

TYPES OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES USED BY YOUNG LEARNERS IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

The learner's proficiency level in communication using English as a foreign language was indicated by their capability to make use of strategies to communicate both in written as well as spoken forms. This qualitative study focused on finding out (i) the types of communication strategies used by the students in EFL classrooms at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja, and (ii) the students' reasons towards the use of their communication strategies. The data were obtained from observation and focus group discussion. All data were analysed descriptively. The results of the study indicated that numerous types of strategies were used by the students when communicating in the classroom. They are the use of fillers, self-repetition, code switching, appeal for help, self-repair, asking for confirmation, message abandonment, omission, approximation, and literal translation. Various types of reasons were expressed by the students toward the use of communication strategies such as thinking time, anxiety, and proficiency level.

Keywords: communication strategies, young learners, EFL classroom

INTRODUCTION

The goal of teaching English as a foreign language based on the latest curriculum implemented in Indonesian is to develop the students' communicative competence (Sukirlan, 2014). The notion of communicative competence came from Hymes (1967, as cited in Brown, 2007). Hymes defines communicative competence as "an aspect of our competence that enables us to convey, and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts" (Brown, 2007, p.196).

Canale & Swain explains and later in Canale's (1983, as cited in Brown, 2007) definition, there are four different components which make up the construct of communicative competence. These four components are grammatical competence (knowledge of the

rules of grammar), discourse competence (knowledge of intersentential relationships), sociolinguistic competence (knowledge of the social context in which language is used), and strategic competence (the knowledge of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies). Among those components, the one that holds the decisive role is recognized as strategic competence (Rastegar & Gohari, 2016). Canale & Swain (1980) describe strategic competence as an ability of the individuals to convey verbal and non-verbal communication strategies in order to compensate breakdowns of communication due to insufficient competence or due to performance variables. Therefore, among those components of communicative competence, communication strategies were labeled and adopted under strategic competence. In other words, strategic

competence refers to the learners' ability to use communication strategies.

The use of communication strategies is unavoidable in oral communication for language learners. By using communication strategies the learners can feel secure when they face difficulty in communicating the target language (Dornyei, 1995 as cited in Majd, 2014). Moreover, Dornyei also believes that the use of communication strategies by the learners can facilitate them in expressing the message, conveying their meaning and helping them to cope with the communication apprehension of the second or the target language (as cited in Bijani & Sedaghat, 2016). The notion of communication strategies was constructed by Selinker (1972, as cited in Maldonado, 2016) as one of the five processes that occurs in the learning of a second language. Corder (1983) defines communication strategies as a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his or her meaning when he or she faces some difficulties (as cited in Al-Gharaibeh & Al-Jamal, 2016).

According to Cook (2001 as cited in Yarahmadzahi & Samani, 2014), the classification of the types of communication strategies was adopted from some experts, namely Tarone (1980), Faerch & Kasper (1983), and Dornyei & Scott (1997) who distinguished between two major types of communication strategies: reduction (or avoidance) and achievement strategies (or compensatory strategies). Avoidance strategies can be divided into topic avoidance and message abandonment. While compensatory strategies involve word coinage, code switching, foreignizing, use of mime, self-repair, mumbling, use of all purpose, approximation, circumlocution, literal translation, use of fillers, self-repetition, other-repetition, omission, asking for repetition, appeal for help, clarification request, asking for confirmation, comprehension check, and expressing non understanding.

There are some factors that affect the people to use those strategies in the oral communication. The first factor is language anxiety. According to Horwitz (1995, as cited in

Bijani & Sedaghat, 2016), language anxiety occurs when language learners feel nervous, uneasiness or worry while expressing the target language. The next factor is about language proficiency. In Nakatain's study (2006, as cited in Huang, 2010), the learner with high proficiency tend to use social affective, fluency-oriented, and negotiation of meaning strategies in which those strategies are categorized as an effective strategies in order to keep the conversation flowing and to maintain the interaction through negotiation. The learners with low proficiency depend on "message abandonment and less active listener strategies", which are regarded as ineffective strategies. In Bialystok's study (1981 as cited in Huang, 2010), functional practice is indicated to be critical to learners' language performance. MacIntyre & Charos (1996) state that if "foreign language learners lack the opportunity for constant interaction in the L2, they should be less likely to increase their perceived competence, willingness to communicate, and frequency of communication" (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000 as cited in Huang, 2010, p. 91). The last factor is motivation. Schumann (1986, as cited in Huang, 2010) says that high motivation of the learners may cause them to have an interaction with native speakers of the target language, which in turn improves the amount of input to learners.

Cervantes & Rodriguez (2012) argue that when the language learners cannot express a word in English, they can communicate effectively by imitating the sounds, using their gestures, inventing new words or describing what they mean. They usually maintain the conversation in order to achieve the goal of communication by employing communication strategies as tools to overcome the barriers in communicating the target language (Faerch & Kasper, 1983 as cited in Cervantes & Rodriguez, 2012). Moreover, Al-Gharaibeh & Al-Jamal (2016) state the role of communication strategies is aimed at informing the learners on what to say and on how to expand the language communicatively. It means that the use of communication strategies by the learners make them think about what to say and how to communicate the message effectively.

However, learning English as a foreign language becomes a big problem for the learners due to the limited amount of exposure in their oral production (Bijani & Sedaghat, 2016). Ellis (2005) says that having difficulties in oral production during the language learning process is a big problem for the language learners (as cited in Bijani & Sedaghat, 2016). The phenomenon found when the researcher conducted a preliminary observation at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja. When the researcher entered the classrooms, it was found that most of the students had high motivation in joining the process of learning English, however, not all of them were capable using English fluently to communicate. The phenomena happened when the students had an interaction using English with the teacher in the classroom. Sometimes when the teacher asked about something using English, they responded it by using English and Bahasa Indonesia. They overcame the communication problem or difficulties by alternating two languages (English and Bahasa Indonesia), using fillers e.g. eee.... hmmm...., by repeating words and asking for translation.

This phenomenon becomes significant considerations of the researcher to find out (i) the types of communication strategies used by young learners, (ii) the students' reasons towards the use of their communication strategies in EFL classrooms at SMPN 4 Singaraja. Thus, communication strategies appear to be a major area of exploration since these strategies do not only help the speakers to overcome the problems but also they can significantly contribute in improving and building up the communicative competence.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive design which was conducted at SMP N 4 Singaraja. The subjects of this study were the young learners in 7a1 and 7b1 classes. The objects of this study were the types and the reasons of using communication strategies by young learners. The data were collected through classroom observations and focus group discussion. Then, the data obtained was transcribed and analyzed by using the classification framework from Tarone (1980),

Faerch & Kasper (1983), and Dornyei & Scott (1997). To get the qualitative result, after the data were quantified, then the total numbers of each situation were calculated in the table of mean and percentage.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the table 1. and chart 1., out of twenty-two types of communication strategies proposed by Tarone, 1980; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Dornyei & Scott, 1997, only ten types of communication strategies were found to be used by young learners in the EFL classrooms learning activities. It indicates that the most frequent type of communication strategies to occur was the use of fillers (11.16). The second most frequent strategy occurred was about self-repetition (10.33) followed by code switching (10.16), appeal for help (4.50), self-repair (4.00), asking for confirmation (3.33), message abandonment (2.33), omission (2.16), and approximation (1.16). The least frequent of communication strategy used by young learners was literal translation (0.83).

The most frequent strategy used by young learners was the use of fillers with the average frequency of 12.16. Dornyei (1995, as cited in Uztosun & Erten, 2014) states that this strategy is known as a 'communication maintenance strategies'. This strategy is not related to speakers' lack of competence but it is employed when the speakers need to gain time in conversations. In this study, it showed that most of the young learners commonly uttered 'eee..., hmm...' expressions to fill pauses in communication. Dornyei (1995, as cited in Nakatani, Makki, and Bradley, 2012) stated that the use of fillers strategies could help the speakers to gain time to think and keep the channel of communication open. Based on the discussion, these strategies happened when the teacher asked them some questions directly and chose their names. They still needed time to think about the answers and they did not know what they were going to say. The result of study conducted by Uztosun & Erten (2014) showed that the responses of the students regarding the reasons in uttering fillers confirmed the function of the use of fillers itself in order to gain time in conversation.

The other reason expressed by the young learners was they forgot about the vocabulary that made them stuck then used fillers. The last reason was they were nervous when trying to express something using English. Forgetful and nervous are the factors of communication apprehension that affect someone to use

communication strategies. According to Daly (1991, as cited in Tiono & Sylvia, 2004), a person who has difficulties in concentrating, become forgetful, and sweat much are categorized as the ones who have high communication apprehension level.

Table 1. The Frequency of Communication Strategies

Types of Communication Strategies	Meetings						Frequency		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total	Mean	%
1. UF	8	1	29	8	14	7	67	11.16	22.33
2. SRt	10	1	23	11	9	8	62	10.33	20.67
3. CS	19	15	17	3	2	5	61	10.16	20.33
4. AH	11	3	6	2	3	2	27	4.50	9
5. SR	1	0	10	6	4	3	24	4.00	8
6. AC	5	8	1	1	2	3	20	3.33	6.67
7. MA	8	1	2	1	1	1	14	2.33	4.67
8. Omi	4	0	5	1	1	2	13	2.16	4.33
9. App	0	1	2	0	2	2	7	1.16	2.33
10. LT	1	1	0	1	0	1	5	0.83	1.67

Notes:

UF: Use of filler
SRt: Self-repetition
CS: Code switching
AH: Appeal for help

SR: Self-repair
AC: Asking for confirmation
MA: Massage abandonment

Omi: Omission
App: Approximation
LT: Literal translation

Self-repetition with the average frequency of 10.33 was the next most frequently used strategy by the young learners. Self-repetition has similar function to the 'use of fillers'. Instead of uttering non-lexicalised fillers, the speakers repeated a word or a phrase in order to fill pauses in the conversations (Dornyei & Scott, 1997, as cited in Uztosun & Erten, 2014). Based on the discussion, the young learners used repetition in communication because they were still thinking about what sentence that would be made. The finding was the same with the study conducted by Uztosun & Erten (2014). The result of the study found that the students used self-repetition strategy in order to think what to say next.

The use of code switching by young learners was the next popular strategy in this study with the average frequency of 10.16. Trousdale (2010) implies code switching as a situation where the speaker alternates two codes in the same speech toward the

interlocutors who have the similar languages (cited in Mujiono *et al.*, 2013). This strategy involves stretches of utterance which range from single words to whole chunks and even complete turns (Dornyei & Scott, 1997 as cited in Yarahmadzahi & Samani, 2014). On the observation, this strategy happened in a situation where the young learners alternated two languages (English and Bahasa Indonesia) in the same speech toward the interlocutors who have the similar languages. Based on the result of discussion that had been conducted, the young learners said that they used this strategy because almost all of them did not know many vocabularies. The same result was found on Nakatani, *et al.*, (2012). The finding shows that the students used code switching because they still had problems using target language vocabularies. Another reason was they also said that they were sometimes afraid of using English (lack of self-confidence). The factor of language anxiety which affect the use

of communication strategies happens when language learners feel nervous, uneasiness or worry while expressing the second or foreign language (Horwitz, 1995, as cited in Bijani & Sedaghat, 2016).

The other strategy used by young learner was appeal for help which occurred in the average frequency of 4.50. This strategy refers to asking for help directly or indirectly. Direct appeal for help is turning to the interlocutor for assistance by asking an explicit question concerning a gap in one's target language knowledge. Indirect appeal for help is trying to elicit help from the interlocutor indirectly by expressing lack of a needed L2 item either verbally or non-verbally (Dornyei & Scott, 1997, as cited in Yarahmadzahi & Samani, 2014). In the observation, this strategy was used by young learners to ask for help directly or

indirectly when they faced some difficulties in the target language to their teacher. They said that they often asked the teacher about the meaning of some words or asking for translation to their teacher. The result of discussion showed that they admitted that they did not understand about something and lack of vocabularies. The same result was found on Nakatani, *et al.*, (2012). The finding shows that the students employed this strategy since they did not know the meaning of the words (insufficient knowledge of target language vocabularies), so they appealed for help. Moreover, they also said that in order to reinforce more fluent communication, they often asked the teacher for the translation of particular target language vocabularies or vice versa because they did not bring dictionaries to cope with the problems by themselves.

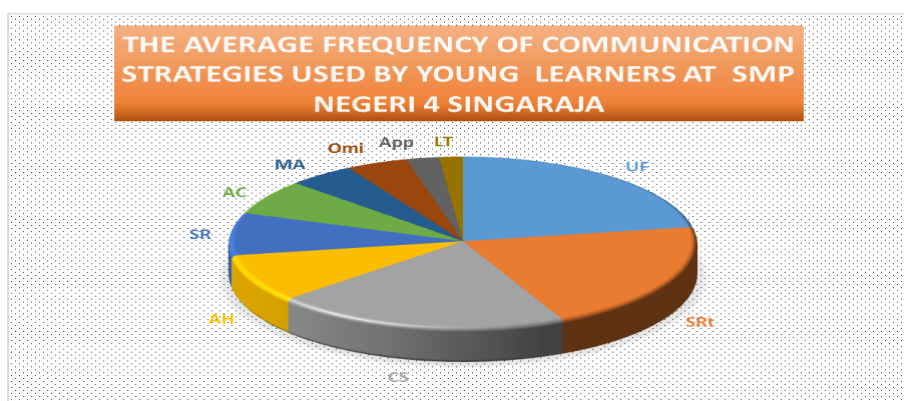


Figure 1. The Frequency of Communication Strategies

The next fifth strategy occurred was self-repair. These strategies are self-initiated corrections used by the speaker in one's own speech (Dornyei & Scott, 1997, as cited in Uztosun & Erten, 2014) and speakers use modified output (Nakatani, 2010) to correct their utterances. Self-repair strategy with the average frequency of 4.00 used by young learners who seemed to consciously monitor their own speech. Based on the discussion, the young learners said that the reason in implementing this strategy was they realized that the sentence that they made was incorrect then immediately knew the correct one then repaired it. Those students who have language anxiety will have high feelings of self-consciousness that have a desire to be perfect when speaking (Foss et al., 1991, as cited in

Tiono & Sylvia, 2004). The finding was the same with the study conducted by Uztosun & Erten (2014) who said that the students repaired their utterances immediately because having noticed the grammatical mistakes.

EFL young learners in this study used to request for confirmation with the average frequency of 3.33. According to Dornyei & Scott (1997, as cited in Yarahmadzahi & Samani, 2014), this strategy is defined as requesting confirmation that one heard or understood something correctly. In this case, the young learners used this strategy in order to ask for confirmation or appealing for approval for the correct message to their teacher. They admitted that they were not sure about the accurate use of vocabulary to express the message. They also used this strategy when

they were confused about the pronunciation of an item. Then they asked their teacher for confirmation.

Message abandonment strategy was used by young learners with the average frequency of 2.33. In this strategy, the young learners simply abandoned conversation when they could not recall a word or an expression. Brown (2007) defines that message abandonment happened when the learner stops his middle utterance because of the lack of meaning structures (as cited in Syahril & Setyarini, 2013). Here, the young learners simply abandoned conversation when they couldn't recall a word or an expression. In other word, when they came with the difficulty of the target language rules, he just cut short of the discourse or stop in the mid-sentence. According to Nakatani *et al.*, (2012), message abandonment was used by lower proficiency learners as their language capability in which they could not continue the message effectively. Based on the discussion, they used this strategy because they were not sure about what was going to say. They also said that they were in doubt to say something and afraid of making mistakes. Therefore, they stopped in the middle of their utterance. The young learners in this study belong to the ones with low language proficiency that affect the use of communication strategies. In Nakatani's study (2006, as cited in Huang, 2010), the students with low proficiency just relied more on *message abandonment*, which is regarded as ineffective strategies.

The other strategy employed by EFL young learners was omission. According to Molley (2012, as cited in Yarahmadzahi & Samani, 2014), this strategy possibly used by the speakers when they simply delete the missing word or phrase and carry on the conversation as if it had been said. This strategy occurred in the average frequency of 2.16. Based on the discussion, there were several reasons that they had toward the use of this strategy. Sometimes, they often forgot to insert a word or some words in the middle of utterance, for example "she beautiful" because they were nervous. According to Ounis (2016), communication strategies used by an individual

to overcome the problem which occurs when the individual has inadequate of language structures to convey his/her thought. Moreover, Tarone (1976) says that the communication strategy occur in the situation where the learners express the meaning of the target language which is not formed in the systematic rules of the target language (as cited in Zhao & Intaraprasert, 2013). Some of them said that they did not realize the grammar, then just translated it literally.

The next strategy occurred was approximation. This strategy used by young learner in the average frequency of 1.16. According to Cook (2001, as cited in Yarahmadzahi & Samani, 2014), this strategy is defined as groping for a word and fails uses a word that means approximately the same, because the listener will be able to deduce from the context what is intended. In this study, this strategy was used by young learners when they tried to express the meaning of the target lexical item but they failed use the intended word and used another term as closely as possible as the intended word. Nakatani *et al.*, (2012) stated that this strategy was used by young learners as their vocabulary knowledge was still limited. When conducting the discussion, in this study, the students said that they did not know the intended word to express the target language. Uгла, Adnan, & Abidin, (2013) stated that the difficulty in expressing the ideas and thought happened when the speaker could not select or use the appropriate words, phrases and so on. As Varadi (1980) said that communication strategies were used as a means which a learner uses them to convey his message when linguistic resources fail to do so (as cited in Hua *et al.*, 2012). It refers to a conscious attempt to communicate the learner's thought when the interlanguage structures are inadequate to convey that thought.

The last strategy used by young learner was literal translation by the average frequency of 0.83. Literal translation or transfer according is translating literally a lexical item, an idiom, a compound word or structure from L1 to L2 (Dornyei & Scott, 1997, as cited in Yarahmadzahi & Samani, 2014). This strategy

uttered by the learners when they translated literally a lexical item, an idiom, a compound word or structure from L1 to L2. The reason toward the use of this strategy was they were easy to say in Bahasa Indonesia first and then English. This reason was supported by a study conducted by Nakatani, *et al.*, (2012). The finding showed that the students employed this strategy. The instances of literal translation showed the existence of native-language mind-set among the learners of even higher levels of proficiency.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

After analyzing data, it was found that there were only ten types of communication strategies used by young learners: the use of fillers, self-repetition, code switching, appeal for help, self-repair, asking for confirmation, message abandonment, omission, approximation, and literal translation.

To conclude the results of focus group discussion, there were various reasons behind the students' use of communication strategies which could be grouped into the following classifications:

1. Thinking time: Thinking about the answer, thinking what to say next.
2. Anxiety: Forgetful, nervous, unprepared, confused, unable to take risks, feeling uncertain, slip of the tongue, doubtful.
3. Proficiency: Having no idea, lack of vocabularies, did not know the meaning of the target language lexical items, realizing about making mistakes, did not know what was going to say next, did not know the grammar of the target language, getting easier to express something.

It was deeply admitted that this study was found to have a bundle of weaknesses as a results of so many restrictions either in the forms of space, time, energy as well as professional capabilities, so that the following recommendations were considerably very important to take into account by other parties interested in the same area of subject matter in order to: (1) take deeper as well as wider

objects of the study; (2) expanding the coverage range of research area; (3) overcome time restriction; (4) involving greater number of subjects of the study; (5) implementing different models of research design; (6) employing more comprehensive research instruments, etc.

By taking into account about the findings of this study, it seems very important for the EFL teachers to work harder in order to provide longer times to facilitate the students in encouraging and developing their proficiency to compensate for their target language deficiencies involving accelerating their fluency in the engagement of interaction strategies. Teachers should introduce communication strategies to students more frequently in real life communication context and encourage their use. By learning how to use communication strategies appropriately, learners would be more capable of bridging the gap between pedagogic and non-pedagogic communication situations. By taking into deliberate consideration of the above recommendation, the aims of the study would undoubtedly be achieved successfully.

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