

The effect of awareness-raising and explicit instruction of compensatory strategies on young learners' EFL oral and written production

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Abstract

This article presents a study intended to analyze the effects of awareness-raising and explicit strategy instruction on the performance of young learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in a multilingual context. In particular, we focused on the teaching of compensatory strategies (CpSs), a subset of communication strategies (CSs), and examined the immediate and delayed effects of explicit instruction of conceptual CpSs on young learners' oral and written object description in English. Students' description appropriateness and CpS use were assessed at three different times during the study. Three intact classes of eleven-year-old learners in a Spanish primary school participated in the study: Two classes formed the experimental group ($n = 43$) and the third class served as the control group ($n = 20$). Object description was part of the learners' EFL syllabus, but only the experimental group received explicit instruction in identifying and using CpSs. Results revealed a positive effect of awareness-raising and explicit instruction of CpSs on overall description appropriateness in oral production immediately after intervention. Moreover, with regard to specific strategies, the use of superordinate appears to be the CpS that benefits the most from instruction.

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1 Introduction

For over 40 years, research has focused on the study of strategies that help learners become more effective in communicating orally and in written form in a foreign language. Earlier studies (Faerch

& Kasper, 1983; Poulisse, 1987, 1990; Tarone, 1980; among others) aimed at defining and classifying strategies and developed towards determining the effectiveness of intervention in enhancing strategic competence, which generally resulted in more successful communication.

In the study of the strategies L2 learners use, Tarone (1980) distinguished between strategies of language use and language learning strategies. The former included communication strategies (CSs), which involve the speaker's communicative intention as one of their defining criteria, and production strategies (i.e., using the linguistic system efficiently) whereas the latter had to comply with the need to learn the language. Despite this distinction, Tarone (1980) already pointed out that CSs could also lead learners to effective language learning. Indeed, Oxford (1990) defined compensation strategies (i.e., strategies to overcome limitations in comprehension or production) as a category within language learning strategies, and, more recently, Oxford, Rubin, Chamot, Schramm, Lavine, Gunning and Nel (2014) claimed that all strategies benefit learning a new language, as "every instance of language use offers the potential for language learning" (p. 32).

Many studies have provided evidence of the possible benefits of strategy instruction on language learning improvement (Cohen, 1998; Dörnyei, 1995; Gunning & Oxford, 2014; Iwai, 2006; Lam, 2009, 2010; Maleki, 2007; Nakatani, 2005; Rabab'ah, 2004, 2016; Teng, 2012; among others). However, most research has been carried out with adults or adolescents whereas studies on the effects of CS instruction on young learners are scarce. In order to offer new data, this study presents an approach for CS instruction and examines its immediate and delayed effects on young multilingual children learning EFL in the school context. The present study uses a quasi-experimental design to address the effectiveness of awareness-raising and explicit instruction of CpSs on the performance of a referential task. In order to determine the short- and long-term effects of training, comparisons regarding the appropriateness of the learners' descriptions between an experimental and a control group were established prior to the study, immediately after intervention and in the long run.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Conceptualization of communication strategies

From the initial stages of CS research, most authors (Canale, 1983; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Poulisse, 1990; Tarone, 1980) agree that language learners frequently resort to CSs when experiencing linguistic shortcomings in their target language (TL) production in order to avoid a communication breakdown. In the foreign language instructional context, the main goal of CSs is to help learners communicate effectively in the TL despite their deficient linguistic knowledge and limited communicative ability.

Two theoretical approaches, the interactional and the psycholinguistic, have influenced the study of CSs (Ellis, 1994). The interactional or interindividual approach (Dörnyei, 1995; Fernández Dobao, 2004; Nakatani, 2005, 2010; Tarone, 1980; Yule & Tarone, 1991) considered CSs in terms of social interaction and included negotiation of meaning and repair mechanisms as CSs. On the other hand, the psycholinguistic or intraindividual approach (Bialystok, 1990; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Poulisse, 1990) located CSs within a general model of speech production and conceived CSs as cognitive processes involved in language use (See Nakatani & Goh, 2007 for a summary). These two competing orientations influenced the notion of CSs as well as how CSs were identified and categorized, which resulted in two types of strategy classifications, namely, product- and process-oriented taxonomies. Product-oriented taxonomies were traditionally descriptive in nature whereas process-oriented classifications considered the processes underlying the learner's strategy choice.

Initially, Faerch and Kasper (1983) distinguished two types of CSs: *Achievement strategies*, which derive from the speaker's intention to reach their communicative goal, and *reduction strategies*, which result from the speaker's avoidance behavior. In turn, achievement strategies comprise *compensatory strategies* (CpSs), which are intended to solve problems due to the speaker's limited linguistic resources, and *retrieval strategies* aimed at recalling appropriate terms or information. When using achievement strategies, learners can resort to cooperative or interactional strategies and

appeal to the listener to avoid a breakdown in communication, but they also have the option of relying on intraindividual CpSs in an attempt to follow their initial speech plan without the interlocutor's assistance (Poulisse, 1987). Actually, Kasper and Kellerman (1997, p. 2) remarked that CSs were considered "a form of self-help that did not have to engage the interlocutor's help for resolution".

Within the psycholinguistic perspective, researchers from the Nijmegen Project (Kellerman, Bongaerts & Poulisse, 1987; Bongaerts & Poulisse, 1989; and Poulisse, 1987, 1990), focused on intraindividual CpSs and stated that the speaker can resort to two knowledge sources, conceptual (i.e., manipulation of the concept) or linguistic (i.e., manipulation of the code), to compensate for a missing lexical item in referential communication. The speaker makes use of *conceptual CpSs* when referring to the intended concept by either analyzing its criterial features or adopting a holistic approach and using a related term. When the speaker describes an object by means of a holistic CpS, the listener has to "extract the criterial properties of the referent" (Kellerman et al., 1987, p. 105), but when the speaker uses an analytical CpS, the listener needs to "reconstruct the referent from what are effectively a series of clues" (p. 106). Traditional strategy categories such as *circumlocution*, *description* and *paraphrase* would reflect a process of analysis of the referent whereas the use of *approximation* or *superordinate* are manifestations of holistic strategies. On the other hand, *linguistic CpSs* manipulate the code and include strategies that rely on the processes of transfer (i.e., borrowing, foreignizing, literal translation), from the L1 or any other language available to the learner, or morphological creativity which Poulisse (1990, p. 62) defined as "the use of L2 rules of morphological derivation to create (what the subject assumes to be) comprehensible L2 lexis".

This divergence in the conceptualization of CSs has also prompted different views regarding whether to teach CSs. Whereas researchers within the psycholinguistic view do not advocate for CS instruction, others (Dörnyei, 1995; Lam, 2005, 2006) argue in favor of teaching CSs and their linguistic realizations.

2.2 *Communication strategy instruction*

Despite the general agreement that the use of strategies improves language learning (Hassan, Macaro, Mason, Nye, Smith & Vanderplank, 2005), strategy teachability is not yet exempt from controversy. Some researchers seemed to be skeptical about the effectiveness of strategy instruction (Bialystok, 1990; Kellerman, 1991) on the basis that CSs develop as a result of communication in real-life situations rather than in classroom context. Actually, given the non-uniqueness of CSs to the L2, that is, learners already exhibit a repertoire of CSs in their L1, which is transferable to the L2, Kellerman (1991) rejected CS instruction and advocated to simply teach more language. On the basis of these arguments, teaching CSs in the foreign language classroom appears to be unwarranted. However, the fact that most strategic knowledge may not be acquired in the classroom does not imply that it is not teachable. Besides, automatic strategic transfer from the L1 is not necessarily guaranteed (Faucette, 2001; Nakatani & Goh, 2007). Actually, younger learners may not have enough L1 experiences to transfer and exhibit the strategic ability of an adult in the L2 (Yule & Tarone, 1997). Moreover, as strategy instruction appears to be more effective with low-proficiency learners (Lam, 2010), CS teaching seems highly desirable with young learners whose TL knowledge tends to be limited. In a study on the effect of proficiency on strategy use, Hua, Nor and Jaradat (2012) concluded that learners' oral proficiency level resulted in differences in the quantity and type of CS use between low- and high-proficiency learners and claimed that "If participants are fully equipped with linguistic resources, they make less use of compensation strategy than those who have less linguistic access." (p. 841). Moreover, these authors reported discordant perceptions as to the CSs learners thought they could employ and those they had actually used. The authors attributed these discrepancies to a lack of awareness on strategy use and advocated the systematic training in CS awareness raising.

In order to assess the usefulness of CS instruction, Dörnyei (1995) conducted a 6-week CS training program to examine the frequency and efficiency of strategy use with Hungarian secondary

school students. The author claims that some aspects of strategy use, such as the quality of participants' use of circumlocutions and frequency of fillers improved after training. In a comparative study with adult immigrants enrolled in an ESL program at a post-secondary institution in Canada, Rositter (2003) examined the benefits of CS instruction (i.e., paraphrase) in L2 performance. Immediate posttest results showed that students who received CS training used a greater variety of strategies, mainly in an object description task.

In spite of some inconclusive findings, many researchers (Cohen, 1998; Dörnyei, 1995; Gunning & Oxford, 2014; Iwai, 2006; Konishi & Tarone, 2004; Lam, 2005, 2006, 2009; Maleki, 2007; Manchón, 2008; Nakatani, 2010; Salazar, 2006; Yule & Tarone, 1997) advocate the benefits of strategy instruction to enhance the learners' communicative ability in the TL.

In a study on the effectiveness of CS training with college students, Rabab'ah (2004) reported that training and raising awareness in CS use improved students' success in describing objects depicted in pictures as students appeared to be willing to take more risks to communicate the intended meaning. In a later study, Rabab'ah (2016) examined the effectiveness of training intermediate Jordanian EFL students in the use of seven oral CSs. As results indicated, CS instruction improved learners' awareness on strategy use, which, in turn, had a positive impact on oral communication effectiveness. Teng (2012) also analyzed the effects of explicit CS instruction on a senior class of 24 English majors at university. Results revealed that, after strategy instruction, participants showed significantly higher communicative effectiveness. Lam (2010) reported an intervention study with 13- and 14-year-old students in Hong Kong. Learners in the treatment class were trained in the use of eight oral CSs. Results showed that CS instruction seemed to enhance the use of resourcing (i.e., strategic use of information provided in the task instruction sheet) by less proficient speakers.

In a study with sixth graders in Québec, Gunning & Oxford (2014) concluded that strategy instruction had a positive impact on learners' oral interaction. As the authors reported, prior to intervention, learners tended to switch to their L1 or abandon the message when facing difficulties interacting in English. However, as a result of intervention, students became more aware of the strategies they could use and, in turn, relied more on the strategies they had been taught.

As Rubin, Chamot, Harris and Anderson (2007, p. 141) argued, "learners should be taught not only the language but also directed towards strategies they could use to promote more efficient learning". Konishi and Tarone (2004, p. 175) stated that CS instruction needs to meet two goals: "improving students' ability to use the second language (L2) communicatively and improving their mastery of a core set of English syntactic patterns". Moreover, Dörnyei (1995) suggested that CS teaching is more effective if explicit, that is, if learners are provided with a set of basic linguistic structures and procedural vocabulary in L2 to verbalize CSs.

In their review of CS research, Nakatani and Goh (2007) concluded that CS instruction is beneficial especially when strategy training includes the use of metacognitive strategies and awareness-raising. Malakoff (1992) already pointed out the importance of having learners reflect on the linguistic features of the language as "metalinguistic awareness allows the individual to step back from the comprehension or production of an utterance in order to consider the linguistic form and structure underlying the meaning of the utterance" (p. 518). Actually, metalinguistic awareness, which appears to be higher in multilinguals than in monolinguals, is a crucial factor in facilitating the acquisition of additional languages. As Jessner (2006, p. 34) claims, "the learner who has already been in contact with two language systems develops certain skills and abilities which the monolingual learner of a second language in this form lacks". However, as Svalberg (2012) states, more research is needed on how language awareness is applied in language learning classrooms and its effects on language learning.

Whereas most studies on CS instruction have dealt with its immediate effects, many researchers (Benson, Fischer, Geluso & Von Joo, 2013; Cohen, 2011; Hassan et al., 2005; Iwai, 2006; Manchón, 2008; Nakatani, 2010; Plonsky, 2011) have claimed that more studies on the long-term effects of strategy instruction are needed. Moreover, most studies have been conducted with older learners while research with young learners is still scarce (Bialystok, 1990; Gunning & Oxford, 2014; Martínez-Adrián, Gallardo-del-Puerto & Basterrechea, 2019).

Additionally, most research on CSs has been developed in the oral domain, and only a reduced number of studies has focused on the learners' use of CSs in written production (e.g., Yarmohammadi & Seif, 1992), although as Santos (2011, p. 2) states, "lexical problems can come to the writer's attention as much as they come to the speaker's attention".

In order to fill these gaps and offer new data, our study aimed at examining the short- and long-term effects of awareness-raising and explicit instruction of CpSs on young EFL learners' oral and written performance. Taking into consideration the findings from previous studies (Dörnyei, 1995; Konishi & Tarone, 2004; Iwai, 2006; Nakatani, 2010; Poulisse, 1990; Tavakoli, Vahid & Esteki, 2011; Yule & Tarone, 1991), we seek to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Does awareness-raising and explicit instruction of CpSs have an immediate effect on learners' oral and written description appropriateness?

RQ2: If so, is this effect sustained in the long run?

3 Method

To establish the boundaries of this study, we focused on CpSs, a sub-type of CSs that help learners expand their communicative resources. According to Poulisse (1990), conceptual CpSs are the most frequently used in object description tasks similar to the task participants in our study carried out. More specifically, we examined conceptual CpSs and targeted the analytic CpS of describing characteristic features, and the holistic CpSs of using *superordinate* and the comparison of related terms (*likeness*).

3.1 Setting and participants

The study took place in a public primary school in the Valencian Community, a bilingual region in Spain with two official languages: Spanish and Valencian, a dialectal variety of Catalan. Although both languages are taught and used as languages of instruction at school, Spanish is the dominant language in the sociolinguistic school context.

A total of 63 students (31 boys and 32 girls) in their sixth and last year of elementary education participated in this study. Learners' ages ranged between 10 and 13, the mean age being 10.8 years ($SD = 0.54$). All students were at least bilingual in Spanish and Valencian; however, whereas 21% of the students claimed to have both languages as home languages, the rest reported Spanish (60%), Valencian (9.5%) or Romanian (9.5%) as their L1.

At the time of the study, two different language approaches were used for instruction at school: a Valencian immersion program (*Programa de Inmersión Lingüística* or PIL), and a program that progressively introduces the use of Valencian to students (*Programa de Incorporación Progresiva* or PIP). English was the third language in the school curriculum.

At the onset of the study, most learners had received about 300 hours of EFL instruction, and had an elementary level of proficiency in English (A1), as the results of an adaptation of the *Movers Cambridge Young Learners English Test* (<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/young-learners-sample-papers-2018-vol1.pdf>) indicated.

Three intact classes participated in the study. Two classes (a PIL and a PIP group) formed the experimental group ($N = 43$) while the third class, a Valencian immersion group (PIL), served as the control group ($N = 20$). Despite this difference, the effect of language instruction was out of the scope of the present study. The three classes were taught by the school's appointed EFL teacher, who also participated as a researcher in the study.

3.2 Materials and procedure

Due to the participants' elementary level of proficiency in English, and the fact that the study had to be embedded into the regular EFL classes, the basic referential task of describing pictures of real-world objects (e.g., a camera, a laptop, a mobile phone, etc.) was chosen as the communicative task to elicit the learners' CpSs.

Data were collected at three different times throughout the study (i.e., at the onset of the study, immediately after intervention, and six months later). Intervention consisted of implementation of awareness-raising activities and explicit instruction in the use of analytic and holistic conceptual CpSs for the referential task of describing objects in EFL.

Drawing upon previous models of instruction (Cohen, 1998, 2011; Dörnyei, 1995; Chamot, 2008), our strategy instruction approach for the experimental group included the following phases:

- *Awareness-raising* (Ar): Have learners reflect on the use of the CSs they produce.
- *Modelling* (M): Provide learners with models of CpSs in the TL.
- *Instruction* (I): Explicitly teach learners the core vocabulary and structures required to use CpSs successfully.
- *Practice* (P): Provide tasks for practicing the targeted CpSs.

Even though the ArMIP approach is described in a sequential way, awareness-raising should embrace all phases of the intervention process.

The study was conducted throughout a series of fifteen 50-minute sessions over a period of eight months within the school year (see Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of the study

Sessions	Timing	Experimental Group	Control Group
1 - 2	Oct.	Pretest: Oral (video recorded task) and written object description	
3 - 5	Oct.	Introduction to object description as part of the EFL curriculum	
6 - 11	Oct. Nov.	ArMIP approach for the use of CpSs in object description	Object description unit from their textbook
12 - 13	Nov.	Posttest: Oral (video recorded task) and written object description	
14 - 15	May	Delayed posttest: Oral (video recorded task) and written object description	

To assess overall description appropriateness prior to any intervention, pre-test data were collected at the beginning of the study for both groups (Sessions 1 and 2). Each participant completed an oral and a written task individually. The written task consisted of the description of a camera whereas the oral task was conducted as a guessing game in which each learner described an object to the entire group and was videotaped. To minimize a mimicking effect, several pictures of different objects were displayed for each learner to describe. Sessions 3 through 5 were common to all participants and consisted of an introduction to object description, which was part of the EFL curriculum.

Intervention in the experimental group (Sessions 6 to 11) involved explicit CpS instruction by means of the ArMIP approach described above. The first phase (*Awareness-raising*) took place while viewing the videotaped oral descriptions produced in Session 1. Students in the experimental group were prompted to identify the strategies or 'tricks' they had used to help their peers guess the object depicted, which was an effective way to highlight and raise awareness on the strategies learners already possessed in their repertoire (Dörnyei, 1995; Rubin et al., 2007).

In the *Modelling* phase, a series of object definitions adapted from the *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* was used to provide CpS models in object description. To raise awareness on

the importance of naming the essential features when describing an object, learners were asked to pinpoint the keywords that had allowed them to identify the object depicted in each definition.

During *Instruction*, an object description guide (Appendix A) was provided to illustrate the linguistic realizations for using the targeted CpSs. This guide was based on the previous work of Jourdain and Scullen (2002), Konishi and Tarone (2004), and Tarone and Yule (1989). To enhance the use of holistic conceptual CpSs (e.g., superordinate), the teacher emphasized the importance of starting a description by naming the category the object belongs to. Similarly, to promote the use of analytic conceptual CpSs, learners were explicitly taught the basic features to describe an object (i.e., size, shape, material, function, etc.) and the grammatical structures and vocabulary to do so. In order to raise awareness, learners were directed to identify the structures used in the object definitions provided earlier while referring to this guide.

In the *Practice* phase, the teacher showed pictures of similar objects (same category, different features) to illustrate the importance of describing details to properly differentiate among similar objects (Yule, 1997). Again, to raise the learners' metalinguistic awareness, the experimental group was guided to detect and analyze the descriptive structures frequently employed in object description (Appendix B). At the end of this phase, learners completed a description task to consolidate the vocabulary, structures and strategies explicitly introduced during intervention.

While the experimental group received CpS instruction by means of the ArMIP approach, students in the control group followed their regular EFL curriculum and completed the unit on object description from their textbook by Holderness and Superfine (2001). Although this unit included exercises on how to describe objects by naming, for example, the material or size of an object, students in the control group did not receive any explicit training on CpSs.

Immediately after intervention (Sessions 12 and 13), a posttest was administered to assess the effect of awareness-raising and explicit instruction of CpSs on oral and written production. Learners performed the same oral and written object descriptions that had been completed at the onset of the study. Six months later (Sessions 14-15), the same referential oral and written tasks were administered as a delayed posttest to verify long-term effects of awareness-raising and explicit CpS instruction.

3.3 Data Analysis

The corpus to be coded and analyzed in this study consisted of the learners' oral and written descriptions of objects before awareness-raising and explicit instruction of CpSs (pre-test data), immediately after intervention (posttest data) and six months later (delayed posttest data).

In order to analyze the appropriateness of learners' descriptions (*description appropriateness*), a coding system based on Snow, Cancino, De Temple and Schley (1991) to measure the ability of children to give formal definitions was used (see Appendix C). In our study, the appropriateness of a description was measured by the use of three conceptual CpSs, namely, the use of a word that represents an entire class of objects (*superordinate*), its resemblance to other objects (*likeness*), and an explanation of all the relevant features and functions of the intended object (*descriptive features*), as well as *communicative adequacy*, that is, the extent to which the learner successfully describes the object. Although conceptual CpSs were the focus of our study, *communicative adequacy* was considered a useful category to globally assess how comprehensible the description was. The *description appropriateness* score was obtained by adding up the scores of these four categories.

In order to illustrate how description appropriateness was coded, the following example, which was produced by a student in the experimental group in the written posttest, is provided:

It is an electronic object. It is a kind of machine. (Superordinate:+2). It is small, rectangular, light and flat. (Descriptive features: size, shape, weight, thickness:+4). It is made of metal. (Descriptive features: material:+1). It has got buttons, flash and screen. (Descriptive features: parts: +3). You use it to photos. (Descriptive features: function: +1).

Moreover, since the object could be clearly identified, *communicative adequacy* was coded as +2, resulting in this example receiving an overall score of 13 in *description appropriateness*.

To address our research questions, *t*-test analyses were conducted to assess immediate and delayed effects of intervention.

4 Results

Results on the *Movers Cambridge Young Learners English Test* were used to determine comparability between the experimental and the control groups at the onset of the study. Moreover, pre-test results on oral and written *description appropriateness* provided baseline data to establish gains in performance in both groups. As *t*-test results indicated, there were no statistically significant differences in overall *description appropriateness* between groups at the beginning of the study (see Table 2).

Table 2. Overall description appropriateness at the onset of the study (pre-test)

Description appropriateness	Experimental (N=43)		Control (N=20)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	M	SD	M	SD		
Pre-test						
oral	4.77	2.01	4.00	1.65	1.49	.142
written	4.58	2.16	3.90	1.94	1.20	.235

4.1 Results on research question one (RQ1): the immediate effect of intervention

As expected, in comparison to pre-test results, learners in both groups improved in performance in the posttest. Indeed, further analyses indicated the benefits of strategy instruction for learners in the experimental group. In oral production (see Table 3), descriptive statistics showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in all measurements. Moreover, *t*-test results revealed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in overall *description appropriateness* ($t = 2.49$; $p = .016$). Results also showed statistically significant differences in *communicative adequacy* ($t = 3.26$; $p = .003$) and in the holistic CpS of *superordinate* ($t = 2.41$; $p = .019$) in favor of the experimental group.

Table 3. *t*-test results of the immediate effect of intervention in the oral task

ORAL DESCRIPTION	Experimental (N=43)		Control (N=20)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Posttest	M	SD	M	SD		
Description appropriateness	8.84	1.98	7.25	3.04	2.49	.016
Conceptual CpSs:						
<i>Superordinate (Holistic)</i>	.79	.64	.40	.50	2.41	.019
<i>Likeness (Holistic)</i>	.05	.21	.00	.00	1.43	.160
<i>Descriptive features (Analytic)</i>	6.93	1.44	6.30	2.47	1.28	.207
Communicative adequacy	1.07	.55	.55	.60	3.26	.003

Note. Statistically significant differences when $p \leq .05$ are in bold.

With regard to written production (see Table 4), the control group scored slightly higher in *description appropriateness*, although this difference was not statistically significant. Actually, post-test results did not show any significant differences for *description appropriateness* and *communicative adequacy* between the two groups in written production. However, when evaluating individual CpSs, t-tests analyses revealed statistically significant differences in the use of *likeness* ($t = 2.61$, $p = .013$) and *superordinate* ($t = 4.37$, $p = .000$) in favor of the experimental group.

Table 4. t-test results of the immediate effect of intervention in the written task

WRITTEN DESCRIPTION	Experimental (N=43)		Control (N=20)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	M	SD	M	SD		
Posttest						
Description appropriateness	9.95	3.09	10.55	3.50	-0.68	.496
Conceptual CpSs:						
<i>Superordinate (Holistic)</i>	.81	.70	.20	.41	4.37	.000
<i>Likeness (Holistic)</i>	.14	.35	.00	.00	2.61	.013
<i>Descriptive features (Analytic)</i>	8.16	2.39	9.30	2.70	-1.69	.097
Communicative adequacy	.84	.72	1.05	.83	-1.04	.302

Note. Statistically significant differences when $p \leq .05$ are in bold.

In light of these results, and in order to answer RQ1, we can claim that explicit instruction and awareness-raising on the use of CpSs with sixth graders had an immediate effect on overall *description appropriateness* only in oral production. With regard to the CpSs addressed in the present study, intervention appeared to influence the production of the holistic CpS of *superordinates* in both oral and written production. It is also interesting to note that the holistic CpS of *likeness*, which was not produced in the pre-test, emerged as a result of intervention in the experimental group although the difference was statistically significant only in written production. In contrast, the analytic CpS of *descriptive features* was not immediately affected by awareness-raising and instruction.

4.2 Results on research question two (RQ2): the delayed effect of intervention

Six months after intervention, overall *description appropriateness* diminished for both groups in oral as well as in written production in comparison to posttest results. In oral production (see Table 5), the positive effect of intervention was only maintained in *communicative adequacy* ($t = 2.93$, $p = .005$). The benefit of CpS instruction on the use of *superordinate* was not sustained, although the result was close to being statistically significant ($t = 1.94$, $p = .057$).

Table 5. *t*-test results of the delayed effect of intervention in the oral task

ORAL DESCRIPTION	Experimental (N=43)		Control (N=20)			
Delayed Posttest	M	SD	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Description appropriateness	7.51	2.33	6.40	2.44	1.74	.088
Conceptual CpSs:						
<i>Superordinate (Holistic)</i>	.30	.51	.10	.31	1.94	.057
<i>Likeness (Holistic)</i>	.00	.00	.00	.00		
<i>Descriptive features (Analytic)</i>	6.19	1.82	5.85	2.03	.66	.513
Communicative adequacy	1.02	.77	.45	.60	2.93	.005

Note. Statistically significant differences when $p \leq .05$ are in bold.

In written production (see Table 6), *t*-test analyses revealed that the positive effect was sustained for the holistic CpS of *superordinate* ($t = 3.83$, $p = .000$), but not for *likeness* ($t = 1.78$, $p = .083$) in the long run. Moreover, a beneficial effect on *communicative adequacy* seemed to emerge in favor of the experimental group as well ($t = 2.97$, $p = .004$).

Table 6. *t*-test results of the delayed effect of intervention in the written task

WRITTEN DESCRIPTION	Experimental (N=43)		Control (N=20)			
Delayed Posttest	M	SD	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Description appropriateness	9.53	2.68	8.55	3.38	1.25	.217
Conceptual CpSs:						
<i>Superordinate (Holistic)</i>	.53	.59	.10	.31	3.83	.000
<i>Likeness (Holistic)</i>	.07	.26	.00	.00	1.78	.083
<i>Descriptive features (Analytic)</i>	8.05	2.03	8.10	2.81	-0.08	.940
Communicative adequacy	.88	.66	.35	.67	2.97	.004

Note. Statistically significant differences when $p \leq .05$ are in bold.

With regard to RQ2, the results of our study do not denote a long-term effect of instruction on the sixth graders' overall *description appropriateness*. However, intervention appears to benefit *communicative adequacy* on oral and written production over time. As regards specific CpSs, the use of *superordinate* appears to be the strategy most influenced by instruction in written as well as in oral production in the long run. Moreover, the analytic CpS of *descriptive features* did not seem to be influenced by intervention in the present study.

5 Discussion

This study examined the effects of awareness-raising and explicit instruction of CpSs, a subtype of CSs, on the oral and written production of 11-year-old learners of EFL. The referential task of object description was used to analyze the effects of intervention on the appropriateness of the learners' descriptions and their use of analytic and holistic conceptual CpSs immediately after intervention (RQ1) and in the long run (RQ2).

With regard to the immediate effects of instruction (RQ1), our findings are in line with Fernández Dobao (2004), Lam (2009), Maleki (2007), Nakatani (2010), and Rabab'ah (2004, 2016), among

others, who concluded that explicit teaching of CSs improved learners' oral performance in the TL immediately after instruction. Actually, as Rabab'ah (2004) claims, training in the use of CSs and raising awareness on how to use CSs may encourage students to become more risk takers and communicate more effectively. Explicit strategy instruction may have provided learners with the tools they needed for successful communication. As a result, learners could have felt more comfortable and determined in using the CpSs they had learnt when describing objects.

Concerning the influence of strategy instruction on the use of specific CpSs, our study also suggests that CpS awareness-raising and instruction had the greatest impact on the use of the holistic conceptual CpS of *superordinate* in both oral and written production. It seems that prompting young learners to start their object description by naming the category the object belongs to (superordinate) was an effective way of enhancing their descriptions in English. The emergence of a significant effect of intervention on the use of *likeness*, also a holistic conceptual CpS, in written descriptions may be due to the fact that written production is not as immediate as oral production and learners can take more time to plan their writing and look for comparisons with other objects. The overall benefit of intervention on holistic strategies could be supported by the fact that younger learners tend to rely more on their holistic skills rather than on the analysis of different components when learning. This finding contrasts with Poulisse (1990), who claimed that learners predominantly used analytic CpSs in object description tasks. However, we cannot disregard that in her study data were collected from older learners.

The absence of noteworthy differences in the use of *descriptive features*, an analytic strategy, might be due to the preference for a more holistic approach to learning among young language learners. Although with university students, Teng (2012) reported that strategy instruction did not affect the use of an analytic CpS (e.g., circumlocution). Additionally, the unit on object description in the students' textbook introduced how to describe an object by naming some of its essential features. Consequently, learners in the control group, although implicitly, practiced some of the grammatical structures and vocabulary that were explicitly taught to the experimental group in order to use the analytic CpS of descriptive features, which could have had a bearing on these results.

With regards to long-term results (RQ2), in contrast to other studies (Iwai, 2006; Iwai & Gobel, 2004), our findings did not support the benefits of awareness-raising and explicit instruction of CpSs on learners' oral communicative ability in English over the long run since the positive effect of intervention on *description appropriateness* in oral production was not maintained in the present study. Despite the enhancement of *communicative adequacy* in oral and written performance and the benefits of the use of superordinate in written production, it seems that learners in the experimental group were not able to retain what they had learned. Since instruction took place over a limited number of sessions in the present study, it would need to be seen whether more intense intervention over an extended period of time would produce substantial differences.

To sum up, our six-session intervention produced positive results immediately after instruction, and in the long run, especially with regard to the use of *superordinate*, a holistic CpS, so it is plausible to think that a systematic implementation of awareness-raising and strategy instruction would "furnish students with valuable learning skills" (Gunning & Oxford, 2014, p. 96). Therefore, an effort should be made to embed strategy instruction in the school curriculum (Gunning & Oxford, 2014; Habók & Magyar, 2018; Maleki, 2007) where the recursive appeal to the learner's awareness on strategy use may play a central role in determining the effectiveness of such training. As Rivera-Mills and Plonsky (2007) stated, metalinguistic awareness may play a role in using strategies effectively as well as enhancing TL development.

In line with an overall consensus about the preference for an explicit instructional approach (Gu, 2019), strategy instruction appears to be helpful among young learners. Moreover, especially in a multilingual context, learners should be trained to take advantage of their multilingual knowledge and increase their metalinguistic awareness by teaching them similarities among languages they already know (Jessner, 1999).

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the short- and long-term effects of raising young learners' metalinguistic awareness while explicitly teaching the use of conceptual CpSs to describe objects in English in a multilingual context. Our findings lend support to immediate instructional benefits in both oral and written production which are barely sustained in the long run. Therefore, further research should examine whether a more extensive treatment would produce greater effects (Plonsky, 2011).

This study offers insights into the potential benefits of explicit instruction and awareness-raising on the use of CpSs with EFL learners in the multilingual context of the Spanish elementary education system. Jessner (2006, p. 122) suggested that "instruction methods aiming at raising linguistic awareness in language learning should be developed and applied to a much greater extent in the classroom". Without any doubt, more studies are needed to determine whether similar or greater effects occur in different contexts (Gunning & Oxford, 2014). In as much as "more intervention studies are needed to investigate effective and appropriate strategy instruction for young learners" (Goh, 2019, p. 267), we intended to contribute to this much needed research agenda in the multilingual classroom.

From a pedagogical standpoint, our study may contribute to understanding the usefulness of teaching CSs to a younger population. Explicit instruction of CpSs may provide learners with the necessary tools, so they can keep engaged in communicating in the TL.

The present study is not exempt from constraints. First of all, it was limited to examining three types of conceptual CpSs, one analytic, namely, *descriptive features* and two holistic CpSs, the use of *superordinate* and *likeness*. The analysis of other strategy types or the use of a different task to elicit learners' CpSs could have yielded different results. As it has been pointed out, the type of task may determine the learner's use of CSs (Poullisse, 1990; Rosas, 2018).

Also, a qualitative analysis of the data could have provided a more in-depth understanding of CS instructional outcomes. Given the context of the study (i.e., only one English teacher per grade level), the teacher was to act as the researcher, which could have influenced the outcomes of the study. When possible, the inclusion of an observer would be desirable to avoid the likelihood of teacher/researcher bias. Our intervention did not include a self-appraisal phase as seen in other strategy training models. For further research, it would be desirable to collect self-reported data on the usefulness of learners' choices in strategy use (see Martínez-Adrián et al., 2019), which could offer new insights into how learners use their strategic knowledge in developing strategic competence. As it has been argued, self-reported use of CSs could assist younger learners in "developing students' ability to reflect on their own learning and develop their procedural knowledge." (Rubin et al., 2007, p. 147).

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This article is dedicated to the memory of our colleague Pilar Jara Jiménez.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Object Description Guide (Adapted from Konishi & Tarone, 2004; Jourdain & Scullen, 2002; and Tarone & Yule, 1989).

DESCRIBING OBJECTS

Para describir un objeto debes indicar el grupo al que pertenece, su tamaño, su forma y de qué material está hecho. También debes señalar para qué sirve y nombrar algunas de sus partes.

Useful structures**It is an instrument / an object / a tool**

Es un instrumento / un objeto / una herramienta

It is a piece of ...

Ex. It is a piece of furniture: Es un mueble

It is a kind of.../ It is a sort of ... + noun

Es una clase de .../ Es un tipo de... + nombre

Ex: It's a kind of vehicle: Es una clase de vehículo.

It is like a ...+ noun: Es como un/una... + nombre

Ex: It is like a snake: Es como una serpiente.

It is ... + (size and shape adjectives): Es ... + (adjetivos de tamaño y de forma).

Ex: It is long and thin: Es largo y delgado.

It is made of ... + Wood/ plastic/ metal/ glass/ cloth/ paper:

Está hecho de ... + nombre del material.

Ex: It is made of wood: Está hecho de madera.

It has got ...+ noun: Tiene ... + nombre

Ex: It has got four legs: Tiene cuatro patas.

You use it ... + for + verb(-ing): Se usa para..**It is used + to + verb**

Ex: You use it to peel potatoes: Se usa para pelar patatas.

It is used to draw circles: Se usa para dibujar círculos

Useful vocabulary

SIZE (TAMAÑO): big (grande), small (pequeño), medium size (mediano), long(largo), short (corto), thin (delgado), thick (grueso).

SHAPE (FORMA): round (redondo), circular (circular), square (cuadrado), triangular (triangular), elliptical (elíptico), rectangular (rectangular), flat (plano).

MATERIALS (MATERIALES): wood (madera), metal (metal), glass (cristal), plastic(plástico), cloth(tela), paper(papel).

Appendix B. Raising-awareness activity on common structures

Read these definitions and find the common features:

Chair: It is a piece of furniture with a seat raised above the ground and a support for the back. You use it to sit on.

Cupboard: It is a piece of furniture with one or two doors at the front. It usually has shelves inside. It is used for keeping things in.

Bed: It is a big piece of furniture that you use to sleep.

COMMON STRUCTURES: _____

Pencil: It is an object that you use for writing and drawing. It consists of a long thin piece of wood with a piece of graphite in the middle.

Ruler: It is a long flat object made of wood, metal, or plastic. It has got straight edges and it is marked in centimetres. You use it to measure things or to draw straight lines.

Rubber: It is a small object that you use to rub out mistakes that you have made while writing or drawing. It is made of rubber.

COMMON STRUCTURES: _____

Appendix C. Description appropriateness coding system (Adapted from Snow et al. 1991)

Category	Score			
		Absence	Presence	
			Once	Twice or +
<i>Superordinate</i>	0	1	2	
<i>Likeness</i>	0	1	2	
<i>Descriptive features</i>				
Color	0	1	2	
Shape	0	1	2	
Size	0	1	2	
Weight	0	1	2	
Length	0	1	2	
Thickness	0	1	2	
Material	0	1	2	
Function	0	1	2	
Enumeration	0	1	2	
Parts	0	1	2	3
Others	0	1	2	3
<i>Communicative adequacy</i>	Impossible to identify the described object			0
	Possible to identify the object, but ambiguity remains			1
	Clear identification of the object			2

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