

# Communication Strategies Performed in an English as Lingua Franca Context and Their Contributions Toward Students' Engagement

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Keywords:</b> Communication strategies, English as Lingua Franca, Students' Engagement</p> <p><b>DOI:</b> <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v8i2.1439">http://dx.doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v8i2.1439</a></p> <p><b>How to cite:</b> Shofiya, A. &amp; Basuni, M. (2023). Communication Strategies Performed in an English as Lingua Franca Context and Their Contributions Toward Students' Engagement. <i>Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics</i>, 8(2), 1-12</p>	<p><i>Learning language is learning to communicate in spoken and written form. However, learning to speak can be difficult due to a lack of linguistic resources. The students may encounter problems in communicating ideas and thus, it ends in a communication breakdown. To overcome this problem, some communication strategies like message abandonment and fillers can be used. Furthermore, communication strategies can foster students' engagement in classroom interaction, especially in an English as Lingua Franca (ELF) context. The present study was intended to explore how the communication strategies were performed in the context of ELF and the contribution of strategies to the students' engagement. Using a qualitative descriptive design, the present research investigated students' communication strategies in an international class. The findings revealed that communication strategies were creatively performed in a variety of ways. The strategies were proven to be contributive in fostering engagement by increasing students' self-confidence, boosting their self-respect, and pushing the students to be active during classroom interaction.</i></p>

## 1. Introduction

Speaking skill is one of the most important elements in learning a second language. However, it may be tricky due to the students' limited linguistic resources. They may encounter problems in communicating ideas and thus, it ends in a communication block. Common problems related to learning speaking are anxiety of speaking, unavailability of a suitable environment, and lack of vocabulary (Prasetyaningrum et al., 2020), lack of confidence and skills (Jaelani & Zabidi, 2020), incorrect accent and pronunciation (Dalem, 2017), and lack of opportunities to communicate in English (Chien et al., 2019). In addition, some cultures become a hindrance to learning speaking, like the case of Chinese-English learning students

who tend to be doubtful of their skills (Turner et al., 2021) or parents of Non-Western backgrounds who tend to be less talkative and express less verbalization to their children (Tulviste & Tamm, 2021).

The problem becomes more serious when the speaking activities take place in an English as lingua franca (ELF) context. ELF is a situation where English is used as a means of communication by speakers of different first languages. Seidlhofer (2001) notes that ELF is a language whose properties must be acquired to help speakers negotiate meaning and relationships, including, for example, back-channeling, repair or explicit signposting of intent, structure, and importance of contributions. To use English in the context of lingua franca, speakers have dealt with some parameters such as different accents, proficiency levels, and cultural references (Mauranen, 2007). The communication runs in an asymmetric form due to the differences of first language, social background, and cultural background, as all of them shape various communication styles (Kaur & Sidhu, 2014). Among the most prevailing issues in the field of academic ELF are communication strategies (CSs) such as message abandonment or topic avoidance which are used in negotiating meanings among speakers (students) from different first languages, and the contribution of CSs to student engagement. Student engagement is seen as an expanding knowledge that portrays a range of institutional practices and students' behavior to students' achievement and satisfaction, including tasks and achievement, social integration, and teaching practices.

The use of communication strategies is assumed to be helpful in fostering the students' engagement in the learning activities. Through the use of various strategies, the students can express ideas and be engaged in the learning process. In addition, communication strategies are useful for learning at the following ranges. The students raise more awareness in maintaining effective communication (Chan, 2021), are more proactive to ensure communicative effectiveness (Mauranen, 2007), and use a variety of strategies to solve communication problems (Bjorkman, 2014). The previous studies emphasize the investigations on face-to-face communication in which the students can respond directly to any language inputs spoken by the teachers or their friends. However, in the online learning era nowadays, where classes are often done through online modes, the use of communication strategies may be performed differently. The students cannot observe their classmates' facial expressions clearly as well as their gestures. Such situations may lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, the present study is intended to explore issues related to communication strategies performed in an English as Lingua Franca context. The research problems are formulated as follows: 1) How do the students in the context of ELF perform the communication strategies? and 2) To which extent do the communication strategies foster the students' engagement in the classes?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Communication Strategies (CSs)**

Communication strategies (CSs) are seen as crucial in the process of negotiating meaning. The term communication strategy is defined as verbal and non-verbal efforts to compensate for any breakdown in communication due to a lack of linguistic capabilities (Dornyei, 1995). Faerch & Kasper (1984) state that CSs are used to compensate for the insufficient knowledge of the target language system. In a conversation, when the speakers have limitations in basic

grammar and vocabulary, the use of body language, facial expressions, and paralinguistic features will help to express the idea or to make the meaning clear. In another situation, such as when there is a jerk in conversation due to a misunderstanding between the interlocutors, the use of CSs helps to overcome the problem. The importance of CSs in the flow of communication is in accordance with (Dornyei, 1995), who conceptualizes CSs in a broader sense as “strategies to enhance effective communication”.

The controversy on the use of CSs lies upon whether the speakers use the CSs to avoid misunderstandings or there is already a misunderstanding between them, so they need a strategy to overcome the misunderstanding. Despite the reason for using the CSs, a student can communicate effectively. With the help of gestures, facial appearance, repetition of words, and the like, any communication breakdown can be avoided. Communication strategies are any verbal and non-verbal efforts to maintain good communication. Dornyei (1995, p. 56) contends that communication strategies are not unique for L2 learners, and the use of such strategies is relatively frequent. L2 learners will use effective strategies for negotiating meaning. The learners will use communication-enhancing devices such as fillers, body language, or gestures. Tarone (1977) states that communication strategies are vital for L2 newbies to participate in speaking activities due to the fact that they need to maintain them in a scenario or otherwise they would give up.

The realization of communication strategies as an interlanguage can be viewed from two perspectives: psycholinguistics and interactional point of view. Faerch & Kasper (1984) note that in the psycholinguistics view, communication strategies are defined as a potentially conscious plan for solving what an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a communicative action. Further, Faerch & Kasper (1984) divide this conscious plan into two that are problem-orientedness and potential consciousness. Problem-orientedness deals with the ability of the learners to cope with a new and unforeseen situation. At the same time, in using the communication strategies, the learners are influenced by the teaching; hence, it is called as potential consciousness.

In general, CSs are classified into big three categories (Dornyei, 1995), namely *avoidance* (reduction) strategies, *achievement* (compensatory) strategies, and *stalling* (time-gaining) strategies. Avoidance strategies comprise message abandonment (leaving a message unfinished because of language difficulties) and topic avoidance (avoiding topic areas or concepts which pose language difficulties). *Achievement* includes circumlocution, approximation, use of all-purpose words, word-coinage, use of non-linguistic means, literal translation, foreignizing, code-switching, and appeal or help. *Stalling* involves the use of filler/hesitation.

## **2.2 English as Lingua Franca**

There are some situations where speakers from different native languages meet and communicate, such as in an international conference, international classes, and the like. To mediate the differences, people often use English as a lingua franca (ELF). This is a language whose properties need to be acquired. In the ELF context, the development of speaking skills requires a process of internalizing the concepts of linguistics to maintain conversation. The learners should acquire other competencies such as sociolinguistics, strategic, discourse, and interactional competencies (Celce et al., 1995). The use of English as a means of communication among students of various first languages brings some advantages because

they will learn to understand each other's English. The use of English by different native speakers does not show signs of incompetence but serves as a potential to widen the students' horizons about language and culture (Bjorkman, 2014).

To communicate by using ELF, however, speakers often encounter some challenges since their counterparts may perform some other variations of English, either in the level of sounds, words, or sentences. Issues related to ELF lay upon sociolinguistics (Seidlhofer, 2001), culture (Dippold et al., 2019, Seidlhofer, 2001), psychology (Medgyes, 1994), and pragmatic production of in ELF interaction (Chan, 2021). Issues on sociolinguistics discuss the relationship between linguistics variations among speakers, context and use of identity, variability of English, and the nature of linguistic diversity (Deniz et al., 2016). Misunderstanding often happens because of the variation of English spoken by different native language speakers. The use of ELF, however, cannot be set apart from the culture of the speakers. There is a strong relationship between language, culture, and identity. Meanwhile, topics about psychology in the context of ELF highlight the importance of listening to how the speakers' feeling inferiority as non-native speakers and their attitude toward ELF (Jenkin, 2007).

### **2.3 Communication strategies in ELF context**

In the practice of ELF in the EFL context, the students will likely use a communication strategy (CS) to overcome the problems of communication and to negotiate meaning between interlocutors. In this case, the strategies are used in the production of language as well as in the comprehension process (Tarone, 1977). Studies related CSs in ELF situations negate the assumption that understanding is inherent in the conversation. There are, in fact, some imbalances in communication because of the differences in first languages among the speakers that require them to use strategies intended to create explicitness, anticipate misunderstanding, and ask for confirmation (Bjorkman, 2014). As nonverbal devices, the uses of gestures, gesture holds, and gaze are effective as secondary strategies to maintain effective communication in ELF context (Matsumoto & Canagarajah, 2020). The use of communication strategies, indeed, increases mutual interactions among interlocutors and thus, communicative goals can be achieved (Bjorkman, 2014; Thu & Thu, 2016; Dippold et al. (2019).

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design**

The present research intended to explore the practice of communication strategies in English as lingua franca (ELF) context. Within a case study design, the present research was aimed at exploring the ELT students' verbal and non-verbal strategies used to negotiate meaning during classroom interaction. The investigation was focused on the communication strategies performed by the students in an ELF context, in this case, an international class. As widely understood, classroom interaction in an international class is done by using English to overcome communication problems among the students. At this point, the use of English can be called English as lingua franca.

### **3.2 Participants**

To get a deep understanding of the problems, the researcher examined a number of students in the master program in ELT at the English Department in State Islamic University

(Universitas Islam Negeri/UIN) Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, East Java. The subjects were four students from four countries, namely, Zambia, Egypt, Nepal, and Indonesia. The students were selected based on the following criteria; they participate actively in classroom discussions, they use communication strategies, and they represent of particular native languages.

### 3.3 Instruments

To collect the data, the researcher mainly used the documentation technique. Documentation was used because the research was done during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the classes were held through online mode. It was done by recording the students' presentations and participation in the group discussions through Zoom meetings. So, the collected data were in the form of verbal and non-verbal strategies captured in the records of the classroom activities. In addition, with the help of an interview guide, interviews were carried out once after the documentation was done to verify the recorded data.

### 3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Once the data were collected, the process of analysis began. In analyzing the data, the researchers followed, but not strictly, the model of qualitative data analysis by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014), which includes data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Types of Communication Strategies Performed by the Students in ELF Context

The data of the present study were taken from the students' utterances during the class discussion via Zoom meetings. Like in other places, during the Covid-19 pandemic, education was done online. Students' interactions took place through online mode. The data, therefore, were in the form of video recorded during the class. The findings were classified based on the classification by Dornyei (1995) covering, namely, *avoidance (reduction) strategies*, *achievement (compensatory) strategies*, and *stalling (time-gaining) strategies*.

#### 4.1.1 Avoidance/Reduction Strategies

This strategy was commonly performed by the speakers (the students). Avoidance strategies consisted of two kinds of strategies, message abandonment and topic avoidance. The data showed that message abandonments were likely to be performed by the subjects since they found difficulties in using the language.

Table 1. Message Abandonment Performed by the Students

Data	Description
S2 : <i>For example, the word horse in English it refers to an animal, the shape is...eee...eee the image is .....In Arabic, we have this word as.....s.</i>	The subject describes the word horse in English, and she finds difficulty in describing the imaginary picture of a horse. She did not describe the word and abandoned the message without any further information.
S4: <i>... the discussion of the systemic functional linguistics is e:.... So, the difference of .....</i>	S4 finds it difficult to use the words that explain the concept of systemic functional linguistics, so he left such concept undefined. However, there is an explanation written in the slides that can help him show the concept of systemic functional linguistics. In this part, the communication breakdown did not happen due the existence of the PPT slides.

Besides message abandonment, another strategy within the confine of reduction strategies was topic avoidance. This strategy was also popular among the interlocutors in English as a lingua franca context. Among them, there were various first languages that required the interlocutors to use more communicative strategies to negotiate meaning. However, since the subjects in the present research found it difficult to select the most comprehensive strategy to explain, they tend to avoid discussing the topic. The following is an example of how the subjects perform the topic avoidance.

Table 2. Topic Avoidance Performed by the Students

Data	Description
<i>S2: so...<u>acquisition is different from learning. Do you agree? Ok let's move to another topic</u></i>	S2 avoid discussing the topic about acquisition and learning. She asked her classmates to move to another topic. The probability is that she found some problems dealing with selecting the correct vocabulary related to the topic, and therefore, she asks to move to another topic
<i>S4: ...<u>Functional Approach...</u> The term functions has several meanings in linguistics.</i>	There is no explanation related to the functional approach. S4 only read and directly moved to another topic without explaining the concept of a functional approach to avoid the discussion about it. The interlocutors are given time to digest the meaning themselves.

#### 4.1.2 Achievement/Compensatory Strategies

Such kinds of strategies were very popular among the subjects in the present research. The achievement strategies embraced a lot of sub-strategies. However, in the present research, only some sub-strategies are found in the data. They were appeal for help, use of all-purpose words, and use of non-linguistic means.

Table 3. Appeal for Help Strategy Performed by the Students

Data	Description
<i>S1:... Being important much on that e:m and we see that there are varieties that language learning and some of these facts we know <u>that language...that language which is learned are learned in different circumstances and some of varieties of language names are when a language is...</u></i>	The subject repeated the utterance, <i>that language.. that language and is learned are learned</i> as a sign to get help from the members of class to express what meant. He repeated the statements while increasing the intonation. This strategy was helpful to emphasize the message. By making repetition and increasing the intonation, the intended meaning became much clearer.
<i>SA: Excuse me, S2...the screen is blocked, we can't see S2: OK...<u>Now?</u> SA: Yes it is.</i>	S2 increased the intonation in saying "Now" and help making the meaning clear. It was proven by the interlocutor saying "Yes, it is". This strategy was effective and efficient since the subject could save time in expressing the meaning
<i>S4: the first...e: <u>what is it</u> but...e: functional typology... yes functional typology</i>	S4 was in doubt about the topic. Therefore, he stopped for a while and asked for help to the listeners while he was thinking but then, he just remembered and answered by himself.

Another popular sub-strategy of achievement/compensatory strategies performed by the students was using all-purpose words. The following table shows the findings on the use of all-purpose words in an online classroom discussion.

Table 4. Use of All Purpose Words Strategy Performed by the Students

Data	Description
S2: ...Such as a strategy and our mind has a device <u>OK</u> that is able to acquire language. So this focuses on internal factor like error analysis e: like approaches we learn...	The subject used the word "OK". It was categorized as the all-purpose word. It emphasized the message that every human is gifted with language acquisition devices which will help the human in acquiring any language. With the word OK, the interlocutors would trust what the subject said.
S3: ...So all languages have <u>you know</u> the same rules called as universal grammar, <u>you know</u> ... the same rules but different in performance...right...	Using all-purpose word ( <i>you know</i> ) here was intended to show the classmates that there was very important issue that all languages have that is universal grammar.
S4: ...of the first...e: <u>what is it</u> but...e: functional typology.. yes functional typology	The subject used this expression ( <i>what is it</i> ) to make sure the topic is correct
S4: In here learner e: start with <u>what is it</u> e: infinite utterance organization	Using all-purpose words can help to ensure that the idea is clear and negotiate the meaning

The use of non-linguistic means also appeared in the classroom interaction, even though it was very limited. Since the classes were held by using the Zoom application, the speakers were zoomed in when they spoke. Through such a mode, their use of non-linguistic means could be observed. The following is an example of the use of non-linguistic means.

Table 5. Use of Non-Linguistic Means Strategy Performed by the Students

Data	Description
S2: ... like the word horse..	The subject used her hand to make a sign of a horse to express her intention of talking a horse to the listener

Not many gestures could be observed in the classes since many students turned off the camera while joining the discussion.

#### 4.1.3 Stalling/Time Gaining Strategies

The use of stalling/time-gaining strategies could be found by the frequent use of filler/hesitation devices. All the students used this strategy to have some time to think. With this little pause, the speaker could find a suitable utterance which expressed the intended meaning. The following is an example of the use of stalling/time-gaining strategies.

Table 6. Use of Stalling/Time Strategies Performed by the Students

Data	Description
S1: Children are born with <u>e.. e...</u> potential language and this is very IMPORTANT..	The subject used filler ..e.. and stopped for 2 seconds. Such a long pause allowed him to think the words or expressions to negotiate meaning. Since he came from an African country which has a different first language from his classmates, he needed a longer

	pause to find the words easy to understand for his friends. It is proven that this strategy was effective to avoid misunderstanding and communication breakdown
<i>S2: The first division of language is vocabulary. OK.e(3).e(2). in this e e.... division of language we know about the words, the meanings of words, and so on. If you can participate with me...</i>	The subject made a long pause to collect and think to find the correct expression to negotiate meaning and avoid any misunderstanding. In this case, the fillers appear in the form sounds "e.." which actually did not have any linguistic meaning.
<i>S2: Putting words together to have contexts and to eeeee have meaning, story or to have theses..eee..eee. to eee... putting words together to find discourse OK.</i>	Among speakers of different first languages, fillers provide spare time for them to find the best alternatives to maintain communication.
<i>S2 : What about syntax? Syntax..... Okay. syntax yes it is about grammar for eeee.... for example, having tense aarr ee ee words in future or in the past and so on. The last division we mention here about language is discourse</i>	The subject used the word <i>Okay</i> to emphasize the meaning that syntax is about grammar. The use of filler <i>aarr..ee...</i> gives time to negotiate meaning

#### 4.2 The Extent of Communication Strategies to Foster Students' Engagement

The communication strategies that were performed by the subjects contributed to their engagement in classroom communication. The subjects could gain self-confidence to speak in the classes because they already know how to maintain good communication even though their interlocutors came from different countries and different first languages. The detailed findings about the contribution of CSs on the students' engagement are presented below.

Table 7. The Contribution of CSs on the Students' Engagement

Data	Description
<i>S1: I don't know the name of the strategy. I used it to clarify the meaning and sometimes I pause my speaking for having a time to find appropriate words, so the communication can run well. It helps me much in the classroom interaction. On the contrary I identify that my friends also use strategy "e;...e:...e;" just the same as I do. So, listening the, saying that utterance can improve my self-confidence because I exactly know that my friends are the same as I in speaking</i>	The subject realized that using communication provides opportunities to negotiate meaning which ended on improved self-confidence.
<i>S2:I often make a long pause because I often blank. I lost the words and have no idea suddenly. But making a long pause is not a problem for me because I believe my friends will understand me even though they have to wait for me. I am happy to join the classroom discussion because not only knowledge but also experience on using various strategies to express ideas. I can use many strategies to help clarify the meaning. Especially in the class with students from different countries, sometimes they don't understand and on the contrary sometimes I don't understand what they mean. With help of strategies, I can understand what they mean.</i>	The subject realized that to be contributive in the classroom discussion, a person must use various strategies. If not, s/he will be misunderstood by their friends.



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<i>S3: I intentionally use the communication strategies to clarify the intended meaning I have. It often happens that I have a lot of ideas, but I cannot say meaningfully. I use fillers, repetition, words that have no specific meaning, and some other strategies that can mediate the communication between the speakers and the listeners. The use of strategies can push communication and share of meaning, especially in a class consisting of students from different countries, like what I have now at the English Department at the State Islamic Institute Tulungagung.</i>	Communication strategies can push the students to be active because there is a sort of choice in using strategies to express ideas.
<i>S4: Actually, I don't know that this is a kind of communicative strategy, but I often use it to save my time and my face also. Of course, I don't want to look stupid in front of my friends. Therefore, I use whatever strategies that I can do to make my speaking understood by my friends.</i>	CSs facilitates the subject in expressing ideas, even complicated ones. The communication strategies that consist of verbal and non-verbal ways let the subject enjoy the freedom to choose the easiest ones in negotiating meaning.

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## 5. Discussion

The findings of the present research show that in an ELF context and in the era of online learning, communication strategies were used in limited numbers. The students used the CSs to maintain interaction and make the meaning clear/negotiate meaning. However, not all strategies could be observed. This was due to the limitation of the students' language mastery. Besides, since the classes were done online, the use of non-linguistic features could not be observed in detail. Another finding of the present study showed that the students with higher skills used more communication strategies. The students with lower language skills tend to use the avoidance strategy.

The primary use of CSs is to negotiate meaning. In an ELF class, the students often encounter some misunderstanding since they come from different native languages. It is a fact that the native language contributed to the performance of the students in the second language, for example, in terms of language structure or pronunciation. To bridge the differences, therefore, the students should use proper strategies. The letter "n" in the word *negotiate* emphasizes collaboration and cooperation (Dippold et al., 2019). It means that in the context of ELF, collaboration and cooperation are essential in making meaning clear. The findings of the present research showed that all the subjects had a kind of negotiation strategy till the meaning is understood and agreed by both parties. The strategy is done, for example, by using various strategies like repeating the words or by raising or falling intonation. Perceived from the perspective of sociolinguistics, linguistic variation should not become a dilemma for different native speakers because it can be mediated by using linguistic and non-linguistic means, that is CSs.

During the classroom interaction, not many CSs could be observed since the classes were done online. In line with Dornyei's (1995) explanation that communication strategies refer to devices the speakers use when they have difficulty in verbalizing mental plans due to linguistics limitations, it was found that the strategies commonly used were *message abandonment, topic avoidance, repetitions, raising intonation, appealing for help, all-purpose words, use of non-linguistics means, and fillers*.

Message abandonment is used to avoid communication breakdown by moving to another topic directly without finishing the topic. The speakers chose to discuss another topic which is linguistically easier to express. It was also a fact that in classroom interaction, the students

tend to avoid discussing unfamiliar topics. This type of strategy was performed to avoid communication breakdown since the speakers did not know the language to decode the meaning. In a class situation where the students cannot afford to use message abandonment, it is reported that they use achievement strategies like using repetition or raising intonation (Bjorkman, 2014). Vettorel (2018) states that communication strategies play an important role in the ELF context, especially as a mediator in a plurilingual repertoire. The findings of the present research suggest that effective communication can be achieved when there is no misunderstanding between the speakers, and using CSs is an alternative.

Repetition, raising intonation, appealing for help, all-purpose words, use of non-linguistics, and use of stalling/time-gaining strategies like filler or hesitation devices are found as effective strategies to make the meaning clear. This fact confirms Tarone's (1980) statement that CSs is used to overcome the crisis of language when the structure is not mastered. The use of CSs shows mutual accommodation among heterogeneous speakers where linguistic and non-linguistic features of English are employed (Chan, 2021). The present study reported that among the students, CSs were more likely to be used by the students with higher proficiency in English. They had more strategies to make the meaning clear and avoid misunderstanding.

Using CSs in ELF context was also reported to improve their engagement in classroom interaction in some ways. First, the use of CSs gives the students a chance to negotiate meaning by, for instance, using repetition or rising intonation. Such strategies could improve their self-confidence. In addition, for low-proficiency students, the use of CSs could help them manage to communicate within their limited resources of language. These findings corroborate Sato et al. (2019), who noticed that CSs are used to co-construct an interaction by supporting one's interlocutors, signaling affiliation as a member, or keeping the interaction going. The second contribution of CSs in classroom engagement dealt with the students' self-respect. In a class with an ELF situation, self-respect is an important issue since the students interact with their classmates from various nationalities. As shown in Table 7 the use of CSs, like making a long pause, can help to boost students' self-respect because their classmates will wait and be curious about what is talked about next. This situation confirms Mauranen (2007), who notes frequent repetition of information is important to achieve cooperativeness in ELF interaction. The third contribution of CSs to student classroom engagement is that it can push the students to be active. There is sort of choices in CSs that could be used to express ideas and make the meaning clear. CSs could facilitate the students to express complicated ideas due to the existence of verbal and non-verbal means in the ELF situation.

## **6. Conclusion**

In the ELF situation, the use of CSs is crucial to bridge the gap in linguistics among the participants since they come from different first languages. Despite the fact that not all CSs are observable during the learning process, their existence could help to promote students' engagement in the classes. It implies that in the classroom, the teacher should be aware of teaching CSs so that the students can use various strategies to negotiate meaning as well as foster their classroom participation.

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