to tasks.

One of the foregrounds of research interest in CS remains on the issue of teachability of CS (Dornyëi, 1995; Dornyëi and Thurell, 1991; Manchon, 2000; Faucette, 2001). This issue is however outside of the scope of this study, therefore no review of such studies shall be offered.

2.4.1 CS Research in the Local Arena

Roslina (1999) cited the earliest CS study recorded in Malaysia by Lim (1983) entitled: *“Message adjustment in Communication Strategies: A study of the Interlanguage of a group of adult learners of English in Malaysia.”* Several studies have since surfaced with subjects who are learners of either a second or foreign language (i.e., Ang, 1992; Aminah, 1996; Lee, 1997; Ownie, 1997; Rocky, 1998). There have also been a number of studies focusing on CS used by speakers of certain regional dialects in their communications in the standard language. Studies centralizing on this area have mainly been conducted on the speakers of the Kelantan dialect in communications in Bahasa Malaysia (i.e., Ghazali, 1997; Azmi, 1998).

Ang (1992) for example, studied on CS employed by 120 Malaysian Chinese in communication in the Malay language (Bahasa Malaysia). She concluded that CS can help learners to communicate better and make their utterances sound smoother. She found problems in their communication disrupt the effectiveness of communication and these disruptions hinder the interactional process, waste time and leave a negative effect on the interaction mood.

In the study he conducted on CS employed by 30 speakers of the Kelantan dialect when communicating in the standard Malay language (Bahasa Malaysia), Ghazali (1997) found stalling or time-gaining strategies in the form of pause fillers, guessing strategy and sound approximation strategy are often employed as CS.

2.4.2 Studies on Malay Learners of Japanese

There is only one study on CS by Malay learners of Japanese to date. The study conducted by Roslina (1999) looked at CS employed by 20 Malay learners of Japanese attending the preparatory program for Japanese university entrance at the Malaysia Technological University (UTM). The subjects were 10 high proficiency learners and 10 low proficiency learners. There were no mixed proficiency pairings. 4 tasks were used; picture description, story telling, role-play and group discussion.

Roslina discovered that time-gaining strategies such as stalling, pause fillers, lengthening of vowels, repetition and back channel cues were frequently used by her subjects in their communication. She also found that some of the code-switching were not used as CS but were more of an idiolect or a habitual practice in a multi-lingual

society like Malaysia. Her findings on the code-switching as an idiolect are consistent with Ang's (1992) findings.

Roslina also found her subjects using what she called the 'Morpheme Combination Strategy' where parts of a word are formed by a combination of a foreign sounding morpheme and Japanese sounding morpheme. Other researchers use the term 'foreignising' for this strategy. Results from her study showed that the subjects used non-linguistic strategies most, and that the low proficiency learners used CS more than the higher proficiency learners.

2.5 Studies Based on Interactional Approach

CS were studied in many facets over the years; some on written communication such as the study by Varadi (1973), but mostly on oral communication. Studies on oral communication were conducted either using the psychological approach or the interactional approach. The following are some reviews on studies adopting the interactional approach.

2.5.1 Studies by Trosborg, Wagner and Williams et al.

Wagner (1983) conducted one of the first empirical studies on CS using an interactional approach. This pilot study was originally published in German in 1979 and the translated version was then included in the book edited by Færch and Kasper (1983a): *Strategies in Interlanguage Communication*.

Wagner (1983) adopted a broader concept in looking at CS, pointing out that the traditional definition of CS is "potentially misleading as it implies that learners only

have recourse to the strategies in very special types of situations” (ibid, 1983:159). 9 adult Danish learners of German were the participants of the pilot study who were asked to produce a clay pot and a house from Lego blocks.

Wagner observed a particularly high frequency of the following 3 phenomena, although the same phenomena also appeared in the speech of NS:

- a frequent change of strategies in connection with the production of plans or sub-plans.
- a change in the type of discourse, induced by the speaker’s knowledge of his interlocutor. In this case, the better interactant is charged with an increased load of verbalization;
- an emphasis on ensuring mutual comprehension, primarily on the part of the better interactant.

While Wagner used instruction tasks to elicit oral production on his subjects, Trosborg (1982) audio taped spontaneous natural conversations between Danish intermediate learners and NS of English. She observed high frequency of repetition and appeal strategies in her data demonstrating how meaning is negotiated in a cooperative and mutually aiding fashion. Trosborg believes that although attempts to solve communication problems may be performed on a cooperative basis, strategies are products of the individual performer. She also states that the NS interlocutor may not only encourage communication, but at the same time the learner can benefit from being exposed to the NS’s speech production. The reason being the NS’s feedback may not only function as a check on the learner’s performance, but his response also has the

important function of providing the learner with new linguistic “input”, as well as stimulating the interest for communication.

Williams, Inscoc and Tasker (1997) studied interactions between NNS international teaching assistants (ITA) and NS undergraduate students in chemistry laboratory sessions. They looked at confirmation checks, clarification requests, comprehension checks and other or self-repetitions/ reformulations employed by the interactants in achieving their goal, which is to successfully complete the lab experiments. Results from the study suggest that mutual comprehension is related to the CS that the NNS and NS employ during the task. Their success may be attributed in part to what Williams, Inscoc and Tasker called, their ‘conservative’ questioning strategies and to the apparent awareness of both parties of the potential for miscommunication and the need for gradual and often prolonged negotiations of meaning.

2.5.2 Studies Using Dornyei and Associates’ Taxonomy.

The following are two studies which used taxonomies adapted from Dornyei and associates’ taxonomy with some other well-known researchers’ taxonomy.

Inuzuka (2001) explored on how to encourage Japanese learners of English to acquire CS in a junior high school classroom. Students were asked to transcribe and evaluate their own recorded conversations with their NS assistant language teacher (ALT). 8 classroom sessions were used for this study, where students were taught a different type of CS in each classroom period except for the first period prior to the conversation with the ALT. Results show that although the students were unable to use CS at the beginning, by the end of the study they began to use some of them. The self-

transcription and evaluation of their conversation recordings helped raised students' awareness of how CS work in conversations and gave them opportunity to improve their conversation ability. Inuzuka's findings also show that all three levels; elementary, intermediate and advanced learners were able to employ the 'meaning negotiation strategies'. Only the intermediate and advanced learners were able to demonstrate what Inuzuka called 'turn-taking strategies', while none of the elementary learners were able to use achievement strategies.

Wannaruk (2002) used one-on-one interviews of 75 Thai engineering, agriculture and information technology major students by their NS English teachers in her study on CS in the English for Science and Technology (EST) context. Findings proved that significant difference exists between high, moderate and low oral proficiency learners in the number of CS employed. The group with low level of oral proficiency employed significantly more CS than did the ones with moderate and high levels of oral proficiency. According to Wannaruk, the reason for this phenomenon is due to the fact that CS served to compensate for the lack of target knowledge. Therefore, the learners with high level of proficiency were equipped with more knowledge of the target language and appealed less to CS. The low proficiency learners on the other hand had limited knowledge; therefore they resorted to the use of CS.

Wannaruk observed differences in the selection of the type of CS by the 3 groups. Low oral proficiency learners used more avoidance CS, modification devices, paralinguistic CS and L1-based CS significantly more than those with moderate and high levels of oral proficiency. While L2-based CS were employed more often by those in moderate and high levels of oral proficiency.

2.6 Taxonomical Framework

The framework for analysis in this study is developed from taxonomies suggested by previous researchers (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurell, 1995; Dornyei and Scott, 1997; Tarone, 1977; Paribakht, 1985) with some modifications. Descriptions of the CS are adapted from Dornyei and Scott, (1997) and Iwashita (1999) and the CS taxonomy for analysis in this study is given as follows:

(A) Avoidance/ Reduction Strategies

1. Topic avoidance (TA)

A message is reduced by avoiding certain language structures or topics considered problematic or by leaving out some intended elements for a lack of linguistic resources.

2. Message abandonment (MA)

A message is left unfinished because of some language difficulties.

(B) Achievement/ Compensatory Strategies

1. Paraphrase

(i) Circumlocution (CR)

Exemplifying, illustrating or describing the properties of a target object or an action.

(ii) Approximation

- Lexical (LX)

Using a single alternative lexical item, such as a superordinate or a related term, that shares the semantic features with the target word or structure.

- Phonetics (similar sounding words) (PH)

Compensating for a lexical item whose form the speaker is unsure of with a word (either existing or non-existing) which sounds more or less like the target item.

(iii) Word coinage (**WC**)

A non-existing L2 word is created by applying a supposed L2 rule to an existing L2 word.

(iv) All-purpose-words (**APW**)

Extending a general, “empty” lexical item to contexts where specific words are lacking.

(v) Restructuring (rephrase/ self-repair) (**RS**)

Abandoning the execution of a verbal plan because of language difficulties, leaving the utterance unfinished, and communicating the intended message according to an alternative plan such as by repeating a term, by adding something or using paraphrase or making self-initiated corrections in one’s own speech.

2. Conscious Transfer

(i) Literal translation (**LT**)

A lexical item, an idiom, a compound word or a structure is literally translated from L1/L3 to L2.

(ii) Foreignising (**FR**)

Using a L1/L3 word by adjusting it to L2 phonology (i.e., with a L2 pronunciation) and/ or morphology. Roslina (1999) uses the term ‘Morpheme Combination’ for this particular strategy as her findings show that learners tend to combine Japanese and L1 or L3 morphemes to make a word ‘sounds more Japanese’.

(iii) Code switching (**CSW**)

Including L1/L3 words with L1/L3 pronunciation in L2 speech; this may involve stretches of discourse ranging from single words to whole chunks and even complete turns.

3. Non-linguistic Means

(i) Accompanying verbal output (**NLA**)

An utterance that is accompanied by a visual illustration of the same intended concept.

(ii) Replacing verbal output (**NLR**)

A certain concept illustrated completely in the form of a visual illustration and unaccompanied by any verbal utterances.

4. Retrieval (**RT**)

An attempt by a speaker to retrieve a lexical item by saying a series of incomplete or wrong forms or structures before reaching the optimal form.

(C) Stalling/ Time-gaining Strategies

1. Fillers, hesitation devices and gambits (**FL**)

Using gambits to fill pauses, to stall and to gain time in order to keep the conversation channel open and maintain discourse at times of difficulty.

2. Self-repetition (**SR**)

The speaker self-repeats a word or a string of words immediately after they were said.

3. Other-repetition (**ORPT**)

The speaker repeats something the interlocutor said to gain time.

(D) Interactional Strategies

1. Appeals

(i) Direct/ Explicit (APD)

The speaker turns to the interlocutor for assistance by asking an explicit question concerning a gap in one's L2 knowledge.

(ii) Indirect/ Implicit (API)

The speaker tries to elicit help from the interlocutor indirectly by expressing lack of a needed L2 item either verbally or nonverbally.

2. Meaning Negotiation Indicator

(i) Requests

- Repetition (RPR)

The speaker requests for repetition when not hearing or understanding something properly.

- Clarification (CLR)

The speaker requests for explanation of an unfamiliar meaning structure or any expressions designed to elicit clarification of the interlocutor's preceding utterances.

- Confirmation (CFR)

The speaker requests for confirmation that he had heard or understood the interlocutors' preceding utterances correctly or to dispel that belief. This usually involves a complete or partial repetition of the previous speaker's utterances in a rising intonation.

(ii) Expressions of non-understanding

- Explicit (ENU)

The speaker verbally expresses to the interlocutor that he did not understand something properly.

- Implicit (**INU**)

The speaker nonverbally expresses to the interlocutor that he did not understand something properly.

(iii) Interpretive summary (**IS**)

The speaker makes an extended paraphrase of the interlocutor's message to check that the speaker has understood correctly.

(iv) Other repair (**ORPR**)

The speaker corrects something in the interlocutor's speech.

(v) Guessing (**GS**)

Guessing is similar to a confirmation request but the latter implies a greater degree of certainty regarding the key word, whereas guessing involves real indecision.

3. Responses

(i) Repetition (**RPT**)

The speaker repeats the original trigger or suggested corrected form.

(ii) Rephrasing (**RPS**)

The speaker rephrases the original trigger.

(iii) Expansion (**REX**)

The speaker puts the problem word/issue into a larger context.

(iv) Repair (**RRP**)

The speaker provides the interlocutor, self-initiated repair.

(v) Confirmation (**RCF**)

Confirming what the interlocutor has said or suggested.

(vi) Backchannel cues (**BC**)

Backchannel cues here refer to indications of comprehension and participation in conversation on the part of the interlocutor, to keep the speaker talking.

(vii) Reduction (**RRD**)

The speaker responds either by means of reduction strategy; topic avoidance or message abandonment or completely ignores the interlocutors preceding utterances.

(viii) Rejection (**RRJ**)

Rejecting what the interlocutor has said or suggested without offering an alternative solution.

4. Checks

(i) Comprehension check (**CC**)

Asking the interlocutor questions to check whether he is following you or not.

(ii) Own-accuracy check (**AC**)

The speaker checks to see whether what he said was correct by asking concrete questions or repeating a word with a question intonation.

The taxonomy above is not intended to be the final and absolute categorization of all CS.

2.7 Summary

Studies on CS have either been conducted based on the traditional view using taxonomies such as Tarone's, Faerch and Kasper, Paribakht, Bialystok (e.g., Ang, 1992; Ghazali, 1997; Roslina, 1999) or were only looking at certain CS in the extended view suggested by Dornyei and his associates (e.g., confirmation request, accuracy check, comprehension check, clarification request) (e.g., Iwashita, 1999; Inuzuka, 2001; Wannaruk, 2002). This study attempts to comprehensively analyze the CS based on the taxonomy suggested by Dornyei and his associates' with some modifications which were deemed necessary for this study.