

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AND ITS PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION IN EFL CLASS

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Abstract

The primary goal of English Language Teaching (ELT) is to develop the students' communicative competence through which the students are expected to be able to communicate messages in varieties of communicative situations both in spoken and in written forms. There are five components of communicative competence, namely linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, actional, and strategic competences. One of the elements of strategic competence is the students' use of communication strategies which will be the focus of this article.

Communication strategies refer to the strategies used by the speaker to cope with the communication problems as the results of the gap between the speaker's available linguistic knowledge and the message he/she intends to deliver. Therefore this article puts emphasis on the implementation of communication strategies in the classroom to support the achievement of students' communicative competence. In particular, this article deals with communicative competence, definition of communication strategy, taxonomy of communication strategy, teaching communication strategies, and teaching and learning activities in the class

Keywords: communicative competence, strategic competence, communication problem, communication strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

In the process of communication, the speaker always attempts to deliver the message to the interlocutors in many ways possible to compensate for the gaps between what he/she intends to express and the available linguistic resources. The ways the speaker uses to succeed communication is called communication strategies (see e.g. Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Faucette, 2001; Tarone, 2005; Lam, 2006; Maleki, 2007; Aliakbari & Allvar, 2009). The study of communication strategies (CSs) can be observed from 5 major concerns, namely the perspective of CSs, the taxonomy of CSs, the variables affecting of CSs, the use of CSs in L1 and L2, and the strategy training of CSs (see Sukirlan, 2011).

First, there are two main theoretical perspectives of defining communication strategy, i.e. interactional and psycholinguistic. The former focuses on focus on the joint negotiation of meaning between interactants. Communication strategies are seen as attempts to bridge the gap between the linguistic knowledge of the speaker and the linguistic knowledge of the interlocutor (see e.g. Veradi, 1993; Tarone, 1977, 1980, 1981; and Corder, 1978). The latter focuses on the cognitive process in relation to the use of CSs. They discuss communication strategies in psycholinguistic terms. Communication strategies are seen as psychological problem-solving framework and are treated as mental phenomena which underlay actual language behavior (Ellis, 1995). Therefore, communication strategies are used to solve their communication problems (see e.g. Faerch and Kasper, 1980, 1983, 1984; Bialystok, 1990; Poulisse, 1993, 1997; and Kellerman and Bialystok, 1997).

Second, the taxonomy of communication strategies is based on two main classifications of communication strategies, i.e. product-based and process-based classifications. The former follows the traditional conceptualization of communication strategies (e.g. Tarone, 1977; Tarone and Yule, 1983; Faerch and Kasper, 1980, 1983, 1984; Littlewood, 1984; Paribakht, 1985; Bialystok, 1990; and Chen, 1990) that produces the taxonomy of communication strategies based on linguistic products. The latter produces the taxonomy of communication strategies based on psycholinguistic phenomena, the proponents of which include among others Poulisse and Schills (1989), Kellerman (1990), Littlemore (2003). This approach follows the assumption that identifying cognitive process underlying the choice of a strategy is essential. Therefore, the two frameworks above produced different approach in producing the typology of communication strategies. More detailed classifications of communication strategies are discussed in chapter 2.

Third, the use of communication strategies is influenced by several factors, i.e. learner's target language proficiency and situation of use. In the case of the former, it appears that students' linguistic proficiency may, to some degree, influence his/her choice of communication strategies (e.g. Tarone, 1977; Bialystok, 1983b; Ting and Lau, 2008; Mei, 2008; Aliakbari, 2009). In the case of the latter, learner's communication strategies were

affected by the situation of use. For example, Ellis (1985) suggests that learners may use fewer strategies in a classroom environment than in a natural one, particularly if the pedagogical focus is on correct L2 rules rather than in fluent communication. Recent studies also indicate that different situations might, to a certain degree, affect the learner's choice of particular communication strategies (see e.g. Rababah, 2002, 2005; Mei, 2009).

Fourth, previous studies concerning the use of communication strategies in L1 and L2 indicate that there is no correlation between strategy use and L1 background. The use of communication strategies is evident in L1 and L2. In other words, there is no difference between the use of communication strategies in L1 and L2 communication strategy use (e.g. Tarone, 1977; Tarone and Yule, 1983; Bongaert and Polisse, 1989; Kellerman, 1991; and Lukmana, 1996).

Fifth, communication strategy and its place in language teaching, whether or not communication strategies are teachable. Many scholars (e.g. Bongaerts & Poulisse, 1989; Kellerman 1990, 1991; Bialystok, 1990; Poulisse, 1993) believe that cognitive process is unaffected by instruction; therefore, communication strategies are not teachable. However, other scholars (e.g. Faerch & Kasper, 1986; Willem, 1987; Dörnyei, 1995; Gallagher Bret, 2001; Rositer, 2003a; Konishi and Tarone, 2004; Nakatani, 2005; Lam, 2006; Ya-ni, 2007; Tiwaporn, 2009; and Maleki, 2007, 2010) advocate that communication strategies deserve a place in language teaching.

For the sake of pedagogical reasons, however, this article views that training communication strategies in the classroom is beneficial because of several reasons: (1) promoting learners' awareness to use their linguistic resources to minimize communication problems, (2) strategic competence is a part of learner's communicative competence, (3) bridging the gap between classroom and real-life communication, and (4) increasing the students' security, self-confidence, and motivation to communicate. Therefore, this article highlights several related concerns of communication strategies such as communicative competence, definition of communication strategy, taxonomy of communication strategy, teaching communication strategies, and teaching and learning activities in the class

2. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The primary goal of teaching the language is to develop the students' communicative competence - that is the ability to use the target language to achieve varieties of communicative purposes in varieties of communicative situations. Communicative competence comprises of five components, four of which are grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence (Canale and Swain (1980), and another component is actional competence (Celce-Murcia (1995).

Grammatical competence refers to the ability to use the target language based on correct grammatical rules. It is the domains of grammatical and lexical capacity (Richards, 2001). *Sociolinguistic competence* refers to the ability of using expressions in relevance to particular contexts and situations in which communication takes place (who speaks and to whom one speaks). *Discourse competence* refers to the ability of organizing the sentences coherently using cohesive devices. *Actional competence* refers to knowledge of how to perform speech acts and speech events in the target language involving interactions such as information changes, interpersonal exchanges, expression of opinions and feelings, problems (complaining, blaming, regretting, apologizing, etc.). *Strategic competence* refers to the knowledge of how to use one's language to communicate intended meaning, it is the ability to cope with the situation when vocabulary and structures are lacking so that there will be no communication breakdown. It also refers to the coping strategies that a speaker employs to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair, and redirect communication. Tarone (1984) said that strategic competence is the ability to convey information to a listener and correctly interpret information received.

Canale and Swain (1980) regarded strategic competence as the ability to use verbal and nonverbal strategies in order to avoid communication breakdown that might be caused by a learner's lack of appropriate knowledge of the target language. Then, Canale (1983) modified this view and defined strategic competence as the skills underlying actual communication. According to this model, strategic competence includes both compensatory characteristics and communication strategies.

Strategic competence is the ability to manage communication not only during an interaction, but also before and after the interaction Bachman (1990). Strategic competence is the ability to use metacognitive strategies consciously in order to solve language related difficulties in communication situation (Nakatani, 2005). Several proponents (e.g. O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Cohen, 1998) believe that metacognitive strategy training is effective for developing learners' foreign language proficiency. From the explanation aforementioned above, it can be inferred that communication strategy is a part of strategic competence which is also under subdivision of of communicative competence.

3. DEFINITIONS OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

There have been several proponents proposing the definitions of communication strategy. Tarone's (1977, 1980) definition of communication strategy puts an emphasis in interactional aspect. Meaning structure includes both linguistic and sociolinguistic structure. Communication strategy is seen as an attempt to bridge the gap between the linguistic knowledge of L2 learner and the linguistic knowledge of the learner's interlocutor in real communication situation. Tarone (1981) characterizes communication strategies as "negotiation of an agreement on meaning" between interlocutors. However, Faerch and Kasper (1983a, 1984) point out several difficulties dealing with this interactional definition: (1) it is difficult to apply to monologue (e.g. writing), when L2 learner's interlocutor is not present, there is no overt negotiation of meaning. Communicative problems occur in monologue just as much as in dialogue; (2) the application of communication strategy can take place without this becoming manifest in interaction. Based on the two perspectives aforementioned above, it might be inferred that communication strategies occur in both interactional events such as in dialogue and monologue like in describing object, telling stories, etc.

There are several definitions of communication strategies offered and each of which has its own different approaches. Below are definitions that might provide insight into the nature of communication strategies:

Communication strategy is defined as learner's attempt to bridge the gap between their linguistic competence in the target language and that of the target language interlocutors (Tarone, 1981: 288)

Communication strategies are potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal (Faerch and Kasper, 1983: 36)

Communication strategies are all attempts to manipulate a limited linguistic system in order to promote communication. Should learning result from exercise, the strategy has also functioned as a learning strategy, but there is no inherent features of the strategy itself which can determine which of these roles it will serve (Bialystok, 1983: 102)

Compensatory strategies are strategies which a language user employs in order to achieve his intended meaning on becoming aware of problems arising during the planning phase of an utterance due to his own linguistic shortcomings (Poulisse, 1990: 88)

A communication strategy is defined as an individual's attempt to find a way to fill the gap between their communication effort and immediate available linguistic resources (Maleki, 2007).

From the definitions above, it can be inferred that communication strategies share three main features. Firstly, problematic – it refers to the fact that learner uses CSs as he/she encounters communication problem. Secondly, consciousness – it is a potentially conscious plan for solving communication problem to reach a particular communicative goal. It also refers either to the learner's awareness that the strategy is being employed for a particular purpose, or the awareness of how that strategy might achieve its intended effect. Thirdly, intentionality – it refers to the learner's control over those strategies so that particular ones may be selected from the range of options and deliberately applied to achieve certain effects. In short, communication strategies are used to resolve difficulties in expressing intended meaning (Tarone, 2005); it can also be defined as the tactic taken by the learners to solve oral communication problems (Lam, 2006).

4. TAXONOMY OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

There have been a number of proponents of communication strategies who have the typologies of communication strategies. Different researchers have made attempts to group communication strategies in meaningful categories. The following are typologies of communication strategies proposed by several proponents in this matter. First, Tarone (1977: p. 179) summarizes communication strategies into 5 typologies as presented below.

1. Avoidance
 - a. Topic Avoidance
 - b. Message Abandonment
2. Paraphrase
 - a. Approximation

- b. Word Coinage
- c. Circumlocution
- 3. Conscious Transfer
 - a. Literal Translation
 - b. Language Switch
- 4. Appeal for Assistance
- 5. Mime

Second, Faerch and Kasper (1984) categorize communication strategies into two major groups i.e. reduction strategies and achievement strategies. Reduction strategies refer to the attempts to do away with a problem and achievement strategies refer to the conditions when the learner decides to keep to the original communicative goal but compensate for insufficient means or makes the effort to retrieve the required items. The summarized version of the typologies of communication strategies is presented below.

- 1. Reduction Strategies
 - 1.1. Formal Reduction
 - 1.2. Functional Reduction
- 2. Achievement
 - 2.1. Compensatory Strategies
 - 2.1.1. Non-cooperative Strategies
 - 2.1.1.1. L1/L3 Based Strategies
 - a. Code-switching
 - b. Foreignizing
 - c. Literal Translation
 - 2.1.1.2. L-2-based Strategies
 - a. Substitution
 - b. Paraphrase
 - c. Word Coinage
 - d. Restructuring
 - 2.1.2. Co-operative Strategies
 - 2.1.2.1. Direct Appeal
 - 2.1.2.2. Indirect Appeal
 - 2.2. Retrieval Strategies
 - 2.2.1. Waiting
 - 2.2.1.1. Waiting
 - 2.2.1.2. Using Semantic Field
 - 2.2.2.3. Using Other Language

Third, Paribakht (1985) proposes 4 major typologies, namely linguistic approach, componential approach, conceptual approach, and mime. More detailed information of the typologies of communication strategies is presented below.

- 1. Linguistic Approach
 - 1.1. Semantic Contiguity
 - 1.1.1. Superordinate
 - 1.1.2. Comparison
 - a. Positive Comparison
 - i. Analogy
 - ii. Synonymy
 - b. Negative Comparison
 - i. Contrast and Opposition
 - ii. Antonymy
 - 1.2. Circumlocution
 - 1.2.1. Physical Description
 - a. Size
 - b. Shape
 - c. Color
 - d. Material

- 1.2.1. Constituent Feature
 - a. Feature
 - b. Elaborated feature
- 1.2.3. Locational Property
- 1.2.4. Historical Property
- 1.2.5. Other Feature
- 1.2.6. Functional Description
- 1.3. Metalinguistic Cues
- 2. Contextual Approach
 - 2.1. Linguistic Context
 - 2.2. Use of TL idioms and proverbs
 - 2.3. Transliteration of L1 idioms and proverbs
 - 2.4. Idiomatic Transfer
- 3. Conceptual Approach
 - 3.1. Demonstration
 - 3.2. Exemplification
 - 3.3. Metonymy
- 4. Mime
 - 4.1. Replacing Verbal Output
 - 4.2. Accompanying Verbal Output

Fourth, Littlewood (1984) who points out that there is no sharp dividing line - either practical or psychological terms - between speech which is the spontaneous output of learner's underlying system and speech which is in the result of a communication strategy. All language use is a response to some kind of communication problem and a person's awareness of this problem is a matter of varying degree. Littlewood lists 8 categories of communication strategies namely avoid communication, adjust the message, use paraphrase, use approximation, create new words, switch to native language, use non-linguistic resources, and seek help. The summarized version of the typologies of communication strategies is presented below.

- 1. Avoid Communication
- 2. Adjust the message
- 3. Use paraphrase
- 4. Use approximation
- 5. Create new words
- 6. Switch to native language
- 7. Use non-linguistic resources
- 8. Seek help

Fifth, the next type of communication strategy is proposed by Si-Qing (1990). Drawing upon the previous work of communication strategies (Bialystok & Frölich, 1990; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Paribakht, 1985) and the present study, Chen's yielded four major categories of communication strategy which can be summarized below.

- 1. Linguistic-based Strategies
 - 1.1. Metalanguage
 - 1.2. Superordinate
 - 1.3. Synonym
 - 1.4. Antonym
 - 1.5. Componential Analysis
- 2. Knowledge-based Strategies
 - 2.1. Exemplification
 - 2.2. Cultural Knowledge
 - 2.3. Simile
- 3. Repetition Strategies
- 4. Paralinguistic Strategies
- 5. Avoidance Strategies

Based on the typology of communication strategies proposed by the researchers above, there are basically only two main categories of communication strategies: reduction strategies and achievement strategies. The former is adopted by the learner who attempts to do away with a problem. They involve the learners giving up part of his/her original communicative goal and achievement strategies. The latter is taken by the learner when

he/she decides to keep the original communicative goal but compensate for insufficient means, or makes the effort to retrieve the required items.

However, after analyzing the two main strategies, Sukirlan (2011) categorizes communication strategies into 12 types: approximation, circumlocution, exemplification, comparison, word coinage, borrowing/code switching, foreignizing, repetition, non-verbal, avoidance, time-stalling device, and appeal for assistance.

5. TEACHING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN CLASS

To be able to communicate meaning in varieties of communicative situation is the ultimate of target the target language. In other words students should be taught how to use communication strategies so that they are able to cope with the communication problems faced in the process of communication. In order to achieve the goals, the teacher students should be made aware of the use of communication strategies by conducting explicit training how to use them in communication in the classroom. Cohen (1998) points out that when strategy training is included in the instructional package, students can learn how to learn a foreign language while they are learning the language content. There are relative benefits of the strategy training, among others are developing a broad range of problem-solving skills, making decision about how to approach a language task, and becoming more aware of what helps them to learn the language they are studying most efficiently. Sukirlan (2011) assumes that the teachers should be able to design classroom activities that allow the students to overcome communication problems. He, then, asserts that promoting the students to use communication strategies means training the students to be able to find any possible ways to exchange intended meanings with interlocutors. Therefore, communication strategies deserve a place in L2 training program because they can be used to develop learners' strategic competence.

The researchers on communication strategies (e.g. Tarone, 1984; Willems, 1987; Manchón, 1988; Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991) explicitly argue that one of the aims of L2 teaching should be the development of the students' use of communication strategies as a way of enhancing their communicative competence. In Tarone's view, each component of communicative competence ought to have a place in the foreign language classroom because "a student who has failed to develop competence in any of these components cannot truly be said to be proficient in the foreign language" (Tarone, 1984: 129).

Manchón (1999) assumes that neither the awareness of strategies nor their successful implementation is a necessary off-shoot of language teaching, unless an effort is made to draw the learner's attention to this particular component of his/her communicative competence. Both Tarone (1984) and Willems (1987) stress that, in contrast to naturalistic learners, classroom learners cannot simply learn by "doing" given that the foreign language classroom is not by its very nature the ideal scenario for learners to engage "naturally" in a variety of communicative situations that would allow the implicit development of their strategic competence. Learners must therefore be trained in the use of communication strategies.

It is also assumed that communication strategy training transfers of L1 skills. Despite the obvious similarities between communication in L1 and L2, Manchón (1999) notes two differences: (1) L2 users may face a wider range of problems in L2 communication and thus they may need to develop additional strategies for solving them. For instance, L1 and L2 speakers differ not only in the amount of knowledge of language they possess, but also in how efficiently they can access and use that knowledge (Wiese, 1984). There is also plenty of evidence to suggest that L2 learners, owing to either lack of knowledge or lack of automatization of resources, need more time than their L1 counterparts in planning or executing their utterances. Thus, L2 users may face more processing time problems whose solution also involves CS-implementation (Dörnyei, 1995); and (2) as pointed out by Faerch & Kasper (1986), L2 users have at their disposal additional problem-solving devices because in their problem solving attempts they can draw from two knowledge sources: their L1 and their L2 (but see Bialystok & Kellerman, 1987 and Cook, 1991 for a view that there are no strategies unique to second language learners).

6. TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN THE CLASS

The role of instructional materials in determining the types of activities in the classroom is very important. To some extent, teaching material will shape the type of learning and teaching activities in the class will be like. Students in the class will learn the way the teaching materials are presented by the teacher. Therefore, in many cases, materials are center of instruction and one of the most important influences on what goes on in the classroom (Kitao et al, 1997).

In relation to teaching communication strategies in the class, the students are introduced the 12 targeted communication strategies i.e. approximation, circumlocution, exemplification, comparison, word coinage, code switching, foreignizing, repetition, non-verbals, avoidance, time-stalling device, and appeal for assistance. In addition, the students were taught the language aspects that support the use of communication strategies such as

grammar and vocabulary that might help them describe unknown objects. The strategy training was largely presented in 3 stages, i.e. orientation, exposition and practice.

Orientation: The students are taught how to use the 12-targeted communication strategies, they are also taught the difference between a certain type of communication strategy with other types. This stage is called orientation because the students are enhanced their awareness and skills to use communication strategies.

Exposition: The students are exposed with teaching materials containing the dialogue which performs how the speaker use communication strategies. As for the teaching materials, they are adopted from several text books written by several authors (e.g. Dobson, 1981; Richards et al, 1984; Jakeman, 1996; Jones, 1997). After listening, the students are asked to identify particular communication strategies the speakers used in the dialogue. The students are also exposed with linguistic resources required for the success of using communication strategies like **vocabulary aspects** (i.e. material, shape, color, size, texture, parts, clothing, taste, synonym, antonym) and **grammar aspects** (i.e. tenses, passive voice). The teaching materials are adopted from several text books written by authors (e.g. Marshtein, 1981; Frank, 1982; Kitao, 1985; Oxford, 1990; and Lougheed, 1992).

Practice: The students are given opportunities to practice using communication strategies. First, the students are given photos of unknown objects to be described in front of the class. Second, the students are asked to practice describing the unknown object to other students in the class as a part of training how to solve problems by using communication strategies.

7. CONCLUSION

Based on the explanations stated aforementioned above, it can be concluded that the students encountered communication problems as the results of target linguistic inadequacy. In order to overcome the problems, the students resort to several types of communication strategies. Communication strategies used by the students does not indicate a sign of communication failure, conversely, communication strategies surfaced as the students realized that they had problems of expressing their intended meaning and they need to solve the problems. The more communication strategies the students have, the more opportunities they have to solve communication problems. It is also potentially conscious plan for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal (Faerch and Kasper, 1983; Tarone, 1997).

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