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The Use of Communication Strategies in Different Speaking Tasks by English Major Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate English major students' use of communication strategies while performing different speaking tasks: one-way and two-way tasks. The participants were 30 third-year students majoring in English for career tracks at Naresuan University. They were randomly selected using the convenience sampling method. Data were collected by the observation form and transcribed data of two different tasks: a picture description task (one-way task) and a role-play task (two-way task). The frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation (SD), and Chi-square were employed to analyse the data. The results showed that the students used all 5 main types of communication strategies which included avoidance strategy, target language-based strategy, L1-based strategy, modification devices, and nonlinguistic strategy. The most frequently used type of communication strategies was modification devices and the least used type of communication strategies was avoidance strategy. The findings also showed that the students used various types of communication strategies while performing two different tasks.

Keywords: Communication strategies, Speaking task

Introduction

Success in communication is essential for those who want to communicate with people in other countries. In order to communicate successfully, communication strategies are important tools since they are the ways or techniques used to communicate and solve communication problems. Many researchers believe that communication strategies can be used to solve communication problems and enhance interaction in the target language (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Færch & Kasper, 1983a; Tarone, 1980). For more than 30 years, a considerable number of studies have been conducted to investigate the use of communication strategies among second and foreign language learners of English because English is used for international communication and having English ability is important for effective global communication. It is, therefore, crucial to investigate the use of communication strategies in order to obtain rich insights into the complex process of language acquisition and help learners develop their communication skills.

A review of available literature has shown that a small amount of research has been conducted with language learners learning English as a foreign language (EFL), particularly in the context of Thailand. This study, therefore, aimed to investigate types of communication strategies employed by English major students at Naresuan University in order to raise learners' and teachers' awareness of using these strategies. The findings of this

study can be used as guidelines for teachers of English to teach appropriate communication strategies to help learners solve their communication problems.

Purposes of the Study

The present study aimed to explore communication strategies used by the third-year students majoring in English at Naresuan University while doing speaking tasks and to examine the third-year English major students' use of different types of communication strategies in one-way and two-way tasks. The study was designed to answer the following two research questions:

1. What types of communication strategies are employed by the third-year English major students while doing speaking tasks?
2. Do the third-year English major students use different types of communication strategies in one-way and two-way tasks?

Literature Review

Definitions of Communication Strategies

The term "communication strategies" (CSs) has been used within the second language (L2) context since the early 1970s. Selinker (1972) is credited for being the first to use this term to explain certain types of errors made by L2 learners. However, Tarone, Cohen, and Dumas (1976) were the first to recognize learners' problem-solving behavior during TL communication as "communication strategy." They stated that learners tend to use CSs to compensate for their lack of appropriate target language knowledge when expressing or decoding the meaning of their intended utterances.

With a psycholinguistic framework, Færch and Kasper (1983) defined communication strategies as "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communication goal." (p.81). In line with Faerch and Kasper (1983), Bialystok (1990) defined CSs as intentional planning to achieve obvious goals. Therefore, in the most general sense communication strategy is a plan of action to accomplish a communication goal and the enhancement of communication. CSs are the strategies that are used when communication problems occur.

Although there are various quoted definitions of CSs, "there is no universally accepted definition of CSs" (Ghout-Khenoune, 2012). Researchers in the field seem to agree on the fact that CSs are resorted to when learners' linguistic means are not enough to convey their intended meaning.

Classification of Communication Strategies

Different types of CSs have been classified by many researchers in the field. Tarone (1980) classified CSs into three main types including borrowing, paraphrase and avoidance. Færch & Kasper (1984) and Willems (1987) classified CSs into two main types: reduction strategies and achievement strategies. In addition, Bialystok (1990) classified CSs into five types: L1-based strategies, L2-based strategies, nonlinguistic strategies, analysis-based strategies, and control-based strategies. Besides, Dörnyei (1995) proposed three main types of CSs: avoidance or reduction strategies, achievement or compensatory strategies, and time-gaining strategies.

Since the classification of CSs has been continuously developed, many different typologies of CSs have merged. In this study, the researcher adopted Tarone's (1981), Bialystok's (1990) and Dörnyei's (1995) classification of CSs and divided the CSs into five

main types that are avoidance strategy (topic avoidance and message avoidance), target language-based strategy (approximation, circumlocution and direct asking), L1-based strategy (language switching and foreignizing), modification devices (comprehension check, clarification request, overlap, back channel, self-repair, confirmation check and pausing) and nonlinguistic strategy (gesture and mime). The types of CSs used as a framework of this study are shown in Table1.

Table 1
The types of CSs used in the study

Avoidance strategy	1. Topic avoidance
	2. Message avoidance
Target Language-based strategy	3. Approximation
	4. Circumlocution
	5. Direct asking
L1-based strategy	6. Language switching
	7. Foreignizing
Modification devices	8. Comprehension check
	9. Clarification request
	10. Overlap
	11. Back channel
	12. Self-repair
	13. Confirmation
	14. Pausing
Nonlinguistic strategy	15. Gesture
	16. Mime

Methodology

Participants

A convenience sampling technique was used to select the participants for this study. The participants consisted of 30 third-year English major students at Naresuan University in Thailand. At the time of data collection, all of them had enrolled in two English courses: Basic Oral Skill and Conversation courses. In those two courses, they learn how to communicate in different situations in real-life circumstances with English native speakers.

Research instruments

The instruments used to collect data in this study were the observation form and transcribed data of two different tasks: a picture description task (one-way task) and a role-play task (two-way task). The observation form was modified from Wannarak (2002) and Weerarak (2003) based on the theoretical frameworks proposed by Paribakht (1985), Willems (1987), and Chen (1990). Sixteen subtypes of five main types of CSs were included in the observation form to check the types of CSs. Moreover, the one-way and two-way tasks were used to elicit the students 'use of CSs. The picture description or one-way task was used to ask the participants to describe three different pictures. The pictures used in this study involved business situations. In the role-play or two-way task, the students were asked to play the role in the simulated business situation.

Data Analysis Procedures

For the purpose of this study, the participants were asked to perform the two different speaking tasks. The researcher used the observation form to check the types of CSs used by the students while performing the two different tasks. Then, the frequency and percentage of students' use of CSs checked in the observation form were analysed. To check for reliability, the researcher and one expert independently checked the types of CSs used by the students. The level of agreement in checking the types of CSs in the observation form was then computed in order to check for reliability. To cross check the data collected from the observation form, the video and audio recordings of the students' task performance were transcribed. Then the researcher and the same expert independently coded all of the transcribed data from the two different tasks. After that, the frequency and percentage of students' use of CSs coded from the transcribed data were analysed. The level of coding agreement was also computed in order to check for reliability. Finally, the Chi-square test was used to examine the difference in the types of CSs used in one-way and two-way tasks in both the observation form and the transcribed data.

Findings

In order to elicit the students' use of CSs in the picture description or one-way task, the students were asked to describe the pictures. The researcher and one expert independently checked the types of CSs used by the students in the observation form and the transcribed data. Then the frequency of the students' use of CSs in the observation form and the transcribed data was counted. The following table shows the frequency and percentage of students' use of types of CSs in the picture description or one-way task:

Table 2
The types of CSs used by the students in the picture description or one-way task

Types of Communication Strategies	Observation form		Transcription data	
	f	%	f	%
Avoidance strategy	**3**	**0.84**	**3**	**0.82**
1. Topic avoidance	0	0	0	0
2. Message avoidance	3	0.84	3	0.82
Target Language-based strategy	**9**	**2.52**	**9**	**2.45**
3. Approximation	5	1.40	5	1.36
4. Circumlocution	4	1.12	4	1.09
5. Direct asking	0	0	0	0

Types of Communication Strategies	Observation form		Transcription data	
	f	%	f	%
L1-based strategy	**5**	**1.40**	**5**	**1.36**
6. Language switching	5	1.40	5	1.36
7. Foreignizing	0	0	0	0
Modification devices	**309**	**86.55**	**318**	**86.41**
8. Comprehension check	0	0	0	0

9. Clarification request	0	0	0	0
10. Overlap	0	0	0	0
11. Back channel	0	0	0	0
12. Self-repair	60	16.80	63	17.12
13. Confirmation	0	0	0	0
14. Pausing	249	69.75	255	19.29
Nonlinguistic strategy	**31**	**8.68**	**33**	**8.97**
15. Gesture	31	8.68	33	8.97
16. Mime	0	0	0	0
Total	**357**	**100**	**368**	**100**

As shown in Table 2, 7 subtypes of CSs were checked in the observation form while the students performed the picture description or one-way task. Pausing (249, 69.75%) was mostly observed in the picture description task (one-way task), followed by self-repair (60, 16.80%), gesture (31, 8.68%), approximation (5, 1.40%), language switching (5, 1.40%), and circumlocution (4, 1.12%). The least frequently used strategy was message avoidance (3, 0.84%). For the five main types of CSs, the findings showed that modification devices was mostly used by the students (309, 86.55%), followed by nonlinguistic strategy (31, 8.68%), target language-based strategy (9, 2.52%) and L1-based strategy (5, 1.40%). Avoidance strategy was the least frequently used strategy (3, 0.84%).

In terms of the transcribed data, the findings showed that the most frequently used strategy was pausing (255, 69.29%), followed by self-repair (63, 17.12%), gesture (33, 8.97%), approximation (5, 1.36%), language switching (5, 1.36%), and circumlocution (4, 1.09%). The least frequently used strategy was message avoidance (3, 0.82%). For the five main types of CSs, the findings showed that modification devices were mostly used by the students (318, 86.41%), followed by nonlinguistic strategy (33, 8.97%), target language-based strategy (9, 2.45%) and L1-based strategy (5, 1.36%). Avoidance strategy was the least frequently used strategy (3, 0.82%).

In order to elicit the students' use of CSs in the role-play or two-way task, the students were asked to play in the simulated business situation. The researcher and one expert independently checked the types of CSs used by the students in the observation form and the transcribed data. The frequency of the students' use of CSs in the observation form and the transcribed data was counted. The following table shows the frequency and percentage of students' use of types of CSs in the role-play or two-way task in table 3.

Table 3 showed 10 subtypes of CSs were checked in the observation form while the students performed the role-play task (two-way task). Pausing (233, 53.81%) was mostly used by the students, followed by self-repair (64, 14.78%), gesture (44, 10.16%), back channel (30, 6.93%), confirmation (25, 5.77%), language switching (16, 3.70%), comprehension check (12, 2.77%), clarification request (5, 1.15%), approximation (2, 0.46%) and overlap (2, 0.46%). The results also showed that the students used 4 main types of CSs. Modification devices were the main type of CSs that was mostly used by the students (371, 85.68%), followed by non-linguistic strategy (44, 10.16%), L1-based strategy (16, 3.70%), and target language-based strategy (2, 0.46%).

In terms of the transcribed data, the findings showed that the students used 10 subtypes of CSs. The most frequently used strategy was pausing (239, 53.47%), followed by self-repair (66, 14.77%), gesture (46, 10.29%), back channel (30, 6.71%), confirmation (27, 6.04%), language switching (16, 3.58%), comprehension check (12, 2.68%), clarification request (5, 1.12%), overlap (4, 0.89), and approximation (2, 0.45%). Moreover, the results

showed 4 main types of CSs were employed by the students. Modification devices were mostly used by the students (383, 85.68%), followed by non-linguistic strategy (46, 10.29%), L1-based strategy (16, 3.58%), and target language-based strategy, (2, 0.45%). However, avoidance strategy was not used by the students.

Table 3
The types of CSs used by the students in the role-play or two-way task

Types of Communication Strategies	Observation form		Transcription data	
	f	%	f	%
Avoidance strategy	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
1. Topic avoidance	0	0	0	0
2. Message avoidance	0	0	0	0
Types of Communication Strategies	Observation form		Transcription data	
	f	%	f	%
Target Language-based strategy	**2**	**0.46**	**2**	**0.45**
3. Approximation	2	0.46	2	0.45
4. Circumlocution	0	0	0	0
5. Direct asking	0	0	0	0
L1-based strategy	**5**	**1.40**	**5**	**1.36**
6. Language switching	5	1.40	5	1.36
7. Foreignizing	0	0	0	0
Modification devices	**309**	**86.55**	**318**	**86.41**
8. Comprehension check	0	0	0	0
9. Clarification request	0	0	0	0
10. Overlap	0	0	0	0
11. Back channel	0	0	0	0
12. Self-repair	60	16.80	63	17.12
13. Confirmation	0	0	0	0
14. Pausing	249	69.75	255	19.29
Nonlinguistic strategy	**31**	**8.68**	**33**	**8.97**
15. Gesture	31	8.68	33	8.97
16. Mime	0	0	0	0
Total	**357**	**100**	**368**	**100**

Table 4 showed the comparison of the frequency and percentage of types of CSs used by the students while performing both one-way and two-way tasks. 12 subtypes of CSs were observed in both one-way and two-way tasks. The most frequently used strategy was pausing (482, 61.01%), followed by self-repair (124, 15.70%), gesture (75, 9.49%), back channel (30 , 3.78%), confirmation (25, 3.16%), language switching (21, 2.66%), comprehension check (12, 1.52%), approximation (7, 0.87%), clarification request (5, 0.63%), circumlocution (4, 0.51%), and message avoidance (3, 0.38%). The least frequently used strategy was overlap (2, 0.25%). However, topic avoidance, direct asking, foreignizing, and mime were not

observed in both tasks. In terms of 5 main types of CSs, the findings showed that the students used all 5 main types of CSs. The students mostly used modification devices (680, 86.08%), followed by nonlinguistic strategy (75, 9.49%), L1-based strategy (21, 2.66%), target language-based strategy (11, 1.39%), and avoidance strategy (3, 0.38%).

Table 4

The comparison of the frequency and percentage of types of CSs used by the students in both picture description task and role play task

Types of Communication Strategies	Observation form		Transcription data	
	f	%	f	%
Avoidance strategy	**3**	**0.38**	**3**	**0.37**
1. Topic avoidance	0	0	0	0
2. Message avoidance	3	0.38	3	0.37
Target Language-based strategy	**11**	**1.39**	**11**	**1.35**
3. Approximation	7	0.87	7	0.86
4. Circumlocution	4	0.51	4	0.49
5. Direct asking	0	0	0	0
L1-based strategy	**21**	**2.66**	**21**	**2.58**
6. Language switching	21		21	2.58
7. Foreignizing	0	0	0	0
Modification devices	**680**	**86.08**	**701**	**86.01**
8. Comprehension check	12	1.52	12	1.47
9. Clarification request	5	0.63	5	0.61
10. Overlap	2	0.25	4	0.49
11. Back channel	30	3.78	30	3.68
12. Self-repair	124	15.70	129	15.83
13. Confirmation	25	3.16	27	3.31
14. Pausing	482	61.01	494	60.61
Nonlinguistic strategy	**75**	**9.49**	**79**	**9.69**
15. Gesture	75	9.49	79	9.69
16. Mime	0	0	0	0
Total	**790**	**100**	**815**	**100**

In terms of the transcribed data, the findings showed that 12 subtypes of CSs were employed by the students in both one-way and two-way tasks. The most frequently used strategy was pausing (494, 60.61%), followed by self-repair (129, 15.83%), gesture (79, 9.69%), back channel (30, 3.68%), confirmation (27, 3.31%), language switching (21, 2.58%), comprehension check (12, 1.47%), approximation (7, 0.86%), clarification request (5, 0.61%), circumlocution (4, 0.49%) and overlap (4, 0.49%). The least frequently used strategy was message avoidance (3, 0.37%). Moreover, the results showed that 4 CSs that were topic avoidance, direct asking, foreignizing, and mime were not used by the students. The results also showed that all 5 main types were employed by the students. The most frequently used strategy was modification devices (680, 86.08%), followed by non-linguistic

strategy (75, 9.49%), L1-based strategy (21, 2.66%), target language-based strategy (11, 1.39%), and avoidance strategy (3, 0.38%).

Table 5 shows the comparison of the frequency of types of CSs used by the students in both the observation form and the transcribed data.

Table 5

The comparison of the frequency of types of CSs used by the students in both the observation form and the transcribed data

Types of Communication Strategies	Observation form				Transcription data			
	One-way task		Two-way task		One-way task		Two-way task	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Avoidance strategy	**3**	**0.84**	**0**	**0**	**3**	**0.82**	**0**	**0**
1. Topic avoidance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2. Message avoidance	3	0.84	0	0	3	0.82	0	0
Target Language-based strategy	**9**	**2.52**	**2**	**0.46**	**9**	**2.45**	**2**	**0.45**
3. Approximation	5	1.40	2	0.46	5	1.36	2	0.45
4. Circumlocution	4	1.12	0	0	4	1.09	0	0
5. Direct asking	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
L1-based strategy	**5**	**1.40**	**16**	**3.70**	**5**	**1.36**	**16**	**3.58**
6. Language switching	5	1.40	16	3.70	5	1.36	16	3.58
7. Foreignizing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Modification devices	**309**	**86.55**	**371**	**85.68**	**318**	**86.41**	**383**	**85.68**
8. Comprehension check	0	0	12	2.77	0	0	12	2.68
9. Clarification request	0	0	5	1.15	0	0	5	1.12
10. Overlap	0	0	2	0.46	0	0	4	0.89
11. Back channel	0	0	30	6.93	0	0	30	6.71
12. Self-repair	60	16.80	64	14.78	63	17.12	66	14.77
13. Confirmation	0	0	25	5.77	0	0	27	6.04
14. Pausing	249	69.75	233	53.81	255	19.29	239	53.47
Nonlinguistic strategy	**31**	**8.68**	**44**	**10.16**	**33**	**8.97**	**46**	**10.29**
15. Gesture	31	8.68	44	10.16	33	8.97	46	10.29
16. Mime	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**357**	**100**	**433**	**100**	**368**	**100**	**447**	**100**

In Table 6, the Chi-square test was used to examine the difference in the types of CSs used in one-way and two-way tasks checked in the observation form. The findings showed that there was a significant difference between the students' use of types of CSs in both one-way and two-way tasks (.04).

Table 6
The Chi-square test of the types of CSs used by the students in the observation form

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.195[a]	4	.004
Likelihood Ratio	17.036	4	.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.634	1	.105
N of Valid Cases	790		

In Table 7, the Chi-square test was used to examine the difference in the types of CSs used in one-way and two-way tasks coded from the transcribed data. The findings showed that there was a significant difference between the students' use of types of CSs in both the one-way and two-way tasks (.008).

Table 7
The Chi-square test of the types of CSs used by the students in the transcribed data

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.855[a]	4	.008
Likelihood Ratio	15.552	4	.004
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.969	1	.085
N of Valid Cases	815		

Discussion

Research Question 1: What types of communication strategies are employed by the third-year English major students while doing speaking tasks?

The findings of the study revealed that the students used various types of CSs while performing different tasks. The students employed 12 out of 16 subtypes of CSs. The most frequently used strategy was pausing, followed by self-repair, gesture, back channel, confirmation, language switching, comprehension check, approximation, clarification request, and circumlocution. The least frequently used strategies were message avoidance and overlap. However, topic avoidance, direct asking, foreignizing, and mime were not used by the students in this study. Moreover, the findings also showed that the students used 5 main types of CSs that were modification devices, nonlinguistic strategy, L1-based strategy, target language-based strategy, and avoidance strategy in both one-way and two-way tasks.

Research Question 2: Do the third-year English major students use different types of communication strategies in one-way and two-way tasks?

The results from this study indicated that there was a significant difference in the use of CSs between one-way and two-way tasks. The students used different types of CSs while performing different speaking tasks.

Limitations

There were some limitations of the current study. The sample size of this study was small so there should be a larger sample of participants in future studies. In addition, different types of speaking tasks may affect the use of different types of CSs.

Conclusion

In the present study, different CSs were used in different speaking tasks. Modification devices were the main type of CSs that was mostly employed by the participants in both one-way task (picture description) and two-way (role- play) task. Among 16 subtypes of CSs, pausing was the most frequently used strategy. However, 4 subtypes of CSs that were topic avoidance, direct asking, foreignizing, and mime were not employed by the students in this study. The findings also showed that the students used various types of communication strategies while performing two different tasks.

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