

# AN ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES USED BY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS OF FKIP LAMPUNG UNIVERSITY

**Basturi Hasan**

FKIP Unila, Jl. Prof. Dr. Sumantri Brojonegoro No. 1 Bandar Lampung

*e-mail: basturi.hasan@yahoo.com*

**Abstract: An Analysis of Communication Strategies Used by English Department Students of FKIP Lampung University.** Basically, this research is aimed at investigating the use communication strategies done by the students at the English Department of FKIP UNILA in their attempt to overcome problem in getting a lexical meaning across in English. This include the description of (1) types of strategies used, (2) effectiveness rate, (3) characteristics of their use, (4) their frequency of occurrences, and (5) reasons for their use. The results indicate that the communication strategies used previously and the effectiveness rate were as follows: *topic avoidance* (2.14%), *appeal for assistance* (33.33%), *literal translation* (33.33%), *message abandonment* (54.56%), *circumlocution* (65.07%), *approximation* (66.67%), *language switch* (71.43%), *word-coinage* (75.00%). The characteristics are risk taking, risk avoiding, L2-based, non-linguistic based, repetition, and reconstruction of the utterance. Furthermore, the reasons of using the strategies are naturally motivated by the efforts to avoid communication breakdowns. Ultimately, they can be categorized into: linguistics and psychological limitations.

**Key words:** communication strategy, use, negotiation of meaning

**Abstrak: Analisa Penggunaan Strategi Komunikasi Mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris FKIP Unila.** Pada dasarnya, penelitian ini bertujuan menginvestigasi penggunaan strategi komunikasi mahasiswa pendidikan Bahasa Inggris FKIP Unila dalam usaha mengatasi masalah mendapatkan makna leksikal dalam Bahasa Inggris. Hal ini meliputi deskripsi (1) jenis strategi yang digunakan, (2) tingkat efektifitas, (3) karakteristik penggunaannya, (4) frekuensi kemunculan, dan (5) alasan penggunaan. Hasil mengindikasikan bahwa penggunaan strategi komunikasi sebelumnya dan tingkat keefektifitas adalah sebagai berikut: topik yang dihindari (2.14%), permintaan bantuan (33.33%), terjemahan literal (33.33%), pesan tertinggal (54.56%), pemakaian kata-kata yang terlampaui banyak (65.70%), perkiraan (66.67%), penggantian bahasa (71.43%), kata koin (75.00%). Karakteristik yang muncul adalah mengambil resiko, menghindari resiko, bahasa target, non-linguistik, pengulangan, dan rekonstruksi pengucapan. Alasan lain dalam menggunakan strategi-strategi tersebut adalah termotivasi secara alamiah dengan berusaha untuk menghindari terputusnya komunikasi. Pada akhirnya dapat disimpulkan bahwa mahasiswa tersebut dapat dikategorikan ke dalam : batasan linguistik dan psikologi.

## INTRODUCTION

New movements in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) basically begin as a reaction to former ones (Richards and Rogers, 1986). The Audio-lingual method, for example, as pointed out by Lado (1960), was supported by structural view in linguistics and behaviorism in psychology was severely criticized by Chomsky (1959) arguing that structural linguistics had ignored the creative aspect of language. Meanwhile, Canale and Swain (1980) assert that the most important aspect of language is communication.

Studies on communicative competence in the 1970's tried to distinguish between linguistic and communicative competence (Hymes, 1967; Paulston, 1974). It is naturally to explain the difference between knowledge about language and forms, and knowledge that enables a person to communicate functionally and interactively.

James Cummins (1980) proposed a distinction between Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS). Actually, CALP is the

dimension of proficiency in which the learner manipulates or reflects upon the surface features of language outside the immediate interpersonal context. This proficiency is often used in classroom exercises and texts which focus on the form. On the other hand, BICS is the communicative capacity of the learner to be used for daily interpersonal exchanges. The notion of CALP is said to be context-reduced while the BICS is context-embedded. In other words, school-oriented language is context-reduced, while face to face communication is context-embedded.

Canale (1983) classified communicative competence into four dimensions: (1) grammatical competence, (2) discourse competence, (3) sociolinguistic competence, and (4) strategic competence. Grammatical competence is the dimension of communicative competence which covers knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, and phonology. Chomsky (1965) calls this as *linguistic competence*. While discourse competence, is the ability to connect sentences in stretches of discourse and to form meaningful utterances. Thus, it actually refers to the interpretation of individual message elements in terms of their interconnectedness and how meaning is represented in the discourse. Specifically, sociolinguistic competence denotes an understanding of social context in which communication takes place, including *role relationship*, *the shared information of participants*, and *communicative purpose of their interaction*. At last, strategic competence is concerned with the coping strategic. Freeman-Larsen and Diane (1986) argue that having this strategic competence means a speaker has a repertoire of communication strategies to invoke in order to compensate for breakdowns in communication. They are the verbal and non-verbal strategies employed due to performance variables or to insufficient competence.

In Savignon's words (1983), they are strategies that one uses to compensate for imperfect knowledge of rules or limiting factors in their application such as fatigue, distraction, or inattention. In short, this refers to the ability to cope with imperfect knowledge and to sustain communication through *paraphrase*, *circumlocution*, *repetition*, *hesitation*, *avoidance* and *guessing* as well as *shifts in register and style*.

In the EFL classroom like in the English Department of the University of Lampung, in fact, the students are still communicating in a system they are still building, i.e., they, most of the times, use their inter-language. To be exact, in this department many students still find themselves abandoning their ideas in midsentence or even avoiding communication for fear of making mistakes or for lack of confidence. It is also unfortunate that English is rarely spoken outside the classroom. This study, in relation to the previous description, is aimed at identifying communication strategies employed by English Department students of FKIP UNILA who face difficulties in conveying their messages in English.

It is said that a new wave of interest in TEFL in 1980's is a focus on communicative language teaching with the ultimate goal of communication with native speakers of English called L2 speakers (Brown, 1987). This movement was characterized by the concept of communicative competence. It has naturally centered on speaking and listening skills, and on writing for communicative purposes, while on reading needs to be with authentic materials.

In relation to this study, communication strategies have been actually defined by several experts. Generally, the definitions below can be used as a framework to clarify the notion of communication strategies in second-language learners' communication.

According to Stern (1977) communication strategies are techniques of coping with difficulties in communicating in an imperfectly known second language. Corder (1978) points out communication strategies are systematic techniques employed by a speaker to express his meaning when faced with some difficulty. Similarly, Tarone (1977) asserts that communication strategies relate to a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situation where requisite structures do not seem to be clear.

When faced with problems in communicating the message, native speaker and non-native speaker are alike, i.e., they usually try to use special strategies such as mentioned in the above definitions. However, non-natives are likely to use communication strategies more frequently because they do not possess as big a repertoire of words and structures as natives (Saiz, 1990).

Furthermore, Tarone (1983) sets the necessary criteria for the use of a communication strategy, namely: (1) a speaker desires to communicate a meaning X to a listener, (2) the speaker believes the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure desired to communicate the meaning X is not available or it is not shared with the listener, (3) the speaker chooses to (a) avoid, not to attempt to communicate X; or (b) attempt to alternate means to communicate meaning X.

Here are some examples of communication strategies types mostly used by the learners adopted from Tarone (1973). They are simply aimed at clarifying the notion of communication strategies, namely: *Avoidance*: These are risk-avoiding strategies consisting of (a) topic avoidance, i.e., the learner avoids certain topics for which he lacks the vocabulary, and (b) message abandonment, i.e., the learner starts talking about a topic but abandons it because he is unable to continue, (2) *Paraphrase*: The learner rewords his message to make himself understood comprising (a) approximation, i.e., the learner uses one vocabulary item which he knows is not accurate but which is similar in meaning, e.g., *clock* is conveyed by saying 'He gave me a big watch to hang on the wall', (b) word coinage, i.e., the learner makes up a new word in the foreign language, e.g., *Balloon* is expressed by using 'I saw an air ball', (c) circumlocution, i.e., the learner describes an action or an item of vocabulary because he does not know the appropriate word, e.g., *I am shy* is expressed by saying 'I get a red in my face', (3) *Transfer*: The learner borrows from any language he knows. This consisting of (a) literal translation, i.e., the learner translates from word to word into the foreign language, e.g., *They toast to one another* becomes 'He invites her to drink', (b) language switch, i.e., the learner directly uses the native language without making an attempt to translate it, e.g., *balloon* becomes *balon*, (4) *Appeal for assistance*: The learner seeks help from the person he is speaking to saying, e.g., *How do you call it?*, (5). *Mime*. The learner uses non-verbal signs to convey the desired meaning.

When learners use the first strategy, for example, and avoid communication, they will not receive more input to help them develop their English, they will not test any hypothesis about the language either. Henceforth, they will not grow in the continuum toward acquiring the target language (English).

Thus, input, according to Krashen (1981) which can be encouraged by the use of communication strategies, is extremely important, not only for acquisition, but also for maintenance of the second language learners' skills. Dulay and Burt, 1976) point out that language acquisition occurs not only through habit formation (imitation and reinforcement) but mainly through interaction between cognition and environment. Therefore, learners experience is actually a process of creative construction in building their L2 system. They formulate and test their hypothesis about the second language in the process of interaction.

One of the main reasons for low achievement by many EFL classrooms is simply that they do not provide enough time to practice the target language. By using communication strategies of risk-taking in group or pair interaction, the students can express the meaning despite linguistic limitation and there will also be a change in the total individual practice in accordance with time allocated to each student.. Most importantly, group can also provide more comprehensible input which is very important for second language acquisition (SLA).

It is, then, clear that communication strategies, inter-language talk, and input have close relation to enhancement of the SLA in EFL classroom. This study is an attempt at describing the use of communication strategies by fourth-year students at the English Department of FKIP UNILA when they are communicating in English. This problem can be further analyzed specifically into (1) what types of communication strategies are employed by the students in getting their meaning across?, (2) how effective are such communication strategies to solve problems?, (3) what are the characteristics of the use of communication strategies to overcome problems?, (4) how is the frequency distribution of occurrences of each type of communication strategies used by the students?

## METHOD

The purpose of this research is to describe (1) the types of communication strategies, (2) their effectiveness rate in overcoming the problems, (3) the characteristics of their use, (4) reasons for their use, and (5) their frequency of occurrences.

The subjects of this research were fourth year students of English Department of FKIP UNILA in the academic year of 2012/2013 consisting 28 students randomly chosen out of 40 students who had already taken **Vocabulary, Speaking, Reading, and Writing** subjects.

The research design employed in this study belongs to a focused descriptive methodology (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991). This methodology is principally to explore a particular issue, i.e., the use of communication strategies among non-native speakers who share relatively the same L1 background. This was done by making an exploration of the data corpus, an identification of the communication strategies employed in the data and a classification of the communication strategies according to the taxonomy as well.

The instrument of this study consisting of a series of transactional communication task was developed in which the speaker had to transfer information to a listener who did not previously have the information and who needed to accomplish the task. Thus, there was an information gap between the speaker and the listener and they had to eliminate in the gap through spontaneous communication. This method made possible to elicit spontaneous speech from the subject when they had the problem in the communication and at the same time allowed the observer to determine what the essential content of the speech was.

After all communication strategies were identified based on observation notes, transcript of interview during the research conducted. The analysis of the characteristics of the communication strategy use was primarily based on (1) the speakers' approaches (risk-taking or risk avoiding) towards the solution of the communication problem and on the language used, i.e., L1, L2, or non linguistic based. After all of the data were identified, they were classified on the basis of Tarone's Taxonomy (1983) to determine their types, (2) distribution of frequency of the types of communication strategies, 3) their effectiveness rate measured by using percentage of their use.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Here is tabulation of occurrences of the strategy with which a type of communication strategy was previously used to overcome the problem in communicating a lexical meaning resulted in a frequency distribution of occurrences. The result of the frequency distribution analysis of communication strategies as well as their effectiveness rate can be referred to in the table below.

Table 1. Communication Strategies and their Effectiveness Rate

No	Types	Freq	Success		Effectiveness Rate %
		Times	Yes	No	
1	Approximation	15	10	5	66,67
2	Word-coinage	4	3	1	75.00
3	Circumlocution	146	95	51	65.07
4	Literal Translation	3	1	2	33.33
5	Language Switch	7	5	2	71.43
6	Appeal for Assistance	3	1	2	33.33
7	Topic Avoidance	6	0	6	0.00
8	Message Abandonment	11	6	5	54.56
9	Combined	85	44	41	51.76
Total		280	165	115	58.93

Furthermore, the effectiveness of the combined types of communication strategies adopted from an analysis over all data corpus by the subjects in overcoming the transmission of lexical problems showed that the subjects used 8 types and at least 10 varieties of combined types of

communication strategies reported in this study. The types of combined types can be referred to in the following table.

Table 2. Combined Types and their Effectiveness Rate

No	Combined Types	X	Success		%
			Yes	No	
1	Circumlocution and Approximation	14	8	6	57.14
2	Circumlocution and Word-Coinage	1	1	0	1.00
3	Circumlocution and Language Switch	33	18	15	54.54
4	Circumlocution and Appeal for Assistance	10	3	7	30
5	Circumlocution and Message Abandonment	12	7	5	58.33
6	Approximation and Message Abandonment	1	0	1	0.00
7	Approximation and Language Switch	5	3	2	60.00
8	Approximation and Appeal for Assistance	1	0	1	0.00
9	Language Switch and Word Coinage	1	0	1	0.00
10	Approximation, Language Switch, Message Abandonment	1	1	0	1.00
Total		46	41	38	262.01

Viewing the above results, it can be inferred that all of communication strategy types, but *topic avoidance* had an effect in overcoming the problem in the communication. The effectiveness rate of each communication strategies can be consulted in the above tables. This implies that the higher the effectiveness rate was, the more successful the subjects were in overcoming the problems in case of using the communication strategy.

Considering that the effectiveness rate of the *topic avoidance* strategy was 0%, this means the use of the strategy was never successful because the subjects did not try to have the problem solved. Due to the fact that the analysis of single types of the communication strategies had already been previously reported in **Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran** issued in *volume 7, Nomor 2, September 2009*, and it is intended to be presented again here for showing a comparison, then, analysis of the results of this research merely focuses on the combined types of the communication strategies used by the subjects during the recent study conducted.

In this study, there were occurrences in which the speakers used more than one types of communication strategies in an attempt to overcome the problem in getting a lexical meaning across. It can be identified clearly from the table 2 that the combined types were used in a high frequency. That is to say, they were 46 times or 262.01% of the overall use of communication strategies. The effective rate of this combined type was in general 41.56%. This also means that there were 44 times of successful use and 38 times of unsuccessful use. In the following, a description of combined types used in the data will accordingly be clarified accordingly below.

In accordance with the results of the interview with the subjects, it was found that the use of combined types encouraged by the subjects' was in fact, their motivation to secure the success of the message transmission. In the following section, varieties of combined types will be presented together with authentic examples quoted from available data in this study.

The speaker, in the attempt to describe the intended target concept, i.e., *driving license* used circumlocution and approximation strategies. The use of combined type can be seen in the example, such as, (1) *This sort of certificate... this kind of letter you can have after you passed the test in police office... police station. Of course ... you must have it ...em...em...also people who drive motorbike and car too.* The speaker tried to convey this by using approximation (*a kind of letter*) together with the description of it called approximation. This combined form was used 14 times or 5%. The effectiveness rate was 57% (8 times were successful and 6 times were not). The reason of using the combined type was that the approximation was insufficient to convey the intended message. A description of the approximation was necessary to make themselves understood. The

use of the above type was also characterized by the presence of ungrammatical forms, repetition of forms, pauses filled or unfilled due to linguistic limitation.

In the case of using the second combined type, the speaker used a circumlocution and in so doing he also used a word-coinage as an element to get the meaning across. That is, the speaker used an approximation by describing the function of *blanket* and in so doing he also used a word-coinage the *cover of bed* as elements in the description as they are expressed in this statement: *For instance, you feel sleepy, and you want to go to bed, if it is cold, you want to use...what...material in your body ....I think ...em ...it is the cover of bed... so, you feel warm, I think.* This combined type occurred only once or 0.36% with effective rate amounting to 100%, but basically it was of very low frequency. It is also noticeable that the use combined type was characterized by pauses, ungrammatical form, repetition, also reconstruction to be a better expression. The speaker's reason was that the use of a word-coinage only was not adequate to express the intended word, a circumlocution, then, needs to be also used.

The language switch also appeared in combined for with a circumlocution. Direct of expression of native language (L1) use was found in the description of the available data. To be clearer, here is the example when the speaker tried to convey lexical meaning of the word *lampu sein*: *'It is a tool to you when drive motorbike....you use it.. apa ya...alat itu...no no..I mean it is dangerous because you can be hit ...to another car. So, you may not mengabaikan.....like that'*. Apparently, in attempts to describe the target concept, the speaker experienced difficulties and therefore used language switch strategy to avoid the breakdowns. This combined type was used 33 times or 11.57% of the overall occurrences. The effectiveness rate of this strategy was 54.54% since 18 times of use were successful and 15 times were not. This strategy was characterized by the presence of ungrammatical forms, pauses, repetition, and reconstruction for better expression. The speaker reason was to avoid communication breakdown and to make the meaning transmission a success. Some speaker had used a circumlocution in addition they also used the language switch strategy.

The table above also shows that some speaker had used a circumlocution and at the same time they also used the appeal for assistance strategy to make the intended concept understood as seen in the case of describing the lexical word in Bahasa Indonesia *obeng* or *screwdriver*. The speaker said: *If you want to repair your TV...and...yes...you use this thing to strengthen it... You see the meaning of 'repair' ...or what you say it that thing?... I don't know.* This kind of strategy were naturally the speaker attempts to make himself clear about his intended meaning in which a circumlocution and appeal for assistance appealed together. In this case, the speaker was not actually sure of what he expressed in the circumlocution, thus, the appeal for assistance strategy was his attempt to find suitable form for the intended message.

While describing the target concept by using circumlocution combined with a message abandonment strategy in which the speaker stopped the description as seen in this example: *When you have breakfast, it is.....also together with the bread but fried...yes... fried egg...and ...you cut it with spoon...also...* The speaker, in this utterance made an attempt to clarify the intended meaning but all of sudden, he gave up because he found it difficult to mention the exact word, i.e., *telur dadar* or *omelet* in English. The reason of its use was actually to avoid the breakdowns in communication. However, the message abandonment strategy, classified into a reduction or a risk-avoiding, could be made use of to get a lexical meaning across. It was also found in this study that the speaker would abandon the communication when he thought the listener had already understood him. In this study, 12 or 4.29% of the overall cases were found to use this strategy with the effectiveness rate amounting to 58.33%, that is, 7 times were successful while the other 5 were not. Naturally, this strategy was also characterized by the presence of pauses, ungrammatical form, reconstruction for better utterance, and repetition.

In his attempts to transform a lexical meaning, the speaker might also made use of approximation and message abandonment strategies. The speaker used a construction of utterance consisting of semantic features but they were unfinished or stopped somewhere in the mid expression, e.g., in the case of transforming the word *Jilbab*, he said *'Veil. I mean veil. I think you understand what I mean....You know it is used to cover face...em... woman face. Veil can be sewn*

like....It is clear that the speaker made the attempt to make the listener able to understand since she actually did not, though the speaker constructed correct form of expression. The reason for the use of message abandonment was that he assumed that the listener was able to get his meaning across. Henceforth, further description was not necessarily to be added. Apparently, this strategy was merely used once or 0.36% of the overall cases, and the effectiveness rate was actually 0% since it was, in fact, unsuccessfully used. The use of this strategy was characterized by the occurrences of pauses, ungrammatical form, and repetition.

It is obvious that the use of language switch together with approximation strategy was also executed in this research. The speaker made serious efforts to his message across. While using an approximation, he in addition made a switch to L1 element. This was in reality her attempt to give a clarification of the intended idea stated in the approximation. The use of this combined type can be referred to in the quotation when the speaker tried to clarify the word *asbak* or *ashtray*. He said '*It is a place for the cigarette dust...we can put the dust in it if you do not want to ...mengotori your room...so you put it beside your chair or ... your table.*' It is noticeable in the table 2 above that this strategy was used 5 times or 1.79% of the overall cases with the effectiveness rate of 60%, i.e., 3 times were successful while the other 2 times were not. The reason of using this strategy was aimed at keeping the communication going on naturally. The use of this strategy was characterized by the presence of ungrammatical utterance, repetition, and a number of pauses.

In the case of transferring the idea of the word *lampu senter* or *flashlight*, for example, an approximation strategy might occur together in combined form with appeal for assistance strategy. This strategy was the speaker attempt to convey intended concept of *flash light* in English but it is still not specific or focused yet. As a result, the assistance was not useful for either speaker or listener. The speaker here is uttered his idea by saying, e.g., '*It is a kind of a tool...It has special model ... special because long and you can use it in the dark to look for something...and it is not heavy...called...*' (i.e., he asked for assistance), *...light used for signals* (assistance). This strategy was used only once with the effectiveness rate of 0% because it was totally not successful. This was characterized by the presence of ungrammatical form and pauses.

In an effort to make the listener able to comprehend the intended meaning uttered by the speaker, appeal for assistance and message abandonment also occurred in this study. In fact, the speaker had made use of the assistance, however typical problem arose which led the speaker hopeless to continue the communication as seen when she uttered the expression describing the concept of the word *taplak meja* or *tablecloth*, she said '*I think you have it ....in.... em...dining room...it can be long or medium size ...May be, also you put it in your other place.* Clearly, this combined type occurred only once but it was unsuccessful to bridge the communication breakdowns. Obviously, this strategy was also characterized by the presence of ungrammatical form and pauses.

Apparently, language switch strategy or the use of native language was found to occur in combination with a word coinage, i.e., communication strategy which makes up a new construction not in English but the speaker uses target language elements as seen in this example when the speaker was trying to clarify vocabulary item in Bahasa Indonesia denoting the word *selimut* or *blanket*. He said '*I think ...if you sleep and you use it... you feel enjoi...em...what...yes...nice. So....you can sleep well on bed..because you have the soft materials around your body...man...ha...ha...ha.* This utterance was his effort to get the meaning of *blanket* across. Subconsciously, the speaker switched to native language element, that is, *enjoi* (native dialect). In addition, he made a word-coinage since he paraphrased the word *blanket* as *the soft material*. This strategy occurred once and it did not provide solution to bridge the communication breakdowns. The characteristics of the strategy found were basically ungrammatical form of utterance, and pauses.

Three types of strategies also frequently committed by the speaker, such as, the combined form of approximation, language switch and message abandonment. Naturally, the use of this typical communication strategy was an effort to convey her meaning. First of all, she used an approximation and language switch as well, in spite of that she gave up to provide the example of

what she had uttered because the problem arose and she avoided to go on giving further explanation as described in this example when the speaker tried very hard to transfer the concept of the word *uban* or *gray hair* into English. She said '*What you call old people hair...it is... I mean the color ..em..a kind of color that ...em ...you know ...yes white color..em.. may be sometime you have uban in your head. If we are old enough we have more because that hair grow more...if we are.....*'. This utterance resulted in the message abandonment. This typical communication was used by speaker once and was successful to bridge the communication gap. The use of this combined form was characterized by the presence of repetition, pauses, and ungrammatical form. The reason of using this strategy was that the subject felt that the uses of the approximation as well as language switch strategies were not adequate, henceforth, to get the meaning across, she used more strategies to secure the success of message transmission.

## CONCLUSION

The results of the data analysis shows that the combined types of communication strategies used by the subjects were as follows: there (1) was achievement or risk-taking strategies, (2) were reduction and or risk-avoiding strategies, (3) was L1-based strategies, (4) was L2 strategies, (5) was non-linguistic-based strategies, (6) were ungrammatical forms committed by the students in using the communication strategies, (7) were pauses, (8) were repetition of forms and reconstruction of the utterances in applying the communication strategies.

As it was stated previously, the reasons of the subjects to use typical communication strategies were mostly motivated by the efforts to bridge the communication gap. Basically, those can be categorized into speakers' weaknesses in terms of (1) linguistic limitation, mostly relying on limitation in lexical and structural utterances of the target language in the case of expressing the intended messages, and (2) psychological limitation including fear of committing errors, being shy to utter themselves in the target language, and also the speakers' absent-mindedness.

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