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### **Revealing the effectivenesses of communication strategies**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to report the history of communication strategy and highlight the importance of strategic competence. It provides the histories and characterizations of communication strategy. Besides, it presents from which perspectives these definitions of communication strategies were developed. Various earlier and latter taxonomies in the field of communication strategy are introduced. Moreover, ten examples of cultural terminologies provided by Taiwanese university students engaged with a long-term research project the researcher had conducted previously, will demonstrate the effectiveness and usages of communication strategies. This study should be valuable because contributed to assisting adult learners in approaching a short cut to fluent English communication. More importantly, this study not only proved the effectiveness of communication strategies, but also it contributed the typical examples to the field workers of strategic communication.

Keywords: strategic competence, communication strategy, cultural terminologies, classifications, qualitative study

#### **INTRODUCTION**

##### **Five Important Taxonomies of Communication Strategies**

In the field of communication strategies, Faerch and Kasper's (1983) taxonomy was regarded as the most significant taxonomy by many scholars (e. g. Bialystok, 1990; Lin, 2009; Lin & Chien, 2009; Yoshida Morise, 1998). However, in the history of communication strategies many other classifications have been developed. The following section presents five important categories of communication strategies, which were recognized by Varadi (1973), Paribakht (1985), University of Nijmegen (1989), and Littlemore (2003). Varadi (1973/1983:81-99) separated the strategies according to meaning reduction and meaning replacement; he also distinguished between intentional and extensional reduction strategies. Generalization, approximation, circumlocution and paraphrase strategies were emphasized. Following Varadi's lead, Tarone (1977: 194-203) named nine strategies, including "topic

avoidance,” and “message abandonment” as “avoidance strategy,” “approximation,” “word coinage,” and “circumlocution” as “paraphrase strategy,” “literal translation” and “language switch” as “conscious transfer” strategy, “appeal for assistance strategy,” and mime strategy. In the earlier history of communication strategies, Tarone demonstrated communication strategy with a renowned coinage word, “airball,” which was a newly created lexicon for referring to (Tarone, 1983: 92) ... ‘balloon’. Indeed, ‘airball’ has become a typical term of newly created language production that shows the characteristic in adult learners’ psychological structure.

Paribakht (1985:132) perceived and investigated more than twenty of them in terms of “linguistic approach, contextual approach, conceptual approach, and mime”. Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1983) classified communication strategies learners’ possible motivations for avoidance. They believed the avoidance types for lexical alternatives can be “phonological avoidance, graphological avoidance, morphological avoidance, syntactic avoidance, and void avoidance.” A group at the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands (Kellerman, Bongaerts & Poulisse, 1987), provided a cognitive, process-oriented classification, which sorted communication strategies into conceptual strategies and linguistic strategies. Poulisse (1993) based his on the psycholinguistic model of speech production and drew a distinction between conceptual and linguistic levels of language production. This well-known classification consists of three strategy types: “substitution”, “substitution plus”, and “reconceptualization.”

Littlemore (2003) attempted to assess the communicative effectiveness of Poulisse’s taxonomy. She analyzed eighty two French speaking English learners’ transcripts from linguistic perspectives and expanded three Poulisse’s strategies into twelve more specific ones. Littlemore (2003) analyzed the collected data in French speaking English learners’ transcripts, and classified communication strategies as six substitution strategies applying to linguistic analysis methods of original analogical/metaphoric comparison, conventional analogical/metaphoric comparison, literal comparison, word transfer with second language word approximation, super-ordinate and simple word transfer, one substitution plus strategy applying morphological creativity of the target language speakers, and five reconceptualization strategies applying linguistic analysis perspectives of componential, functional, activity, place, and emotion. According to Littlemore (2003, p. 339) “...it is better for a student to at least begin to attempt to describe an item, or whether it is better for them to give up before even trying.” Overall, there are fourteen strategies in Littlemore’s taxonomy, which include the twelve mentioned above, as well as the word abandonment strategy and the word avoidance strategy.

Recent studies less and less classified strategies, they have been completed related the related communication strategy (CS) issues. For example, Kaivanpanah et al (2012) have examined the frequency of CSs across proficiency levels, the effect of task type on the use of CSs, and the differential use of CSs among males and females. Lin (2009) and Lin and Chien

(2009) focus their study on learners' feedback and demonstrating examples of strategic usages. Moreover, Lam's (2006) study confirms the results of a study by Nakatani (2005) on the value of awareness raising on strategy use in oral communication. Nakatani provided some evidence that CS training can improve learners' performance on proficiency tests.

### **METHODOLOGIES**

In order to investigate the effectiveness and examples of communication strategies, a qualitative study was conducted in a university in Taiwan. In a class of 45 English-majors, the researchers introduced the concepts of communication strategies to students which involved collecting speech productions from the students who had learned communication strategies for a semester. Five minute-interviews were conducted on 13 students. They were among 45 adult learners who were invited to talk about their feelings toward the strategies that they learned.

#### **Research Question**

The research questions that led the qualitative study were:

What are the examples of communication strategies that Taiwanese university students would produce? How Taiwanese university students' language productions through communication strategies would be like? What are Taiwanese university students' reflections of communication strategies?

#### **Research Setting**

This study was conducted in a university in central Taiwan. Forty five students in the Department of English Studies were taught Faerch and Kasper's (1985) taxonomy for a semester. This night school class was taking a required course Oral Training of English Communication from August, 2007 to January, 2008.

The English majors at night school can be regarded as middle level learners. Before taking this advance oral training course, all of them had taken the required basic oral course for six credits.

#### **Data of Language Productions Collecting and Instruments**

After the students had been taught communication strategies for a semester, the researcher explored the examples that Taiwanese students might produce in March, 2008 (The beginning of Spring semester, 2008) In a two-minute interview, students' language production was recorded in order to collect examples demonstrating the use of communication strategies. In this interview, the researcher (teacher) asked the students through a list of questions about their families. At the end of the interview, the subjects were asked which communication strategies they might have applied. Because some parts of the application of communication strategies were processes invisible to researchers. Students' self-recognitions of strategic applications were very significant.

#### **Data Analysis**

The data collected in the digital recorder were word-coded and transcribed. The

researcher recognized which sentences were typical examples through a certain communication strategy. From 45 English majors' introductions for their family, 10 sentences were found and evaluated as valuable examples through communication strategies.

### **18 Weeks of Training**

From Aug, 2007 to Jan, 2008, 45 English majors were taught communication strategies through a series of free material of 300 pages. In order to hold a neutral position of this study, the students were not encouraged to agree with all the usages in Faerch and Kasper's (1983) classification. The materials included conceptual articles and actual examples of communication strategies. Moreover, more than 10 pictures were offered for students to orally describe in group discussions. Throughout the course, the trainer reminded the students that they could resort to the usage of communication strategies without having to refer to dictionaries in order to maintain a high fluency in oral interaction.

Dornyei (2003) observed that the more confidentiality is emphasized to the subjects, the freer the freer they feel to provide information to the researcher. In this study, students were told that their language production and their feedback for learning communication strategies will be included into a research paper, but their names would not be revealed.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

1. English Language majors might think communication strategies are not the best way to communicate; therefore, the researcher might not be able to collect sufficient examples of communication strategies.
2. The Taiwanese students might apply communication strategies frequently, because they were familiar with them usages after studying for 18 weeks.
3. The 13 volunteers are not a representative sample of English Language majors at Taiwanese universities.

## **RESULTS**

The English majors in Department of English Studies cooperated with this study (From Aug, 2007 to March, 2008) and provided examples of their speech through Faerch and Kasper's (1985) taxonomies of communication strategies. The results showed that the students had learned communication strategies thoroughly so their examples matched the descriptions from the given materials associated with the communication strategies.

### **Speech Productions**

The following examples of their language productions were identified.

Example 1. In my family I have one brother and two sisters. I am number 4. (我是老四 Interlanguage for the youngest)

Example 2. My interest is playing "Ma Chang ." (Interlanguage of 麻將)

Example 3. I am a part of aboriginal. (Replacement of half aboriginal)

Example 4. My father is a hard worker; he works early and comes home late. (Interlanguage of 早出晚歸)

Example 5. Each of them has two boys. (Replacement for sons)

Example 6. We usually go out for “family dinner.” (Interlanguage from 家庭聚餐)

Example 7. My family touches the emotion on the telephone. (Interlanguage from 連絡感情)

Example 8. My sister replaces my father and takes care of us. (Topic avoidance, using replace instead of “substitute”)

Example 9. I am from single’s family (Interlanguage of Single-parent family 單親家庭 )

Example 10. I like...House design..... Interior Design (Approximation/ Circumlocution 室內設計→ accurate word appearing to mind... Interior Design).

Many students at the end of interview reported that many important words were abandoned and some difficult topics had been avoided. Although the researcher felt the speeches of the students were fluent and smooth, many implicated ideas and lexis in students’ mother tongue were skipped imperceptibly. For instance, for “touches the emotion” 連絡感情 in example 7, the simplified language through communication strategies could not indicate the implicated deeper meanings in Chinese, such as continuous of 連絡 making someone feel alive, 感 feelings and perceptions, and 情 love, emotions and sensations. Nevertheless, most speech productions created could put across the basic meanings and the learners’ intended expressions.

### **Feedback for Learning Communication Strategies**

The Primary questions for asking 13 volunteer’s feelings of learning were:

1. Will you use a lot of communication strategies?
2. What are the advantage and disadvantage of using communication strategies?

Most reflections from learners of communication strategies were positive. They tended to agree with the using of various strategies learned and practiced in class. The students’ feedback was as follows:

Volunteer 1. I often use communication strategies, because I don’t know many words. Using communication strategies is a convenient way for me. Because I don’t know many vocabularies, I could not talk to people very well. Therefore, I sometimes use strategies to abandon unknown word. Besides, meaning replacement is especially useful, which helped me to have an abstract concepts for jargons or terms I have never learned. I think it is better than topic avoidance.

Volunteer 2. In my opinion, it is very important using a lot of communication strategies when you need to clarify and translate your opinions. If you only use one strategy in communication it will be boring and not too helpful. I suggest using many strategies interactively. Using a lot of strategies helped me to follow the speakers’ response and updated ideas in talking. I think communication strategies improve my communicative competence and it makes me talk fluently and comprehensively.

Volunteer 3. In class, I talked to my teachers and classmates much easier through applying many communication strategies. I think they help me make much progress in English interactions. I think they are good ways of training English communication. I started to open my mouth and speak in English. Communication Strategies made me have more courage of saying English.

Volunteer 4. I would prefer using a lot of communication strategies to interact in international situations

instead of wondering around the difficult lexis or grammatical structures. I think no response and changing topics are somehow unavoidable methods. I usually avoided pronunciation difficulties and made my speech a little bit pidginized. I would avoid “tr,” “dr,” and “th” sounds. Sometimes, I was not sure if I could express the meaning through communication strategies correctly. So, I used several explanations to compensate my vagueness.

Volunteer 5. I think communication strategies let us talk better and effectively apply English in our real life. Using communication allows me to express myself and substitutes difficult words that I have not learned yet. Although words in my mind were not really many, I can talk to people more easily through using methods of explanation, circumlocution, rephrasing, restructuring, and so on. I think they are very helpful and some speeches produced were like the definitions or explanations in dictionaries. I feel grateful that I have gained an opportunity to interact only in English through communication strategies.

Volunteer 6. Communication strategies are important in my career of English learning. I should use them more frequently to communicate with foreigners instead of going away. After learning communication strategies, I feel much freer when talking to foreigners. Now, I can use a facilitated word to replace a difficult word. Then, I find help from my interlocutors and see if there is a better word that promotes the comprehension level in the whole communication. Communication strategy made me continuously talk well with my classmates and also they made the dialogues sound more comprehensible and friendly.

Volunteer 7. I enjoy using various communication strategies in order to develop my communication ability. First of all, I like to use Interlanguage strategy when talking with foreigners. When I introduce some local food, Taiwanese snacks, like Tzo Tofu (臭豆腐), Sau Jo Ji (燒酒雞), or Sau Sien Tsaw (燒仙草) to foreigners, I would utilize it. Moreover, if I do not recognize the chat of a certain topic and cannot join it straightforwardly, I would not response and make my foreign friends realize that they should adjust their interaction into another theme. I perceived that they usually understood my feeling when I kept my silence.

Volunteer 8. Using a lot of communication strategies let me try my best to talk to people when traveling. I can use countless simple words to substitute a difficult word and assist people know what I mean. Once, I talked to a non-native speaker in Taipei about transportation, which was a difficult word for her. I used “the buses and the undergrounds” to inspire her comprehend what I meant. There would be no excuse and say that they don’t distinguish what I was talking about.

Volunteer 9. In this course, I do learn about how to use communication strategies. Especially, after doing the presentation to introduce Taiwan’s culture and my family, I think using communication strategies are really unavoidable. I can’t imagine how I can introduce my local culture well without using Interlanguage strategy. Also, code-switching is convenient for me to present some popular and significant Taiwanese cultures. For example, when introducing tribe (aboriginal) cultures and food cultures in Taiwan, I resort to code-switching frequently. Therefore, my non-native like languages were accepted by foreign friends who would like to know more about me.

Volunteer 10. I do not only agree to apply communication strategies in oral communication. Also, I relate them into writing English letters through email or fax. Communication strategies save me a lot of time, because I am not enforced to figure out numerous high-level words in my letter, but I still can express myself well. It is a resourceful method for also businessman I think. My language became easily understandable through the replacement strategy, restructuring strategy and Interlanguage strategy.

Volunteer 11. Communication strategies aid me reduce my apprehension in English interaction. I am starting to face many foreigners and talk in English without worrying I might encounter difficulties in high-level vocabularies. I think this is good news for me. From now on, I don't have to feel nervous, due to a single difficult word that would stop the whole proceeding conversation. I feel much more relaxed because I realize that my languages do not have to be perfect or very native-like.

Volunteer 12. Communication strategies helped me survive when interacting with foreigners on MSN. Before I learned them, our interactions sometimes would be interrupted or even stopped due to a long time that I use to check words in the dictionaries. From this moment, I never felt it difficult to continue to talk with foreigners on MSN because I resort to communication strategies a lot. My pen pal on the internet told me that he understood me much better through my humbler sentences.

Volunteer 13. I had German pen pal. We communicated through email twice a month. She gave me sufficient time to consider which words to use and also check difficult structures in the textbooks of English Grammars. After learning communication strategies, I become aware communication can be time-saving and flexible. Therefore, I later invited her to interact with me through MSN to interact promptly. It was much more interesting this way by strategies. Now, we interact directly without considering the difficult lexis and grammatical structures. I can immediately think of how to explain my thinking through various convenient communication strategies.

As seen in feedback from the 13 volunteers, most of the English majors in this training course supported the usages in communication strategies. They reflected that strategies assisted them to “open mouth” and started to interact in English. They help them feel relaxed and save a lot of time. The students pointed out those communication strategies were unavoidable because of their linguistics limitation. They were significant because they liked to “interact” with foreigners but not only one-direction communication. The adult learners in this class also pointed out that communication strategies made used, their interlocutors could not find any excuse to avoid some questions they really need to know. All in all, the English majors of this course supported the trainer's lectures and introductions for communication strategies in Faerch and Kasper's (1983) taxonomy.

Faerch and Kasper's (1983) reduction strategies and achievement strategies were identified as the most significant taxonomies. What they recognized and researched were mainly phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexicon level reduced strategies, which could either carry the reduction or achievement behaviors into execution in order to eliminate the communication difficulties caused by linguistic incompetence in pronunciation, grammar

structure, vocabulary, and inter-cultural knowledge.

During the research period the concept of Faerch and Kasper's taxonomy was conveyed to the students who agreed with the effectiveness of communication strategies. The 45 students were able to cope with their linguistic problems through using the processes in communication strategies. In discussions with 11 groups in this empirical study, adult language learners in English Department had increased mutual understanding when facing the challenges of linguistic limitations of second language learners. Their language productions reflected that they spoke through communication strategies based on their thinking in their mother tongue. Some idioms and customized languages appeared in their speeches, which showed that they translated their own languages into English frequently. This study demonstrated that communication strategies should compensate non-native speakers' limitation of directly thinking in English.

### CONCLUSION

Participants as well as 45 university students in Taiwan had accepted using the communication strategies in Faerch and Kasper's (1983) taxonomy. Faerch and Kasper's (1983) classification was repeatedly introduced as the most significant and has been being employed in countless empirical and interpretative studies cited above. Therefore, Faerch and Kasper's definition of communication strategies should be regarded as authentic and applicable. Their definition (Faerch and Kasper, 1983, p. 36) is that "...strategies are potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal." That is, communication strategies are diverse types of formal reduction strategies, including functional reduction strategies applying meaning reducing methods, and achievement strategies applying interlanguage, cooperative attitudes, and non-verbal languages. This study demonstrated that language learners should be able to attain their communicative goal by resorting to communication strategies in order to compensate for their linguistic limitations.

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