

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY THE ELT STUDENTS IN SPEAKING CLASS

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Abstract

This study was aimed at identifying the communication strategies employed by the students in Speaking class and their reasons in employing communication strategies. The design of the research was descriptive case study. The result of the study shows that the students employed twelve communication strategies, namely, approximation strategy which was employed by the students 65 times, stalling or time-gaining 44 times, appeal for help 19 times, literal translation 15 times, code switching 13 times, message abandonment 10 times, topic avoidance 7 times, word coinage twice, foreignizing once, use of non-linguistic signals once, repetition 25 times, and self-correction 5 times. Based on the data obtained from the interview, the researcher found that the students who used communication strategies said that they used communication strategies because of their nervousness, lack of vocabulary, lack of language structures, the influence of their L1. Moreover, the students said that they wanted to avoid the silence of speaking, to make the word clear to the listener and to correct their own mistakes.

Keywords: *speaking class, communication strategy, types of communication strategies*

Speaking classes have been pointed to be the place where the construct of anxiety potentially manifest in students' learning. As the teacher asks the students to practice or use the language for communication in the classroom, the students become too conscious of the use of their language. As a result, they often make mistakes in their communication.

It is in line with Young (1992) who mention that speaking is probably

considered as the most stressful language skills from the perspective of both foreign language (FL) teachers and learners. Meanwhile, Friedman (1980 cited in Thaher, 2005) states that when the ability and desire to participate in discussion are present, but the process of verbalizing is inhibited, shyness or reticence occurs. McIntyre (1995) illustrates that, if a student is required to speak in the target language, she/he may

become anxious, and this anxiety can lead to the main reason for learners' reticence.

Some experts label this phenomenon as communication apprehension. Communication apprehension can be described as the feeling of uneasiness, worry, nervousness, and anxiety (McCroskey, et. al, 1985). These feelings particularly confront language learners with the immediate use of the foreign language in the classroom context. Moreover, Richmond (2009) also states that communication apprehension (CA) is the fear or anxiety associated with either real or participated communication with another person or persons. A person may be apprehensive in one situation but not in another. Additionally, as communication does not confine itself to just talk, a person may, for example, be apprehensive about communicating by engaging in talk but feel quite comfortable about writing.

All of us suffer from anxiety at some point in our lives (Richmond, 2009). Therefore, communication apprehension is considered common in foreign language learning; it just depends on how greatly it affects students. Furthermore, McCroskey (1977) reported that some apprehension may affect foreign language learners in either high or low levels.

The explanations above indicate that all students have certain level of communication apprehension; therefore, they may face many difficulties and problems in oral communication. Because of that reason, the students usually try to make use of strategies for communication. They use the strategies to help them to cope with their own difficulties. For example, they usually learn particular tricks that can keep the conversation go on to bridge the communication breakdown. These strategies are identified as "communication strategies".

Communication strategy is very important for the development of the students' skill in speaking. Communication strategy can help the students in overcoming the communication breakdown. It is supported by Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000:16) and Brown (2007:247) who view communication strategies as important elements in oral communication because they enable language learners to keep the oral communication channel open.

Moreover, Stern (1984:411) defines communication strategies as the techniques developed and used by language learners to cope with difficulties in communication. In addition to this, Stern (1984:425) also

puts communication strategies as the students' willingness to use the language in a real communication; a communication in which the situation is not either manipulated or arranged.

Furthermore, (Maleki, 2010) states that communication strategy is an individual's attempt to find a way to fill the gap between their communication effort and immediate available linguistic resources. In addition, Dornyei (1995) says that communication strategies are also defined as the ways a person uses to overcome problems and difficulties in oral performance.

Dornyei (1995) classifies communication strategy into twelve types, namely, topic avoidance strategy, message abandonment strategy, circumlocution strategy, approximation strategy, use of all-purpose words, word coinage strategy, code switching strategy, use of non-linguistic means strategy, literal translation strategy, foreignizing strategy, appeal for help strategy, and Stalling or time-gaining strategy.

Considering the importance of Communication Strategies, the present study is aimed at identifying the communication strategies employed by the students in speaking class and finding out the students' reasons in employing the communication strategies.

RESEARCH METHOD

The design of this research is descriptive qualitative. The subjects of the research were the students of English Department of Bung Hatta University. The researcher chose the students of Speaking III class. The students of Speaking III class were divided into three classes, namely, class A, B, and C. The researcher took the students of class A and B as the subjects of the research. The total number of the subjects of the research was 70 students. Each class consisted of 35 students.

The data of the research was the utterances produced by the students when they were performing speaking task in the classroom. An utterance was a complete unit of communication that consist of words, phrases and clauses spoken on context. The utterances were recorded. The data gained from the students' utterances were then analyzed by using three steps. They are, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

It was found out that the students employed several communication strategies, namely, Topic Avoidance, Message Abandonment, Approximation, Word Coinage, Code Switching,

Foreignizing, Appeal for Help, Literal Translation, Use of Non-linguistic Signal, and Stalling or Time-gaining. Therefore, it is clear that among the twelve Dornyei's classification of Communication Strategy (1995), there were two strategies which were not employed by the students in the speaking class; they are Circumlocution, and Use of All-Purpose Word. However, there were also other communication strategies employed by students which do not belong to Dornyei's classification of communication strategy (1995), namely, Repetition, and Self-Correction Strategy. The detail presentation of the findings is presented below.

Topic Avoidance

In topic avoidance, learners avoided certain topics and words for their own sake of maintaining the communication. In this study, the students used this strategy 7 times. From the data which were obtained from the interview, the researcher found that (50%) of the students who employed this strategy said that their reasons of using this strategy was to deal with their lack of vocabulary, (33%) of the students said that they used this strategy because of their lack of language structures, and (17%) of the students said that they used this strategy because of their lack of vocabulary and language structures.

S: Using internet we can download the informatio, we want to download. It makes ... I think that is not expensive (S1TA).

S: I agree with your opinion, internet will give us some information, but you have to consider the effect of internet (S3).

S: Near Panorama ...from Panorama you can see the Great Wall of Bukit Tinggi (S58TA).

Message Abandonment

The students used this strategy 10 times. From the result of the interview, the researcher found that (62.50%) of the students who used this strategy said that their reasons of using this strategy was that because of their lack of vocabulary, (37.50%) of the students said that they used this strategy because of their lack of language structures, and (25%) of the students said that they used this strategy because of their lack of vocabulary and language structures. See the following data.

S: I think artists should have good skill to ... (the speaker stopped speaking) (S21MA).

S: I know that, but I think artists who join politic have good skill (S19).

Approximation

The students used this strategy 65 times. For the reasons of using this strategy, the researcher found that (7.05%) of the students who used this strategy said that their reasons of using this strategy was that because of their lack of vocabulary, (30%) of the students said that they used this strategy because of their lack of language structures, (22.50%) of the students said that they used this strategy because of their nervousness, (12.50%) of the students said that they used this strategy because of their lack of vocabulary and language structures, (15%) of the students said that they used this strategy because of their lack of language structures and nervousness, and (12.50%) of the students said that they used this strategy because of their lack of vocabulary and nervousness. The data is presented as follows.

*S: In my opinion the entertainer can be a **politic person** (S20APP).*

S: I know that, but they must have good skill to join politic (S21).

Word Coinage

In the present study, the students employed this strategy twice. Based on the data gathered from the interview, the researcher found that (50%) of the students who used this strategy said that

their reason of using this strategy was that because of their lack of vocabulary, and (50%) of the students said that they used this strategy because of their lack of vocabulary and language structures. This strategy can be seen in the following data.

*S: Artists who succeed in politic will **inspirate** many people to join politic (S11WC).*

S: I don't agree if artist join politic because most of them do not have capabilities (S13).

Code Switching

This strategy was employed by the students 13 times. For the students' reason of choosing this strategy, the researcher found that (100%) of the students who used this strategy said that they used this strategy because they could not find the right word or words to help them in communication. See the following data.

*S: We can organize the event like **pengembangandiri** in Indonesia (S17CS).*

S: Although we have the event like that, I think dance school is also important for our culture (S16).

*S: They choose a **politikus** who has capabilities (S19CS).*

Foreignizing

This strategy was used by the learners by using L1 word by adjusting it to L2 phonologically. From the observation, the researcher only found that this strategy was used by the students once (0.48%). From the result of interview, the researcher found that (100%) of the students who used this strategy said that they employed this strategy because they did not know the English term of a word or words. The data are presented as follows.

*S: Artists have problem in politic, for example they do **korupsi** (pronounced in L2) (S13F).*

S: You cannot say like that because there are many politicians who are not artist corrupt (S12).

Appeal for Help

Based on the results of the observation, this strategy was used 19 times. From the result of the interview, the researcher found that (29.41%) of the students who used this strategy said that their reason of using this strategy was that because of their limited mastery of vocabulary, (35.29%) of the students said that they used this strategy because of their nervousness, and 35.29%) of the students said that they used this strategy because of their limited mastery of vocabulary and nervousness. The use of

this strategy can be seen in the presented data below.

S: Sometimes their parents will ... (susahapabahasainggrisnya?) be difficult to keep their children (S4A).

S: You have to (he asked his friends by moving his hands) blend the soya bean (S38A).

Literal Translation

The students employed this strategy 15 times. From the result of the interview, the researcher found that (100%) of the students who used literal translation strategy said that they use this strategy because they usually translate what they want to say with the help of the dictionary and then put the words together which was influenced by their L1. See the students' utterances below.

*S: Do you think it will be useful for our culture if Indonesia builds **School Dance** like **Dance Pasambahan**? (S18LT)*

S: Yes. I think if government builds dance school in Indonesia, young generation can learn our culture (S16).

Use of Non-Linguistic Signals

The strategy was used once. From the result of the interview, the researcher found that (100%) of the students who used this strategy said that their reason of using this strategy was that because of their lack of target language vocabulary. the students stated that by using mime

they can show the word or words that they want to say to the listener. The use of this strategy can be seen in the following data.

S: You will get ... (the speaker touched his chest) cancer (S61UNLS).

Stalling or Time-Gaining

This strategy was employed 44 times (21.26%). Based on the data obtained from the interview, the researcher found that (100%) of the students who used this strategy said that their reason of using this strategy was that because of their nervousness. The data are presented as follows.

S: The kids spend their time to play game, it is not good for children because u... if they spend their time to play game, of course they will forget to review their lesson (S3S).

S: As the parents we can manage the time for our children to study. I think there is no problem if children use internet (S1).

Repetition

In this present study, the students employed this strategy 25 times. For the students' reasons of choosing this strategy, the researcher found that ((57.14%) of the students who used this strategy said that they used this strategy because they wanted to fulfil the pause while thinking, and (42.86%) of the

students said that they used this strategy because they wanted to make others understand what the speakers express. See the students' utterances below.

S: If you, if you go there in New Year, they will give you discount (S23R).

S: I'll invite him or her to have dinner with my, my, my family (S50R).

S: O.K. friends I will present, present my product (S27R).

Self-Correction

The students employed this strategy 5 times. Based on the data obtained from the interview, the researcher found that (100%) of the students who employed this strategy said that they chose this strategy because in the middle of their talks they were aware of their mistakes, and then they tried to make their utterance better in terms of its diction and structure by correcting their own mistakes.

S: We can service the tourists, we can give better service to the tourists (S25SC).

S: This product will be protected, will protect your skin (S28SC).

Discussions

This part discusses the findings. The presentation of each strategy is analysed using relevant theory and findings in the previous chapter. The findings are

discussed using the taxonomy of communication strategy proposed by Dornyei (1995).

Avoidance Strategy

From the findings of the use of avoidance strategy, it shows that the learners used this strategy because they have limited mastery of the target language, for example the mastery of the appropriate target language words and structure. Using the avoidance strategies, the students step away from unfamiliar topics, avoid solving communication problems, and reduce or abandon the messages they intended to convey. These behaviours can negatively affect the content of the interaction. As Mariani (1994:2) states reduction strategy can affect the content of our communication goal. This strategy does not give benefits for the students for their language learning.

For message abandonment, the students have actually tried to speak. They started to deliver their concept, but then they decided to stop and leaved a message unfinished because of language difficulties. As Dornyei (1995:58) states message abandonment is used by the speakers of second language or foreign language to deal with their problem in communication, by leaving a message unfinished because of language

difficulties. The causes that may trigger the students to use this strategy are lack of vocabulary, difficulties in arranging the utterances, confused to continue because of their nervousness and worried to make mistakes. The use of these strategies, topic avoidance and message abandonment are not recommended for their language learning. The strategies do not support the development of the students' speaking ability. The strategies may save them from the difficulties during the communication, but they do not challenge the students to try more and find another way for delivering their concepts.

Compensatory Strategy

Compensatory strategy covers Circumlocution, Approximation, Word Coinage, Code Switching, Use of All-purpose Words, Foreignizing, Appeal for Help, Literal Translation, and Use of Non-linguistic Signals. From the nine strategies under compensatory strategy, there were two strategies which were not employed by the students during the observation; they are Circumlocution and Use of All-purpose Words.

For Approximation strategy, the students use vocabulary item or structure which they know is not correct. They used this strategy to maintain the

conversation going on. It is in line with Tarone (in Bialystok, 1990:39) who defines approximation as the use of single target language vocabulary item or structure which the learner knows is not correct, which shares enough semantic features in common with the desired item to satisfy the learner. In the present study, this strategy is the mostly used by the students. It was used 65 times (31.40%). It was found out that this strategy can help the learners of English to overcome the problems in communication because the strategy gives the learners chance to use their knowledge of the target language as much as they can as long as the listener could understand their intended meaning. It is in line with the finding of the study conducted by Damaiyanti (2012), she stated that the students used approximation strategy because they want to speak quickly as long as the audience could understand the intended meaning.

The next strategy is Word Coinage. In this strategy the learners make up new word to communicate a desired concept (Tarone in Bialystok, 1990:41). In this study, the students only used this strategy twice (0.97%). They chose this strategy because they did not know the English terms of a word or words. In the findings the students create the word

"inspirate" instead of *"inspire"* and the word *"collonialization"* instead of *"colonialism"*. This strategy is not recommended for the students because they create non-existing word or words to be used.

The next strategy is Foreignizing. This strategy was used by the students by adjusting L1 to L2 phonologically (for example with L2 pronunciation) or morphology (for example adding it a L2 suffix). The students did not use this strategy very often. In the finding it was found that this strategy was employed once (0.48%). The student used the word *"korupsi"* by pronouncing it in L2. The students used this strategy because of their lack of vocabulary. They got stuck on recalling the intended term.

The next strategies are Literal Translation and Code Switching. The learners' used these strategies were mostly influenced by first language inferences. For literal translation, the students translate a lexical item, an idiom, or a structure from their L1 to L2. The students translate the Indonesian word or words into English word. It is in line with Tarone in Bialystok (1990) who mentions that literal translation take place when the learner translates a L1 words or phrases into L2. In the present study, the example of the use of the strategy is when the student said *"video*

porn” instead of “*porn video*”. In this case the student got the term by translating Indonesian phrase “*video porn*” word by word and became video (“video”) porn (“porno”). For Code switching, Tarone in Bialystok (1990) mentions that language switch is the process of inserting words from another language. In the findings, it can be seen the students use their L1 word or words directly to replace the L2 word or words without bothering to translate. The example is that when the student said the words or the concepts in Indonesian, such as “*pengembangandiri*” to refer to “*self-development*”. The use of these strategies could be because the students tend to avoid using difficult words or they could not find the English terms of the word or words. Therefore, they switch the English words or sentences into Indonesian. The use of these strategies was quite often. Code Switching was used by the students 13 times (6.28%) and Literal Translation was used by the students 15 (7.25%) times. It really shows that the native language or L1 still give influence. The problems with the vocabularies and word choice in English are still problematic for the students.

The next strategy is Use of Non-linguistic Signals, such as mime, gesture, and facial expression which are very

helpful in expressing a meaning of a certain word or words. It involves the learners’ use of non-verbal strategies to replace lexical item or action. It can be useful for the success of the communication. The learners can use this strategy in order to help them to make the words or concepts clear for the listeners. In the present study, the use of the strategy was only used by the student once (0.48%), for example, the students used his hand to touch his chest to express a word “*lung*”. In other words, while the students are delivering their talk, they use mime or gesture to help them express certain things. Many of the students did not use mime in their performance in speaking class.

The last strategy under compensatory strategy is Appeal for Help Strategy. This strategy was used by the students due to their lack of vocabulary or forgets some English words because of low self-confidence or their nervousness. They asked the other students and the lecturer for help. As Tarone in Bialystok (1990) mentions appeal for assistance occur when the learner has tried to consult with any sources for the correctness of the words or phrases. The source could be a native speaker or a dictionary. In this study, the students asked their friends and the lecturer to help them. In the findings, the

researcher found that the students who asked his or her friend by saying “*what is it?*” or “*what do you call it?*” or they often use Indonesian such as “*apanamanya?*”. In the observation, the students did not always ask their friends by using the expression directly, but they also whispered to their friends. Occasionally, the students also used eye contact to ask for help. It is related to what researcher quoted from Dornyei’s (1995) theory. He mentions that the speaker asks for help directly or indirectly. Asking for help indirectly means that the students do not use the expressions such as “*what is it?*” etc., but the students raise their intonation, use puzzled expressions, and eye contact. This may be because they were unable to find the appropriate words themselves. During the observation the students used this strategy quite often. It was employed by the students 19 times (9.18%). They thought it would be a good idea to ask the others for the right word or words than to produce the wrong words themselves.

Stalling or Time-gaining Strategy

Stalling or Time-gaining which also called using of filler strategy was one of the communication strategies that were mostly used by the students. The students need more time to think in the

time of difficulties such as recalling certain vocabulary that they suddenly forgot, or attempting to assert the content which is actually knew for them. This is in line with Ikawati’s (2011) study which found that both senior subjects as well as secondary level subjects have a problem in dealing with the limited time in expressing themselves orally. Therefore, the students use fillers like “*emm*”, “*uh*”, “*well*” etc. to fill the gap in pauses during the time of thinking. Thus, based on her study, Stalling or Time-gaining strategy is considered as a suitable strategy in overcoming the students’ problem in speaking. This strategy is considered helpful by the students in helping them to fill the empty time or pauses during the time of difficulty. Therefore, the silence from speaking can be avoided. Based on the observation on the students’ performance during the communication task, the students used this strategy to overcome their hesitation and nervousness in performing Speaking task.

Other Strategies

In the findings, the researcher has stated that there were two additional strategies found in the present study which categorized as “*Other Strategies*”. Other Strategies means the

communication strategies beyond the twelve Communication Strategies proposed by Dornyei (1995). These strategies cover Repetition and Self-Correction.

These strategies were used by the subjects to compensate with their difficulties and problems while speaking. For repetition, the students used this strategy to cope with their communication difficulties. The students repeated certain utterance was also necessary to gain the time to think of the next words to say and to deliver a clearer message to the audiences. In Nasution (cited in Damaiyanti's, 2010) study, he defined that repetition strategy as a strategy in which the subjects repeat the same word or phrase of a clause twice or more; the purpose is to search other utterance to say further. For Self-correction; the students also often made mistakes in their speaking, so they corrected the mistakes immediately to get clearer messages to the audience. The mistakes usually deal with the misused or overused of verbs, pronouns, and other linguistic features; the mistakes are clarified to produce a grammatically acceptable language.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

From the findings of the research, it can be concluded that most of the students employed communication strategies when they faced with some language difficulties. The students employed all the above strategies was aimed at maintaining the conversation going on. Communication strategies helped them in compensating their problems related to their lack of vocabularies and language structures. Moreover, communication strategies also helped the students to overcome their nervousness when they were speaking. Nevertheless, some of the communication strategies which were employed by the students are not recommended to be used because some strategies do not support the development of the students' speaking ability.

Based on the result of the present study on the students' use of communication strategies, the researcher would like to give suggestions to the English lecturers, students, and further researchers. For the lecturers, they should enrich the students' knowledge about communication strategies because it can help the students to be able to communicate effectively. Communication strategy should be an

integrated part of the whole process of language learning since the ultimate goal of learning English is to communicate. Nevertheless, the lecturers should select the strategies which are beneficial for the development of the students' speaking skill because some strategies do not support the development of the students' speaking skill. For the students, they are suggested to enrich their knowledge about communication strategies because it will be fruitful for them in developing their speaking skill. Using communication strategies the students will be able to compensate their problem in delivering the message to the listener. In other word, communication strategies will help the students to avoid the communication breakdown. Finally, for further researchers who are interested in conducting a study on communication strategies, the researcher recommends that they focus on investigating the communication strategies beyond the twelve communication strategies developed by Dornyei (1995) since in the present study the researcher only found two other strategies.

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