The Use of Reception Strategies by Learners of French as a Foreign Language

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Listening in a second or foreign language is a very demanding task because it involves both correctly interpreting incoming speech and responding appropriately to the speaker. This qualitative classroom-based investigation describes the types and frequency of reception strategies used by learners at three different proficiency levels in French while engaged in a two-way information-gap task. Results indicate that the learners used various strategies in order to achieve understanding while interacting with one another. These strategies were used either to obtain new information from interlocutors, to confirm information, or to repair comprehension problems. The results also suggest that learners at all proficiency levels were able to use these strategies when needed and evidently without prior training in strategy use.

FOR SECOND OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE (FL) learners, listening can be a very demanding task because it involves not only correctly interpreting incoming speech but also responding appropriately to the speaker, especially in face-to-face conversations where listeners must be able to contribute verbally to the discourse. In such cases, the success of communication relies heavily on the listener’s use of strategies to give feedback to the speaker in order “to clarify meaning, signal understanding, or advance conversation” (Vandergrift, 1997b, p. 494). The interactive listening strategies that listeners use during face-to-face communication are called reception strategies (Vandergrift). A number of studies in second language acquisition have attempted to establish typologies of reception strategy use, as well as to identify the different factors affecting their use (e.g., Rost & Ross, 1991; Vandergrift, 1997b). Researchers have also looked into teaching FL learners how to use these strategies effectively (Lynch, 1995; Rost & Ross, 1991; Vandergrift, 1997a, 1997b). The results of these studies have yielded important information concerning FL reception use. However, few of these studies bear direct relevance to the typical setting of FL classrooms, as many took place in experimental conditions that involved gathering data on the interactions between native speakers (NSs) and nonnative speakers (NNSs). To our knowledge, no typologies of reception strategies have been identified from studies in foreign language classroom settings where it is more common for teachers to encourage target language interaction solely between FL learners. Identification of such a typology is important because students who are NNSs of the target language may have different language needs when communicating with other NNSs than with NSs, especially regarding the type and frequency of reception strategy they use (Foster, 1998). This article attempts to fill this gap in FL reception strategy research by reporting on a study of reception strategy use among NNS learners of French as an FL in a two-way information-gap task in Singapore. This study is potentially important for FL researchers because, although they are common in FL classrooms, few studies have used two-way information-gap tasks to study interaction.
between NNS learners despite the fact that studies of NNS interaction have suggested that they produce more negotiation of meaning than interaction between NSs and NNNs (Gass & Varonis, 1985; Varonis & Gass, 1985).

**INTERACTIVE LISTENING**

According to Rost (1990), listeners’ roles in discourse can vary along a continuum from “collaborative to non-collaborative” (p. 91). At the noncollaborative end, such as watching television, listeners have very limited opportunities to interact with speakers, whereas at the collaborative end, such as face-to-face conversations, successful listeners are required to participate actively in building the discourse. The latter type of collaborative listening, or interactive listening (Lynch, 1995), requires listeners to display signs of partnership and understanding to fulfill their role as successful participants in the discourse (Rost, 1990, 2002). Rost (1990) identified several different strategies that listeners must be able to use in order to be effective participants in a discourse. Of these, three strategies of particular significance to the present study are (a) use of appropriate cues, (b) use of queries to repair comprehension problems, and (c) use of queries to check comprehension. Use of appropriate cues means that listeners provide appropriate back-channeling signals, either verbal, semiverbal (e.g., mm, uh huh), or nonverbal (e.g., nodding), to interlocutors to indicate that they are attending to and comprehending the interaction. The second type of strategy, use of queries to repair comprehension problems, is used when listeners want to repair comprehension problems in conversations. There are three types of listener repair corresponding to local, global, and transitional representations of the discourse (Rost). Of these three, Buckwalter (2001) discovered that, although repairs were predominantly local, as learners’ proficiency improved, “repairs became increasingly global” (p. 394). With the third type of strategy, use of queries to check comprehension, listeners ask questions to make sure they have comprehended a message or to clarify ambiguous information.

**Reception Strategies**

Although the term reception strategy was coined from interlanguage research in FL communication strategies (Tarone, 1981), it has largely been ignored in strategy research, which has focused mainly on production strategies; it is only recently gaining increased research attention (e.g., Liebscher & Dailey-O’Cain, 2003; Nakahama, Tyler, & van Lier, 2001; Oliver, 2002; Vandergrift, 1997b; van Lier & Matsuo, 2000; Williams, Inscoc, & Tasker, 1997). The paucity of research on reception strategies could be related to definitional problems of what a reception strategy is, a problem common to most definitions of communication strategies (Tarone). For example, interlanguage researchers have attempted to define strategies according to criteria that were, according to Faerch (1984), “largely based on considerations of speech production” (p. 61). Of the studies that do exist, one of the earliest attempts to integrate reception use within the framework of interlanguage studies was conducted by Faerch and Kasper (1983) when they proposed a model of speech reception comprising mental (nonobservable) strategies and behavioral strategies. They further divided behavioral strategies into interactional procedures and noninteractional procedures. The former included general repair requests in which the listener requests a repair without identifying what needs to be repaired, and specific repair requests in which the listener identifies the repairable item. In the latter, the listener does not respond, indicating he or she does not understand.

In 1988, Bremer, Broeber, Roberts, Simonot, and Vasseur studied the way racial minority workers at different stages of target language proficiency resolved their comprehension problems when interacting with NSs, and established a typology of procedures aimed at signaling these comprehension problems. The more proficient the workers were, the more they would use explicit and direct procedures to signal and solve comprehension problems. Drawing upon the results of this study, Rost and Ross (1991) developed a typology of strategies used by Japanese learners of English as a second language at different stages of proficiency. This typology consisted of three main categories: global questioning strategies, local questioning strategies, and inferential strategies. Rost and Ross discovered that more proficient learners made greater use of inferential strategies, whereas less proficient learners used only local and global questioning strategies. Vandergrift (1997b) further adapted the typology developed by Rost and Ross to reflect the reception strategies used by FL learners of French when they were being interviewed by a native speaker of French. As a result, Vandergrift refined the different types of local questioning strategies into one category, specific reprise, because he noted the difficulty of analyzing certain utterances. The results of his study also indicated that higher proficiency learners tended to use more inferential strategies, such as hypothesis testing and uptaking, whereas...
lower proficiency learners used global and local questioning strategies.

Factors Affecting Reception Strategy Use

Although many factors seem to influence strategy use, the three principle ones emerging from the literature are (a) the type of task used to elicit strategy use, (b) the status of the learner, and (c) the language proficiency of the learner using the strategy.

Type of Task. One major factor believed to play an important role in reception strategy use is the type of task used in FL classrooms to elicit such strategies (Lynch, 1995). Lynch divided tasks into two broad types: divergent and convergent tasks. Studies that used divergent tasks, such as interviews (e.g., Brooks, 1992; Vandergrift, 1997b) or open-ended discussions (e.g., Lynch), to investigate learner interaction discovered that this type of task did not always encourage negotiation of meaning. For example, Vandergrift (1997b) discovered that in interview-type activities, some learners would not attempt to clarify comprehension problems or use inferential questions. However, convergent tasks seemed to promote more substantial interaction among FL learners and give them more opportunities to use confirmation checks and clarification requests. In addition, Pica (1987) suggested that the convergent task that is the most successful in getting learners to negotiate meaning is the two-way information-gap task. Doughty and Pica (1986) suggested that this task is successful at generating more interaction because it requires “the exchange of information among all participants, each of whom possesses some piece of information not known to, but needed by, all other participants to solve the problem” (p. 307). They found that two-way information-gap tasks resulted in FL learners using more clarification requests and confirmation checks. However, it is interesting to note that in a more recent study of NS–NNS dyads engaged in a relatively unstructured conversation and a two-way gap task (a spot-the-difference type task), Nakahama et al. (2001) observed that the conversational interactions offered more substantial learning opportunities than the information-gap tasks even though they resulted in fewer instances of repair work. They maintained that because unstructured conversation results in more use of diverse language and more complex utterances, it is overall more challenging to NNSs than structured tasks. Task type, then, definitely has an effect on strategy use.

Learner Status. Another important factor affecting reception strategy use is the status of the learner. Status is defined by Carrier (1999) as a person’s “position in a societal structure which dictates the rights and duties of a person which in turn guide the performance of that person’s role in a given circumstance” (p. 67). Pica (1987) maintained that, in most FL classroom interaction, teachers and learners “engage in a social relationship which affords them unequal status as classroom participants” and that this relationship, in turn, inhibits successful FL comprehension. Pica suggested that one reason the power relationship between teacher and learners is unequal may be because many FL classroom activities provide learners with situations where they can avoid negotiating meaning. Pica further noted that even when they are faced with a comprehension problem, FL learners may choose not to repair it, hoping that it will be clarified later by the teacher. In a recent study of reception strategies that looked at NNS and native speaker teacher interaction in a content-based German as an FL class, Liebscher and Dailey-O’Cain (2003) observed that the learners did not use unspecified repairs (equivalent to global reprise in the study reported in this article; see Table 3 for a definition) with the teacher when they experienced comprehension problems. Liebscher and Dailey-O’Cain maintained that an act such as admitting that they are not paying attention in class could be face-threatening for NNSs. However, previous studies that have investigated FL learner-to-learner interaction (e.g., Doughty & Pica, 1986; Rulon & McCready, 1986) found a large number of confirmation and comprehension checks and clarification requests in small groups of learners because, as Varonis and Gass (1985) observed, they do not feel embarrassed correcting one another.

Learner Proficiency. A third factor affecting reception strategy use is FL learner proficiency. For example, Bremer, Broder, Roberts, et al. (1988) and Bremer, Roberts, Vasseur, et al. (1996) found that patterns of global questioning strategies marked listeners at a beginning stage of proficiency, whereas local questioning strategies (directed at specific utterances) indicated more proficient learners. More advanced learners also used more inferential strategies (in the form of clarification questions). The studies by Rost and Ross (1991) and Vandergrift (1997b), both focusing on NS–NNS interaction, confirmed these findings. However, whether these patterns of strategy use are the same in NNS–NNS interaction.
remains largely underinvestigated, with the exception of studies by van Lier and Matsuo (2000) and Oliver (2002). Van Lier and Matsuo paired an NNS of English with three NNSs of English at different proficiency levels, one lower, one higher, and one at the same level. They discovered that when learners of similar proficiency levels were paired, they produced a wider range of conversational features, including reception strategies, allowing them to achieve "a degree of symmetry that is similar to that of a conversation between native speakers" (p. 283). In another recent study on conversational interactions between NNSs aged 8 to 13 years, Oliver discovered that the amount of negotiation for meaning occurring in child-to-child interaction was influenced by the proficiency levels of the pairings. In fact, Oliver maintained that more negotiation of meaning occurs between NNSs of similar proficiency levels because they are not afraid to show their interlocutor that they have encountered comprehension problems.

Research on FL acquisition has stressed the importance of interactive listening strategies for listeners to be effective in a discourse. However, in many FL classrooms listening comprehension practice consists only of exposing learners to an oral text and asking them to answer a set of related comprehension questions either orally or in writing, an activity that is relatively atypical of everyday life situations where listening is mostly interactive (Berne, 2004; Field, 2000). Furthermore, and as Anderson and Lynch (1988) have pointed out, these types of listening lessons may not give learners opportunities to interact in situations in which they must "indicate when there is a comprehension problem, or provide feedback that they have understood the message" (p. 15). In agreement, Rost (2002) suggested that teaching interactive listening can be achieved "through collaborative speaking tasks that focus primarily on meaning but also entail negotiation of linguistic form" (p. 143). It is hoped that the findings of the present study, which uses a two-way information-gap activity to encourage use of reception strategies in FL learners, may also be of use to FL instructors who are seeking activities that encourage their FL students to practice interactive listening skills during listening lessons.

THE STUDY

The present study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What types of reception strategies are used by NNSs of French as a foreign language while interacting with other NNSs of French as a foreign language in a two-way information-gap task in a classroom context in Singapore, and what is the frequency of their use?

2. Are there any differences in reception strategy use by FL learners of different language proficiency levels?

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in order to test the appropriateness of the two-way information-gap task to be used in the main study and of the methods of gathering data. The results of the pilot study indicated that the initial information-gap task proved to be somewhat difficult for the participants to complete in a reasonable time frame. Yet, this pilot study demonstrated that the task allowed for the negotiation of meaning, eliciting a complete range of reception strategies similar to those outlined in the Vandergrift (1997b) and Rost and Ross (1991) studies. In addition, the results of the pilot study suggested that the two-way information-gap task needed to be modified in certain ways. That is, it was decided not only to reduce the number of cards in the information-gap task to make it less complicated, so that participants could complete the task, but also to improve the drawings in the two-way information-gap task and to impose a time limit for task completion. One final result of the pilot study was the realization that there would have to be a minimal time gap between task completion and stimulated recall interviews if the interviews were to be completed successfully.

Setting

The study was conducted in Singapore at the Alliance Française de Singapour. This French language institute offers a range of courses in French as a foreign language for both children and adults. Each course at the Alliance Française de Singapour is divided into three main levels of elementary, intermediate, and advanced classes with each level further divided into six units, each unit taking 2 months to complete. Students, who are usually given a placement test before they are placed in a class, can opt for 2-month, 4-month, or 6-month sessions. Permission was granted to conduct the study after the research project was presented to the director, and under the condition that the observation would not interfere with the classes.
Participants

The participants, who all volunteered for this study, were assured that the data collected both on audio- and videotape, would remain confidential and that it would be used only for the purpose of the research. The 14 participants who completed the study came from three different classes representing the three different levels in the Alliance Française de Singapour: Class 1 (elementary level, 4 students), Class 2 (intermediate level, 6 students), and Class 3 (advanced level, 4 students). According to their teacher (the same teacher for all three classes), the first group of students had studied French for about 160 hours, the second group for 300 hours, and the third group for 450 hours. Within each group, all participants had received the same number of hours of instruction in French, and they had learned French using the same textbooks. To help pair students according to similar speaking ability within each class for the information-gap task, their teacher suggested the pairings as outlined in Table 1, which explains the participants’ profiles in each class.

Two-Way Information-Gap Task

The task employed in the present study was a modified version of the two-way information-gap task used for the pilot study. The story, composed and drawn by one of the authors, was about a drunk driving incident, a topic thought to be universal enough for learners from different backgrounds to understand. Cards bearing a picture representing a part of the story were distributed in the same manner for each pair and in such a way that it was impossible for participants to reconstruct the whole story using only their set of cards. The aim of this task was for the participants to reconstruct orally a story represented by a set of 20 cards with each participant holding only 10 cards (Appendix A). Simply put, the participants were informed that they were holding a set of 10 pictures that were different from those of their partners’ 10 pictures. They were also told that when those 20 pictures were put together they would form a complete story line. During the interaction, participants could not see their partners’ cards, but they could see each other’s faces. Once the recording equipment was in place, the teacher was left alone with the participants. After she explained the task, she instructed the participants to complete it within 30 minutes. Participants were allowed to seek help from the teacher only to clarify task procedures. According to the teacher, the participants did not have prior strategy training, nor did they receive any special instruction in developing a story line beyond the instruction to make any story with the pictures that they thought made sense. Table 2 shows the pairing of students in each level who completed the task, and the time it took them to complete it.

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TABLE 1
Profile of Participants by Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>J1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Bank executive</td>
<td>Novice-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Novice-Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Junior college student</td>
<td>Novice-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Estate management officer</td>
<td>Novice-Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Z2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Intermediate-Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>Intermediate-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Army officer</td>
<td>Intermediate-Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Intermediate-Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>University student</td>
<td>Intermediate-Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>University student</td>
<td>Intermediate-Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>V3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Airline company executive</td>
<td>Advanced-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Students are identified by the initial of their first name and a number (1, 2, or 3) to identify their class.
TABLE 2
Pairing of Students for the Two-Way Information-Gap Task

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>Time on Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>K1–V1</td>
<td>18 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J1–C1</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M2–D2</td>
<td>33 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J2–E2</td>
<td>28 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Z2–S2</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>E3–C3</td>
<td>16 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V3–D3</td>
<td>28 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. K1, V1, J1, C1 are students of Class 1 (elementary level); M2, D2, J2, E2, Z2, S2 are students of Class 2 (intermediate level); E3, C3, V3, D3 are students of Class 3 (advanced).

Data Collection Procedures

To collect data, we conducted audio and video-recordings. Because of the poor quality of the video recordings, we did not use this material in the analysis of the learners’ performances. We also conducted interviews with each participant, which were audiorecorded and later transcribed. Because the purpose of the interviews was to gain further knowledge about the participants’ reception strategy use when completing an information-gap task, we decided to interview participants as soon as possible after they completed the task. To facilitate the data collection process, a simple protocol was established for stimulated recall during the interviews. First, we selected a section of the transcript that contained a reception strategy and asked a participant if he or she had understood the speaker’s utterance. Second, we asked the participant why he or she had responded to the speaker’s utterance in that way. Participants were told only that the purpose of the research was to study students’ behavior in classroom language tasks. The time frame for data collection was 2 months, which corresponded directly to an 8-week term at the institute. Data collection began with the availability of the volunteers. Recordings with Class 1 started on the second week of the new term, with recordings of the two other classes taking place in the fourth week of that same term. Interviews were conducted at regular intervals, following transcriptions and partial analysis of transcripts to select instances of reception strategies.

Data Analysis

To begin the data analysis, we generated a list of possible codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994), based on the observations made in the pilot study and on a version of Vandergrift’s (1997b) typology. The decision to start with borrowed codes was motivated by the need to have a benchmark against which to compare the incoming data. We decided early on in the data analysis to avoid coding kinesics (gestures) while watching the videotape of participants’ performances because the camera angle allowed us to see only the participants’ profiles, making it impossible to capture facial expressions fully. We recognize this lack of gesture data as a major limitation of this study. The data analysis began as soon as the first data were collected because they were particularly helpful in refining the tentative list of reception strategies established at the onset of the research. We first examined each transcript line by line for reception strategy use and then assigned codes. Codes sharing the same characteristics were then grouped under a more abstract concept called category (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For the analysis of the interviews, we decided that, because a large number of strategies were observed, we would select a maximum of five examples for each type of strategy found for each participant and ask each participant to comment on these strategies. Using evidence from the interviews, we again reviewed the codes, and then began the process of grouping codes under categories. This analytic process was concluded when all the incidents were classified, and as Miles and Huberman suggested, “categories were saturated, and sufficient regularities emerged” (p. 62).

FINDINGS

The findings will be presented first in terms of the three categories of strategies discovered (see Table 3), and then, in terms of frequency of strategy use.

Strategies to Develop New Information

This category includes three types of reception strategies: forward inference, uptaking, and faking (used only once in this study). This category reflects the listener’s desire to obtain new information to move the discourse forward. In addition, the speaker always perceives these strategies as signals of understanding his or her utterance. This category is somewhat similar to what Rost and Ross (1991) and Vandergrift (1997b) referred to as “inferential questions” (p. 496) though it does not include the strategy of hypothesis testing.

Forward Inference. In forward inference strategy use, the listener indicates his or her current
### TABLE 3  
Typology of Reception Strategies and Likely Speaker Response(s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Speaker’s Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategy to develop new information</td>
<td>Forward inference</td>
<td>Listener indicates current understanding by asking a question or making a statement using established information given by the speaker.</td>
<td>Provides new information; confirms or disconfirms assumption.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uptaking</td>
<td>Listener indicates he or she understands and prompts speaker to continue with yes, <em>uh huh</em>, etc., or by repeating part of or whole previous utterance with same intonation as that of speaker.</td>
<td>Continues topic development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faking</td>
<td>Listener sends uptaking signals and prompts speaker to continue although he or she has not understood previous utterance.</td>
<td>Continues topic development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy to confirm old information</td>
<td>Hypothesis testing</td>
<td>Listener asks question or rephrases speaker’s utterance to confirm what was heard and indicates a propositional understanding (or misunderstanding) of the utterance.</td>
<td>Provides old information; confirms or disconfirms assumption.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Text-level reprise</td>
<td>Listener repeats part of or whole speaker’s utterance with rising or falling intonation to confirm what was heard.</td>
<td>Confirms with a yes or by repeating previous utterance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy to clarify old information</td>
<td>Sentence-level reprise</td>
<td>Listener repeats part of speaker’s utterance with rising or falling intonation, mispronunciation, or both, to repair nonunderstanding.</td>
<td>Repeats or rephrases part of previous utterance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global reprise</td>
<td>Listener signals nonunderstanding without identifying specific problem or asks for repetition of speaker’s utterance.</td>
<td>Repeats or rephrases previous utterance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The fourth column gives only the speaker’s likeliest response(s), although, sometimes, strategy use does not result in immediate achievement of understanding.*

State of understanding. Excerpt 1 shows that inferences can be in the form of *yes/no* questions that the speaker either confirms or rejects. (See Appendix B for an explanation of the transcription notation used in this study.)

**Excerpt 1**

K1 and V1 are students from Class 1 (elementary proficiency level); T1 = Turn 1.

(T1) K1: *qu’est-ce que c’est la première votre première dessin*†  
*what is the first your first picture*†

(T2) V1: *à la sortie à la maison*  
*outside the house*

(T3) K1: *d’accord + pour travailler*†  
*ok + to work*†

(T4) V1: *oui*  
*yes*

After student V1 described her card in Turn 2, student K1 asked a *yes/no* question to obtain further information about the card. During the interview, student K1 commented on her use of this strategy saying, “it’s just to confirm with her.” Student K1 had understood her interlocutor’s utterance, but she needed confirmation of her assumption, which student V1 provided in Turn 4. Although forward inference was observed in each proficiency group, these utterances appeared to be syntactically and lexically more complex for intermediate and advanced learners than for beginning learners.

**Uptaking.** Another strategy included in the category of strategies to develop new information is uptaking, also called a “back-channeling signal” (Schegloff, 1981, p. 78) or a “continuation signal”
(Rost & Ross, 1991, p. 245). By using this strategy, listeners indicate that they are listening and presumably understanding, although Rost (1990) points out that back-channeling behavior does not necessarily prove the listener understood the speaker’s utterance. Excerpt 2 indicates that uptake was performed in the form of yes, ok, mmh, or uh huh.

Excerpt 2
S2 and Z2 are students from Class 2 (intermediate proficiency level); T1 = Turn 1.

(T1) S2: il boit beaucoup le jeune homme
he is drinking a lot the young man
il boit beaucoup et il veut conduire
he is drinking a lot and he wants to drive
la voiture
the car
(T2) Z2: ok
(T3) S2: et il est avec une fille
and he is with a girl

Student Z2 commented on his use of uptake in Turn 2 saying it was "to tell her I understand, I think."

Faking. The term faking comes from Faerch (1984). The formal aspect of faking is similar to that of uptake. However, in the case of faking, listeners signal comprehension when they have not understood. Only one instance of faking was observed in the present study, as outlined in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3
S2 and Z2 are students from Class 2 (intermediate level); T1 = Turn 1.

(T1) S2: euh ++ le le homme vient vient il
er ++ the the man comes comes he is
est ahosse de l’hôpital ahosse de
osid the hospital osid the hospital
l’hôpital
the hospital
(T2) Z2: ok d’accord ok après mon numéro
ok ok after my number
trois the man juste de descendre le
three the man just to get down the bus
bus+
(T3) S2: oui
yes

Student Z2 signaled understanding of the speaker’s utterance although the word ahosse in Turn 1 does not make sense, and its meaning cannot be guessed from the context. When interviewed, student Z2 admitted he did not understand the word used by his interlocutor but could not explain why he faked comprehension. Of course, it is entirely possible that the student did not have a strategy to ask about the meaning of the word osid he did not know. So, faking may be a difficult reception strategy for FL researchers and practitioners to identify.

Strategies to Confirm Old Information

This category includes two types of reception strategies—hypothesis testing and text-level reprise. They include questions and statements about facts mentioned in the preceding turn to indicate the listener’s desire to confirm his or her understanding of that utterance. Though Rost and Ross (1991) grouped hypothesis testing and forward inference together in the category called inferential strategies, we suggest a separate category here because of the backward orientation it gives to the discourse. That is, hypothesis testing strategies confirm comprehension of previously given information.

Hypothesis Testing. When using hypothesis testing, listeners test out their understanding of the speaker’s utterance. At the same time, hypothesis testing also indicates that the listener has made a representation, whether true or false, of the speaker’s utterance. Hypothesis testing is not always accompanied with rising intonation, and therefore can take the form of a statement, as demonstrated in Excerpt 4.

Excerpt 4
D3 and V3 are students from Class 3 (advanced proficiency level); T1 = Turn 1.

(T1) D3: après euh le jeune homme a quitté
after the young man left
son maison c’est le troisième
home it’s the third one
(T2) V3: donc donc donc tu as trois c’est
So, so, so you have three, it’s three
trois images comme ça le jeune
pictures like this. The young man, er,
homme euh le vieil homme #
the old man #
(T3) D3: # vieil homme
# old man
(T4) V3: qui déjeune
having lunch
(T5) D3: ‘yes’
(T6) V3: le jeune homme qui quitte sa maison
the young man who’s leaving his house
(T7) D3: qui quitte sa maison
who’s leaving his house
et le jeune homme qui déjeune
* and the young man having lunch
et le jeune homme qui travaille qui commence commencera à + #
* and the young man who’s working + who starts, will start + #
# à travailler
#working
'à travailler à neuf heures
* working at 9 o’clock

In Turns 2, 4, 6, and 8, student V3 confirmed her understanding of the description of three of her interlocutor’s cards. She rephrased her interlocutor’s previous contribution in a lengthy utterance. During the interview, she commented on this, “Well, there were so many cards I wasn’t sure where to place, I had to recap … it was getting confusing.” This strategy proved useful particularly when student V3 made a wrong assumption in Turn 8, which was corrected by her interlocutor in the following turn.

Text-Level Reprise. Text-level reprise consists of the listener repeating the speaker’s word(s) with a rising or a falling intonation. The term text in this strategy indicates that listeners understand the speaker’s utterance at the sentence level, but cannot immediately connect the proposition to their current understanding of the story line at the text level. Excerpt 5 shows that text-level reprise can be a repetition of a single lexical item.

Excerpt 5
J1 and C1 are students from Class 1 (elementary proficiency level); T1 = Turn 1.

(T1) C1: l’homme déjà arrivé le destination
* the man already arrived the destination
dejà†
* already†
oui arrivé le
* yes arrived the

In Turn 2, student J1 could not connect her interlocutor’s proposition with her current understanding of the story, and she specifically identified the problematic item déjà by repeating it with a rising intonation. During the interview, student J1 explained this strategy as follows: “It didn’t fit with my cards. Mine has the old man already at Dédé’s … she couldn’t have the same one.” In the following turn, student C1, having identified the source of the comprehension problem, confirmed her previous utterance. Text-level reprise can also be a repetition of a clause, or a whole sentence, as exemplified in Excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6
M2 and D2 are students from Class 2 (intermediate level); T1 = Turn 1.

(T1) M2: oui il veut sortir avec une un ami
* yes he wants to go out with a female
or a male friend
(T2) D2: oui
* yes
(T3) M2: ou une amie
* or a female friend
(T4) D2: oui un ami
* yes a male friend
(T5) M2: un ami et c’est plus avant c’est avant il va au restaurant Les Amis + oui
* a male friend, and it’s much before it’s before he goes to the restaurant Les Amis + yes
(T6) D2: c’est avant†
* it’s before†
(T7) M2: oui c’est l’accident c’est après
* yes it’s the accident it’s after

In Turn 1, student M2 described an event. In Turn 5, he explained that this event took place before another one, the accident. Student D2 understood student M2’s utterances, but she had a problem with the chronological order of events. She then repeated a part of her interlocutor’s utterance in Turn 6 to confirm the sequence of events. Student D2 confirmed her comprehension problem during the interview when she said, “I was trying to figure out the sequence … I was a bit blurred I think.”

Strategies to Clarify Old Information

This final category includes two types of reception strategies, sentence-level reprise and global reprise. These strategies signal that listeners cannot understand a part or the whole of the speaker’s utterance. By using these strategies, listeners attempt to repair their comprehension problems. This category encompasses Rost and Ross’s (1991) two categories, local and global questioning strategies.

Sentence-Level Reprise. The first type of strategy used to clarify old information is sentence-level reprise in which listeners repeat the speaker’s word(s) with rising or falling intonation. It differs from text-level reprise in that listeners do not
understand part or all of the speaker’s utterance at the sentence level. In this case, comprehension problems exist on a lexical level. As shown in Excerpt 7, a sentence-level reprise may specifically identify the problematic item.

Excerpt 7
S2 and Z2 are students from Class 2 (intermediate proficiency level); T1 = Turn 1.

(T1) S2: seize + le vieil homme ahosse de l’hôpital
sixteen the old man osid the hospital

(T2) Z2: ahosse†
osid†

(T3) S2: * outside*

(T4) Z2: ok ok dix-sept c’est le vieux homme dans le dans l’hôpital
ok ok seventeen it’s the old man in the in the hospital

In Turn 1, student S2 used a word ahosse, which was really an attempt to say hors (outside). However, her mispronunciation made the word incomprehensible. In the following turn, student Z2 repeated this problematic word with a rising intonation. He commented on his utterance saying, “No, I didn’t get it ... it sounded like, I don’t know, ahosse. Then she said the word in English.” Student Z2 was successful in repairing the comprehension problem because her interlocutor translated the word in English. It must be said that very few examples were observed where students resorted to English to solve an understanding problem, even at the elementary proficiency level.

Global Reprise. The second type of strategy used to clarify old information is global reprise. In this particular case, the listener indicates a comprehension problem but does not specifically identify what needs to be repaired. Excerpt 8 illustrates the use of global reprise.

Excerpt 8
C1 and J1 are students from Class 1 (elementary level); T1 = Turn 1.

(T1) J1: qui qui qui numéro†
who, who, who number†

(T2) C1: uh†

(T3) J1: qui numéro†
who number†

(T4) C1: j’ai aussi un *picture* un homme
un homme manger petit déjeuner à à sept heures le matin
I also have a a picture a man a man eat breakfast at at seven the morning

In Turn 1, student J1 asked a question using the following ungrammatical structure: “Qui numéro?” when she should have said “Quel numéro?” (French for which number?). Commenting on Turn 2, student C1 said, “I don’t understand what she says. Then she repeats the same thing ... I don’t know, I still don’t understand.” She signaled noncomprehension without identifying a specific problem. Note that in the development of the turn that followed strategy use, the problem was left unresolved as student J1 did not clarify anything. In Turn 4, student C1 finally abandoned that topic to start a new one.

Frequency of Reception Strategy Use

Before comparing the frequency of use of reception strategies across levels, we note two observations regarding the number of students who completed the task and the time taken to complete the task. First, the number of students that completed the task in each class was different (4 in Class 1, 6 in Class 2, and 4 in Class 3). Second, there were differences in the time taken by each pair of learners to complete the task. Although the time limit for the completion of the task was set for 30 minutes, some participants managed to complete the task in 16 minutes, while others took the full 30 minutes to do so. In addition, two pairs who exceeded the time limit were allowed to continue until they had completed their task. Table 4 outlines the frequency of reception strategy usage by proficiency level.

Generally, it can be seen from the results outlined in Table 4 that the intermediate level participants used about three times as many reception strategies as the lower proficiency level learners, and slightly more strategies than the advanced proficiency level learners. When looking at the frequency of use of specific reception strategies by individuals and by proficiency groups, the results indicate that the most used reception strategies were, in order, uptaking and hypothesis testing followed distantly by text-level reprise. The other strategies were used infrequently. The reception strategy of uptaking was used more than any other strategy and at all proficiency levels with a slightly greater use at the advanced proficiency level. However, there were some differences in usage of uptaking at the individual level. For example, those who spoke less were also those who used the most uptaking, and their frequent use of uptaking seemed to reflect their more passive role in the interaction. They tended to let their interlocutors be in charge of the task and merely agree with their comments. The reception strategy of
TABLE 4
Frequency (and Percentage) of Use of Reception Strategies by Proficiency Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>GR</th>
<th>SLR</th>
<th>TLR</th>
<th>HT</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>FI</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>2 (1.3%)</td>
<td>2 (1.3%)</td>
<td>13 (8.7%)</td>
<td>36 (24.2%)</td>
<td>92 (61.7%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (2.7%)</td>
<td>149 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>4 (0.9%)</td>
<td>8 (1.8%)</td>
<td>32 (7.1%)</td>
<td>78 (17.2%)</td>
<td>285 (62.8%)</td>
<td>5 (1.1%)</td>
<td>41 (9.1%)</td>
<td>453 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>2 (0.7%)</td>
<td>5 (1.6%)</td>
<td>21 (6.8%)</td>
<td>49 (16.0%)</td>
<td>220 (71.7%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>10 (3.3%)</td>
<td>307 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. GR = global reprise; SLR = sentence-level reprise; TLR = text-level reprise; HT = hypothesis testing; U = uptaking; F = faking; FI = forward inference.

hypothesis testing was the second most used strategy for all proficiency levels, with about one-third higher usage for the elementary proficiency level participants than for other participants. The reception strategy text-level reprise was used much less than the other two strategies outlined previously, but significantly more than the other lesser used strategies. In addition, there is no indication of any marked difference in the frequency of its use by proficiency level, although elementary level participants used this strategy slightly more often than other participants.

Of the other lesser used strategies reported in this study, forward inference was used more at intermediate proficiency levels than at the elementary and advanced levels. The rather low frequency of use of this strategy could be related to the task. That is, it may not have encouraged the learners to question their interlocutors to obtain new information. To complete the task, the learners had to make inferences about the story line, but even if they wanted to verbalize these inferences, their interlocutors were often not in a position to validate or invalidate them as they did not know the complete storyline either. Most of the time, the learners used only forward inference to obtain extra information on a card that their interlocutor had just described (information about the time, the place, or the characters involved in the action). Two previous studies have also related the use of forward inference to task type (Rost & Ross, 1991; Vandergrift, 1997b). Rost and Ross observed that advanced learners made more use of forward inference than did lower proficiency learners. However, in the task they used, the FL learners listened to a story told by an NS of the target language and were instructed to ask questions about the development of the story at key moments in the narration using their L1. This methodology probably accounts for their observation of the frequent use of forward inference. Vandergrift used an interview-type task and, as a result, did not observe any instances of forward inference because, as he suggests, interviewees may not ask questions to advance the conversation.

Finally, in the present study, the reception strategies global reprise and sentence-level reprise were hardly used by all the learners across proficiency levels, a finding consistent with previous studies (e.g., Bremer, Broeder, Roberts, et al., 1988; Bremer, Roberts, Vasseur, et al., 1996; Rost & Ross, 1991; Vandergrift, 1997b).

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study indicate that the types of reception strategies used by the FL learners were for the most part similar to those observed in previous studies (e.g., Bremer, Roberts, Vasseur, et al., 1996; Rost & Ross, 1991; Vandergrift, 1997b). In addition, the findings also demonstrate that the learners used a wide range of reception strategies to achieve understanding in the two-way information-gap task, thus indicating that such an activity (the two-way information-gap task and NNSs interacting with other NNSs in the target language) may be very useful, not only for research purposes when gathering data about learners’ listening strategy use, but also for FL practitioners who wish to teach interactive listening skills. Although the present participants used similar reception strategies as reported in other studies, we suggest that fine-tuning particular reception strategies can further clarify their meaning. For example, we discovered that reception strategies signaling understanding can also serve the purpose of advancing conversation (e.g., uptaking). Furthermore, the results of the present study suggest that there may be a need to distinguish between strategies used to clarify information (where the listener indicates noncomprehension) and strategies used to confirm information (where the listener indicates a propositional understanding of the speaker’s utterance). In addition, when distinguishing between the categories of strategies to confirm old information and strategies to clarify old information, we further suggest that there may be little difference between the terms clarify and confirm when it comes to reception strategy use. For
example, we found it very difficult to distinguish between confirming when a learner understood the other interlocutor’s utterance from trying to clarify a learner’s doubts about that utterance.

One of the main problems that FL teachers have when attempting to create an environment where interactive listening strategies can be used “naturally” by FL learners is the restriction of the context itself, the classroom, because it may be difficult for FL learners to use particular reception strategies such as asking for clarification or repetition (Liebscher & Dailey-O’Cain, 2005). Thus, Liebscher and Dailey-O’Cain maintained that the teaching of such strategies should at least be complemented by the “creation of environments in which students are free to employ them” (p. 388). The results of the present study indicate that the use of two-way information-gap tasks (similar to the one used in this study) can offer a means of creating such an environment for the teaching of reception strategies in which NNS participants must interact while working toward achieving mutual understanding with their partners. This environment of NNS to NNS interaction, as Varonis and Gass (1985) have suggested, provides learners with “a non-threatening forum within which to practice developing language skills” (p. 87). That said, FL practitioners should be aware that the use of a two-way information-gap activity to encourage reception strategy use may also lead to imbalanced participation in the dyads. That is, one partner may monopolize the interaction, thus depriving his or her interlocutor of the opportunity to practice the whole range of strategies. One way of minimizing this threat would be to pair learners at similar proficiency levels because, as Oliver (2002) maintained, more negotiation for meaning can occur in these pairings, possibly because the learners may be “more comfortable about displaying the difficulty they experience than are participants of dissimilar proficiency” (p. 107).

Although we noted that the two-way information-gap task used in the present study elicited a variety of reception strategy usages, the learners tended to rely heavily on the same three reception strategies: uptaking, hypothesis testing, and text-level reprise; so the type of task used to teach reception strategies could elicit the use of some strategies at the expense of others. For example, the frequent use of uptaking by the FL learners in the present study could indicate that in tasks where exchange of information is not required from each participant (e.g., in problem-solving discussions), the more proficient or the more outspoken learners could monopolize the conversational interaction, thus forcing their interlocutors to adopt a more passive role, as reported in previous research (Pica & Doughty, 1985). Furthermore, we speculate that the frequent use of hypothesis testing by the participants might also be task related in that the participants often needed to make sure that they understood their interlocutor’s utterance before going forward in the conversation. The frequent use of hypothesis testing observed at the elementary proficiency levels may suggest that the lower proficiency participants were less clear in their explanations (possibly because they lacked vocabulary in the FL) than the higher proficiency participants, thus prompting their interlocutors to request confirmation of their utterances. The frequency of text-level reprise (although used less than uptaking and hypothesis testing) again might be task related because the participants used reprise most frequently to verify that cards were ordered in the correct sequence.

The low frequency of use of the other reception strategies, especially in the case of the lower proficiency participants, suggests a need for reception strategy training for FL language learners, especially beginning learners. Vandergrift (1997b) also advocated reception strategy training for less proficient learners by providing a list of appropriate expressions to use, among other activities, when listeners are confronted with comprehension problems. We believe that FL beginning learners need to be made explicitly aware of how they can plan, monitor, and evaluate their use (or nonuse) of reception strategies and that post-task activities need to be added so that the learners can receive feedback on their strategy use. For example, if class time permits, the use of audio and videorecording of learners’ performance would be very useful in providing this feedback. It is interesting to note that such posttask feedback was given by the teacher to the participants in the present study and that the FL learners seemed to appreciate this feedback.

CONCLUSION

The results of the present study indicate that when FL participants are engaged in tasks that require exchanging information, such as a two-way information-gap task, they make use of various reception strategies in order to achieve understanding. Although the results have also demonstrated that participants at all proficiency levels were able to use these strategies when needed, and without prior training in reception strategy use, we nevertheless advocate some kind of reception strategy training, especially for beginning FL learners.
Because a major limitation of the present study is the lack of coding for kinesics (gestures), and because a lack of comprehension can indeed be indicated by some kind of gesture, we further suggest that future empirical research studies on reception strategy use by FL learners incorporate the role of kinesics in reception strategy research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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**APPENDIX A**

Two-Way Information-Gap Task
### APPENDIX B

#### Transcription Conventions for the Present Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Convention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of English</td>
<td><em>aaaaaaa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short, longer pauses</td>
<td>+, +++, +++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlap</td>
<td>A: aaaa [aaa] aaaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B: [bbb]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inaudible parts of words or utterances</td>
<td>bbb bbb(xxx) bbb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interruptions</td>
<td>A: aaaa #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B: # bbb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rising intonation</td>
<td>aaa ↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falling intonation</td>
<td>aaa ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments on way of speaking</td>
<td>&lt;aaa&gt; &lt;low voice&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example of reception strategy</td>
<td>aaa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from Bremer et al. (1996).*

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