

## Communication Strategies in English Second Language Acquisition

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### Abstract

This research aims to describe and analyze communication strategies used by learners in the acquisition of a second language. In this case, this research analyzes the use of communication strategies in which English is the language of instruction. This study involved 21 students at the Department of English Language and Literature, in one of the state universities in Semarang, Indonesia. These students are second year students in the English Language and Literature Department. This research is a case study in the purpose of investigating the communication strategies used when the participants are engaged when the learning activities take place. The participants are given a conversation project in pairs and exposed to a variety of setting such as in the restaurant, in the professor's room, and in a company. Data collection was carried out through video and audio recordings. The data obtained are then categorized into 13 categories of communication strategies (Dornyei, 1995) and sorted to obtain the frequency of occurrence. The findings indicate that the students mostly use time-gaining strategy (36%) to overcome the problem in their communication with the interlocutors. It is then followed by the use of meaningless words which occurs very frequently (18%) from all utterances, "repetition" strategy which occurs rather frequently about 16% of the total, literal translation (13%), and "use of non-linguistics means" (10%). In conclusion, choices of communication strategies are highly influenced by the level of the conversation tasks given (Wongsawang, 2001). The occurrence of certain types of communication strategies depends on the tasks given to the students and the level of difficulty of those tasks.

Keywords: case study; communication strategies; second language acquisition

### INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of a second language or often referred to as second language acquisition is a process in which another language is used by a learner other than his native language. This is due to the high need to master foreign languages, especially English as a universal language. However, the acquisition of English as a foreign language is a process that requires time. Sometimes, in communication, difficulties or even the language breakdown in the target language will arise because there are many factors. One of them is the difference in the structure of different languages between the first language and the target language. So, there is a process that takes place between the transitions from this

first language to the second language. This process is called as "interlanguage".

It is noted that English as a second language is not the same as English as a foreign language. In the context of English as a foreign language in a country is when English is not used for the language of instruction or everyday language of communication. But in this context, English is learned in schools of a certain age range. Thus, the role of English in this context is not as the main language, but as an additional language. This is also due to the demand of using English as a universal language in the world, so we feel the need to add English as a language that needs to be learned. Recently, the growing of bilingual or multilingual society is very fast. People, including children

need to speak English in order to achieve some goals in their life. This phenomenon of bilingualism or even multilingualism is very visible that two languages or more are used by the people or the groups of people in their communication (Wardhaugh, 2010).

In Indonesia, English plays as the primary foreign language that must be learned in schools. According to Renandya (as cited in Bautista and Gonzales, 2006), English is taught and learned for 8 to 9 years starting from 4th grade elementary school or primary school to high school. Even, English is also used as the main subject which is also included in subjects on the national examinations in schools.

In higher education, many institutions have adopted English to give instructions and to lead the learning process of students. The demand for internationalization also encourages universities to include English as an important language to communicate in the classroom. Moreover, several international classes have been opened in certain study programs to achieve the vision of internationalization. As in the English Language and Literature Department, for example, international classes where the language of instruction is English, have international classes with students not only coming from various regions in Indonesia, but also from other countries, such as Thailand, Malaysia, Turkey, and Turkmenistan. In this context, English is used as the language of instruction because of differences in mother tongue in each student.

To communicate well and in accordance with the purpose of communication, competency of this strategy is also very necessary. To achieve good strategic competency, a speaker must be able to use communication strategies. Communication strategies are when the language learners try to use in communication to overcome difficulties in language in order to convey the intended meaning. In learning English as a foreign language, learners need to have strategic competencies for the language

learning process. This strategy competency is part of the communicative competency that is needed by language learners. As stated by Canale (as cited in Brown, 2007), communicative competence consists of 4 competencies including strategic competence.

In learning English as a foreign language, the students need to have strategic competencies for the success of the language acquisition. This strategy competency is part of the communicative competency that is needed by language learners. According to Canale and Swain (as quoted in Bagaric and Djigunovic, 2007: 97-98), strategic competence includes spoken utterances and non-verbal actions which functions to face problems where the communication takes place due to lack of competence. In order to communicate well and in accordance with what is intended, the competency of this strategy is also very necessary. This communication strategy is divided into 13 categories (Dornyei, 1995) as follows. (1) Message abandonment is when the message intended is not completed or not finished by the speaker. This is due to language difficulties in the delivery and can be due to lack of vocabulary, so that constrained in delivering the message; (2) Topic avoidance is when the speakers avoid topics or talks that cause language difficulties. In other words, the speaker avoids a topic area which according to him will create difficulties in his language; (3) Circumlocution, in this communication strategy, different words or even phrases are produced by the speaker to deliver the intended meanings. In this type, the speaker can use the definition to describe a word that he thinks is difficult to convey. For example, speakers want to say "kettle" in English by describing the object "the pot that you use for boiling water"; (4) Approximation is when the speakers use different terms to refer to meanings by searching for words close to the meaning, such as "ship" for "sailboat"; (5) "Use of all-purpose words" is when the speakers use words that are meaningless or unimportant. For example, speakers often say such as "thing" and "say"; (6) Word coinage,

this communication strategy is used when speakers create their own words for terms or words that are not known, for example "goodest" to replace "well"; (7) Use of non-linguistic means is when non-verbal communication such as facial expressions are used. Speakers can also use body language like gesture; (8) Literal translation is when the speakers translate words, phrases, and idioms with literal or word-for-word translations, such as "once in a blue moon" is translated into "one time in a blue moon". In fact, the true meaning is very rare; (9) Foreignizing, this communication strategy is used when speakers absorb and use foreign words, such as e-mail; (10) Code switching is a strategy which enables the speaker to insert words from the mother tongue into the sentence and hopes that the speaker understands; (11) Appeal for help, in this communication strategy, the speaker needs a favor from his interlocutor, such as "What do you call?" Or "What is it in English?" (12) Time-gaining strategies are when some words are used to give the speakers time to think or fill gaps, such as "what is it", "well", and "umh"; and (13) Repetition is when the speakers repeat the word after the word is spoken.

Lots of research has been done in this field such as investigating its effects on student performance or students' performance (Lam, 2006) and cognitive style (Littlemore, 2001). Research on the use of communication strategies for teaching is also widely carried out such as research conducted by Maleki (2007); and Harris et al (2001). However, very few studies have done in relation to the context where English is as a foreign language and where English is used as a means of communication in the classroom. Therefore, it is important to carry out an investigation to the learners where the context is English as foreign language.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Based on the research objective previously described, this research involved 21 students in the Department of English Language and

Literature, in one of the state universities in Semarang, Indonesia. These students were the second year students in the English Language and Literature Department. In daily teaching and learning activities, the language of instruction in each course is English. However, 21 students were selected in certain course, namely Interpersonal and Transactional Conversation course. Though they were coming from the same class, each of them has different individual experience.

This research employed a case study, in order to investigate the communication strategies used when research subjects interact in the classroom when learning activities take place. In this case, this study analyzes the use of communication strategies in classes in which English is the language of instruction. The data collection was done at the end of the learning in one semester. In other words, this project was actually graded by the lecturer. In this research, the focus was only the students' performance at the end of the learning process, so it did not take into consideration the development of the speaking progress.

The data to be taken in this research were audio and video recordings of learner interactions while talking to coworkers during a conversation project in a variety of settings. These recordings focused on conversations between learners who applied communication strategies in their interactions.

After the video recording data were obtained, the data were first turned into a transcript. After the transcripts were obtained, the transcripts were sorted and only focused on the part that contained communication strategies, so that the intended data were exposed. The data were then categorized into 13 categories adopted from Dornyei (1995). Data that have been categorized in each category, then sorted to obtain the frequency of occurrence. In the end, it can be seen what communication strategies the students most often use.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the utterances produced by the research participants during conversation project in the classroom, it is found that all participants generally employ communication strategies. However, every participant used different type of strategy depending on his English proficiency. Identification and the classification to be carried out are based on communication

strategies that have been done by Dornyei (1995). From the frequency of occurrence, it indicates that *stalling or time-gaining strategies* are frequently used compared to other types of strategies. It is then followed by repetition strategy which is also often used by the participants. The frequency of occurrence is shown in the following table (in the form of percentage).

**Table 1. Frequency of Occurrence (%)**

No.	Types of Communication Strategies	Frequency of occurrence
1	Message abandonment	1%
2	Topic avoidance	1%
3	Circumlocution	1%
4	Approximation	2%
5	Use of all purpose-words	18%
6	Word coinage	1%
7	Use of non-linguistic means	10%
8	Literal translation	13%
9	Foreignizing	0%
10	Code switching	2%
11	Appeal for help	0%
12	Time-gaining strategies	36%
13	Repetition	16%

From the table, we can see that the students mostly use more time to think (36%) to overcome the problem in their communication with the interlocutors. It is then followed by the use of meaningless words strategy which occurs very frequently (18%) from all utterances, “repetition” strategy which occurs rather frequently about 16% of the total, literal translation (13%), and “use of non-linguistics means” (10%). These are the strategies that are mostly used by the students in the purpose of solving the problem in communication. Dealing with other strategies, they just occur not really frequent, only once or twice of all utterances.

Stalling or time gaining strategies are strategies which enable the speakers to fill gaps or to have time to think of the next words, such as “what is it?”, “well”, and “umh”. Based on the data, the use of “well” and “umh” is very dominant in the students’

utterances. By using this strategy, it indicates that there is a problem in communication and this kind of strategy helps the students to have enough time to think in oral communication and find some words to deliver. This strategy also encourages the students to keep the communication going on in order to not stop before the message is delivered. The use of these strategies can be seen in the following utterances.

Conversation 1 (C-01)

S1: Excuse maam. Is it Alfi’s house?

S2: Ye, it is. Are you Alfi’s roommate?

S1: Yes, I am Alfi’s roommate.

S2: Just come in!

S1: *Mmh...*Thanks maam. *Mmh...*Where is Alfina?

S2: Alfina is bathing. I will call her.

S1: Oh okay. Thanks maam.

S2: *Mmh...*Alfi will come in ten minutes. Just sit down, please.

S1: Ok. I will be waiting for her. *Mmh...* I think your house is very comfortable.

From the conversation, the use of "mmh" is often produced in order to have time in preparing the next sentences to say. The duration of this time gaining is quite long, meaning that the speakers need more time to think. In the conversation C-01, the use of "mmh" also shows that the speakers are too nervous in having communication, especially student 1 (S1). However, this strategy is seen very effective to maintain the flow of conversation instead of avoiding or skipping the words which can cause ineffective communication. This is also considered as one of the functions of communication strategies to keep the conversation going on (Nakatani, 2006). In addition, this strategy is effective in eliminating the long silence among the speakers during the oral communication. In other words, no many pauses are found that can disturb the flow of the conversation.

"Use of all purpose-words" or use of meaningless words is a strategy that is quite often to be used by the students since it is really effective in overcoming the language problem or difficulties during the communication. From all of the students' utterance, this strategy occurs rather frequently which is 18%. From the conversation transcripts, mostly the speakers use the words "thing", "just", "like", and "I guess" in this type of strategy.

#### Conversation 2 (C-02)

S3: It's not like that. I mean, I read it, yes. But it's not the whole **thing**. I **just** read the...you know...the main idea of each paragraph, and I **just** write it down if I found important **thing**. You know, so, it doesn't **like** read the whole **thing**.

S4: But, doesn't it take too much effort and time, **just** create and then write them down? I think you **just** need to write...I think you **just** need to read the material and then you **just** memorize it?

S3: Well, for me, I don't have great memories. So, writing helps me to increase my memory,

*like* you know reading, maybe just 25% helping me to memorize it and when I write it down, it can increase like 70% you know...

From the conversation, female students mostly use this kind of strategy rather than male students. This indicates that female students like to talk more when they are engaged in conversation. Another factor is the students' English proficiency level in speaking. From the students' background in English proficiency, the students who have high level of English proficiency, especially in speaking frequently use this strategy. These students are considered as fluent speakers, so that they want to talk without an end. Thus, since they are fluent in speaking English, they have a tendency to add unimportant or meaningless words such as "like", "just", and "thing" in every phrases many times. This strategy also has a role in maintaining the conversation to keep going on even though a lot of meaningless words are added.

Besides the "use of meaningless words" strategy, repetition also becomes one of the communication strategies, that is very common in second language acquisition. In this strategy, the speakers tend to repeat the words just after the words are spoken.

#### Conversation 3 (C-03)

S5: Honey, wake up!

S6: *Mmh... where we...where we going to? Where are we going to? I am... But, I'm still sleepy honey.*

S5: No, we have to buy new house tools. Look, our apartment is so empty. **And, and**, today is the biggest discount! It's up to 70% discount. *Argghh.*

S6: Ok, ok. Please, *mmh...let me...*

Literal translation is a communication strategy which enables the speakers to literally translate the words in English from Indonesian structure or it is commonly called as word for word translation. Literal translation is quite familiar to the students which occurs about 13% of the students' utterances in total.

#### Conversation 4 (C-04)

S5: *Oh...I think we have to buy washing machine.*

S6: *Washing machine? I think you can wash by your hand, honey.*

S5: *No...my hand. Look at my hand. You will make my hand ugly.*

S6: *Ugly? Mmh...but if you wash with your hand, it will make you strong.*

S5: *Hah...You want to make me ugly. It's ok!*

S6: *Ok, ok, yes up to you.*

S5: *Please choose your ...*

S6: *Look! It's a used machine. We can ya ....get lower price.*

S5: *Mmh...are you sure we want get it?*

S6: *Look! It's more...eee...it's cheaper.*

S5: *Mmh...but...mmh...let me think. If we buy a used machine, it will eee...**it will service again and again.** And it will more expensive, honey and finally we will buy a new one.*

The conversation taking place at a store shows that the speaker (S5) translates the words into English word by word. Those words then sound so weird in English. The sentence "it will service again and again" can be best understood by the Indonesian people who share the same culture. The word "service" is very common in Bahasa Indonesia which means "repair" in English. This sentence is absolutely literally translated. The speaker should have said "It will need more repairs" instead of saying "It will service again and again". This problem can be due to the influence of their L1 (Bahasa Indonesia). For some students with low level of English proficiency in speaking, they tend to use literal translation strategy to overcome the language breakdowns. Although literal translation is employed, we can see from the recordings that the utterances are understood well. Miscommunication can be dismissed. It can be concluded that the use of literal translation seems powerful to deliver the intended meanings. The power of literal translation also can be seen in the following conversation.

Conversation 5 (C-05)

S7: *Good morning! Eee, Banaran Airlines, May I help you?*

S8: *Mmh, yeah...I need eee...I need the information to mmh...**reservate to my flight to home.***

S7: *Ok. Mmh...**from where to where do you want to take a flight?***

S8: *From Semarang to Kendal.*

The use of "non-linguistic means" is a strategy which is rather frequently used by the students (10%). The use of gestures can be seen from the movement of the speakers' hands when they are trying to deliver the message intended. This strategy effectively help the interlocutors to understand what the speaker means. Some speakers tend to use facial expressions instead of gestures. After looking through the recordings in details, male speakers tend to use facial expression compared to gestures, whereas female speakers tend to use both gestures and facial expression. Male speakers tend to be not so expressive in to express their feelings. It is different to female speakers who explore in playing the role more as if they are in the real situation and communication.

Code-switching is a strategy often used by the non-native speakers of English. According to Poplack (as cited in Horasan, 2014), code-switching is when the speakers suddenly do a transition or shift in between two languages within sentences. However, this strategy is not quite common in the English-speaking environment where English becomes a tool to communicate. It occurs only 2% of all utterances produced by the students. It seems that this frequency of occurrence is because these students are exposed to a language class, not a content-based class. In a content-based instruction where the students are more exposed to be bilinguals (using two languages at the same time), code switching is quite familiar to be used. This is line with a study done by Kim (2006) that when people are engaged to a bilingual environment, it is easier for them to use the language and then randomly make a shift into another language to achieve an effective communication. The following conversation shows how the speakers tend to employ code-switching.

Conversation 6 (C-06)

S9: *But you know, I heard about it somewhere that...that Rusia is now purchasing a car that use a nuclear energy. Do you know anything about it?*

S10: *Ya ya ... I don't know. But, do you know why don't we use that energy, water energy, or another energy that no so dangerous like nuclear?*

S9: *Ya ya...I also prefer to use that energy because as you know it's unlimited and it's safe for use. But, what about "bensin" and petrol? We use every day, but it may not kill us now, but it will kill us in the future because it's global warming.*

The conversation indicates that the speaker suddenly switches the language into Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia). The word "bensin" has the same meaning with gasoline in English. This strategy is used due to insufficient vocabulary, so that the speaker directly uses Bahasa Indonesia in order to be understood by her interlocutor. In the conversation, most of the words are spoken in English. It seems that the speakers try their best to use English as much as possible.

Approximation is a strategy in which the speakers use different terms to refer to meanings by searching for words close to the meaning. Usually, the speakers tend to think first and then produce the closest meaning, but it doesn't fit to the sentence. In the approximation strategy, the speakers usually know that they produced unintended words, but by finding another word that is close can represent the intended meaning (Tarone, 1990). Based on the data obtained, the strategy occurs 2% of the total. The occurrence of these strategies can be seen in the following conversation transcript.

Conversation 7 (C-07)

S11: *Hi Bara, what's up?*

S12: *Hi Linda!*

S11: *What are you doing here?*

S12: *Oh I wait for my wife...for my first child birth.*

S11: *Oh congratulations Bara! When it occur?*

S12: *It occurs yesterday.*

The conversation indicates that the speaker is lack of vocabulary. She tries to substitute the word "born" or "happen" with "occur". In this case, the word "occur" is certainly closest in meaning to happen, but it does not fit to the sentence. The speaker should have been better using the word "born" or "happen" which is more making sense. The conversation also shows that the speaker tries to say the words coming to her mind, so that she finds the meaning close to the intended meaning. Damaiyanti (as cited in Yusparizal, Irawati, & Anugerahwati, 2018) states that approximation strategy enables the students to have a quick speed in speaking in order to reach the goal of communication.

In this research, it should be noted that the students' choices of communication strategies cannot represent all non-native speakers of English. We can see that foreignizing and appeal for help strategies do not appear in students' utterances. This finding is really different to the previous studies done before. These differences indicate that the choices of communication strategies are highly influenced by the level of the conversation tasks given (Wongsawang, 2001). The occurrence of certain types of communication strategies depends on the tasks given to the students and the level of difficulty of those tasks. In addition, the students' choices really depend on the pressure given to the students. When the conversation task is graded, for instance, the students have a desire to perform better than if it is not graded, only a conversation practice. Although each student has different choice of the strategy used, communication strategies are still important in speaking English for the English learners where English is not their mother tongue. Communication strategies also enable the students or the speakers to reach the goal in communication (Faerch and Kasper, 1983) and to make the communication more powerful (Canale, 1983).

## CONCLUSION

From the findings and discussion, in conclusion, the students mostly use time-gaining strategies (36%) to face the difficulties in their communication with the interlocutors. It is then followed by "use of all purpose-words" strategy which occurs very frequently (18%) from all utterances, "repetition" strategy which occurs rather frequently about 16% of the total, literal translation (13%), and "use of non-linguistics means" (10%). These are the strategies that are mostly used by the students in the purpose of solving the problem in communication.

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