COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES: WHAT INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS DO IN CASUAL CONVERSATION?

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Abstract

In tackling casual conversation, most foreign language learners have problems in negotiating the intended meaning smoothly. One of the reasons is the lack of optimization of communication strategies to compensate communication breakdowns. This study attempts to reveal Indonesian advance English learners actual competence in engaging in a casual conversation. The data were taken from two recorded conversations lasted for 15 minutes which were then transcribed and analyzed with respect to communication strategies by implementing spoken discourse analysis. The percentage of kind of communication strategies results suggest that filler is the most frequent strategy used by speakers, followed by repetition, appeal for help and self-repair. These findings show that the participants have enough linguistic resources but having problem in verbalizing their mental concept due to insufficient practice.

Keywords: Communication strategies, Casual Conversation, Advance English learner

Introduction

In communication with English, non-native speakers sometimes grapple with compensating communication breakdowns. Limited linguistic resources for instance lexical deficiencies in L2 may become problems in making sure the conversation run smoothly. In overcoming that such problem, speakers may employ strategies while engaging in communication. The ability to employ these strategies is also known as strategic competence and is one of components of communicative competence, a theory introduced by Canale and Swain (1980). They explain communicative competence in terms of three component

competencies, grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. The present study only focuses on strategic competence.

Strategic competence as knowledge of communication strategies (Celce-Murcia, 2008) is "the ability to cope in an authentic communicative situation and to keep the communicative channel open" (Canale and Swain, 1980). It is also defined as the ability to use communication strategies (henceforth CSs) in dealing with communication difficulties (Mei & Nathalang, 2010). Generally it is agreed that these strategies are employed as devices to resolve difficulties or problems speakers encounter in expressing an intended meaning (Canale & Swain, 1980; Faerch & Kasper, 1984; Tarone, 2005; Yang, 2006). However, some experts describe these strategies in broader aspect as enhancing devices in communication (Canale, 1983; Yang and Goh, 2006). Therefore, CSs become pertinent aspect in managing communicative language use and compensating communication problems.

Each individual may vary in using CSs in their interaction with others based on their language repertoire. As related to Tereschuk (2013) that strategic competency in speaking is demonstrated in diverse ways and various types of strategies. In employing particular strategies, Dornyei and Scott (1997) argue that behavior must be involved regarding direct response while facing problems in communication. Further, Faerch and Kapser (1983) as cited in Uztosun and Erten (2014) frame a taxonomy of CSs based on speaker's behavior by categorizing into reduction and achievement. The former are strategies that refer to behavior to avoid sending the intended message including topic avoidance, message abandonment, and meaning replacement. On the contrary, the latter are strategies that refer to behavior of the speakers attempting to send the message including code-switching, inter/intra-lingual transfer, generalization, paraphrase, word coinage, and restructuring.

The scope of CSs from Faerch and Kasper (1983) has been extended by Dornyei and Scott (1997) by categorizing based on problem-, process-, and performance-oriented. The taxonomy categorizes strategies into three basic categories namely direct, indirect, and interactional strategies. Direct strategies refer to "an alternative, manageable and self-contained means of getting the meaning across" such as message reduction, circumlocution, approximation, code-switching, mime, self-rephrasing, self-repair and other repair (Dornyei and Scott, 1997). Conversely, the speakers employ indirect strategies to facilitate the conveyance of meaning by creating situation to gain time such as use of fillers and repetitions. Interactional strategies involve cooperative problem-solving toward interlocutors such as appeals for help, comprehension check, asking for repetition and guessing. The present study employs this typology.

The issue about CSs used by speakers has become intriguing topic in several decades due to their role in communicative language use. Some studies have explored the impact of some aspects such as proficiency levels, gender, task types, etc. toward the use of communication strategies (Mei and Nathalang,

2010; Metcalfe and Noom-ura, 2013; Ustozun and Erten, 2014). Mei and Nathalang (2010) investigated CSs used by Chinese EFL learners and factors influencing it. Questionnaire and speaking test CET-SET were given to undergraduate students in order to collect the data. The result emerged factors that influenced the type of CSs are task type, English proficiency level and academic major.

In addition, Metcalfe and Noom-Ura (2013) undertook a non-experimental research design on 104 first year undergraduate students in a university in Thailand. The empirical evidence was drawn from oral communication strategy inventory (OCSI) questionnaire proposed by Nakatani (2006) who developed the typology of CSs from Dornyei and Scott (1997). The categorization of CSs then is separated into speaking and listening factors reflecting real conversation environment among foreign language learners. Further, to facilitate participants in responding the questionnaire, all of items were translated into Thai language along with the English version. This finding suggested that the most frequently CSs used are message reduction and alteration and negotiation for meaning in speaking and listening aspects.

Ustozun and Erten (2014) revealed the impact of English proficiency on the use of communication strategies in Turkish EFL context. They employed interaction-based study by providing a communicative research environment. Participants got involved in stimulated recall interviews after watching a movie. Underpinned by using categorization of CSs from Dornyei and Scott (1997), kinds of strategies applied while students delivering story were classified and tabulated. The result showed that learners' proficiency does not affect the use of CSs.

Drawing on these previous studies, the current research employs the use of CSs underpinned by taxonomy from Dornyei and Scott (1997) and data collection through questionnaires and speaking test. Theoretically, a characteristic of a successful conversation is the presence of meaning negotiation between speakers. However, sometimes problems arise in encoding intended meaning in which speakers need to use CSs to compensate communication breakdowns or to achieve communication goal. Therefore, wisely, investigating the use of CSs should be in an interactive activity such as casual conversation. This type of conversation concerns with informal interactions in everyday life. According to Eggins and Slade (1997), casual conversation is related to the joint construction of social reality. Thus, present study limits the investigation to find out kinds of communication strategy used by advance English learners when engaging in casual conversation since this area is still under explored especially in Indonesian context. The finding of this study is essential to see actual situation of Indonesian advance English learner in managing casual conversation. Therefore, the objective of the study are formed as follow:

a. To identify type of CSs used by the Indonesian advance English learners in casual conversation.

b. To explain factors influencing the frequent CSs used in the conversation.

Research Method

Research Design

To comply with the purpose of the research, this study deals with qualitative approach by implementing spoken discourse analysis. This type of analysis is to make explicit what is normally taken for granted in people's talking (Cameron, 2001). Looking deeper on how people use their language through conversation is the aim of this such analysis. Thus, this such analysis is deployed to capture naturally occurring phenomena among advance English learners in casual conversation.

Site and participant

The study was conducted in one of universities in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. Regarding the participants of the study, four advance English learners majoring English Education were involved as participants by being purposively chosen. Two of them were first assigned to choose their own partners considering their closest friend. They have already informed in advance that their conversation were going to be used as data of the research. Consequently, this situation somewhat lessened the naturalness of the data obtained.

Data Collection and Analysis

Instruments of data collection in this study were video recordings and interview guide. The reason of using video recordings is because by recording the interaction the researcher can investigate the use of CSs in advance English students' casual conversation. The participants were divided into two pairs and were assigned to engage in a casual conversation in 15 minutes. To create an authentic casual conversation between the participants, the topics of the conversation are not predetermined by the researcher. It is important to make the conversations as authentic as possible to set a casual conversation.

To confirm the obtained findings from recording analysis, the open-ended interview was administered. The interview was undertaken after identifying the most CSs utilized by the participants in the conversation. Informed by gained data from interview session, the second research question was answered by adding several related theories.

To commence the analysis, the data were transcribed thoroughly and then analyzed by using an interactive model of data analysis proposed by Denzin & Lincoln (1998). The analysis included data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved coding the data essential and relevant to the study. Data display was to present the coded data in a comprehensive way, e.g. in tables of categorization. Conclusion drawing was to verify all the displayed data of each source with each other in order to interpret and generate findings.

Results

Communication strategies used by Indonesian advance English learners

The obtained data suggest the assignment of engaging in casual conversation made it necessary for the participants to use CSs. Thus, in response to the first research objective, CSs used by the speakers were coded and calculated by adopting frequencies and percentages. The empirical data revealed students employ an array of strategies in compensating communication breakdowns. The distribution of CSs is as table below:

Indirect strategies (55 %)	Fillers	57
	Repetition	20
Direct strategies (31%)	Self-repair	15
	Self-rephrasing	9
	Code-switching	8
	Message reduction	6
	Circumlocution	3
	Other repair	2
	Approximation	1
	Mime	1
Interactional strategies (14%)	Appeal for help	17

	Comprehension check	3
Total		143

Table of findings of CSs used by the speakers

Indirect strategies

As shown on preceding table, indirect strategies are the most utilized strategies in the conversation. Two indirect strategies were identified in the data, namely filler and repetition. According to Dornyei and Scott (1997) filler in a conversation refers to the use of gambits. The use of filler was frequent in both conversations. Below are some excerpts showing the use of fillers by the participants during the conversation.

"It was, you know, **umm** a wonderful experience for me" (Text 1)

"**Hmm…**hyperlink also will make us easier to explore everything right?" (Text 2)

Repetition is the second indirect strategy used by the speakers. It is a strategy utilized by repeating a word or a phrase immediately after they were said (Dornyei and Scoot, 1997). The following examples evidently show participants of the study employing this strategy.

"So, **what what. what** do you, did you have last week?" (Text 1)

"**Because–because** in the previous version the hyperlink also have some trouble" (Text 2)

Direct strategies

Speakers also employed direct strategies beside indirect strategies in which they find alternative means to communicate one's message in coping with lexical gaps in target language. Seven types of direct strategy were found in the conversations including self-repair, self-rephrasing, code-switching, message reduction, circumlocution, other repair, and mime. Of these seven strategies, the most frequent sub-strategy is self-repair in which speakers repair mistakes that they have made directly after producing it by themselves. Dornyei and Scott (1997) define this as self-initiated corrections in which the speakers use modified output to correct their utterances. The following excerpts show speakers utilizing the strategy throughout the conversation.

"I umm **have a great** –   **had a great** time last week, you know." (Text 1)

"**They have** a.. **they had** a trip to Menganti beach" (Text 2)

Further, self-rephrasing is the second frequent CSs used by the speakers. Using self-rephrasing strategy, the speakers may add something and paraphrase their utterance whenever they notice vague points in their utterances (Dornyei and Scott in Uztosun and Erten, 2014). Here are some evidence indicating the use of the strategy in the conversation.

"...and **there are so crowded of**, **there are so many people** there." (Text 1)

"…and how about our **assignment, Second Language Acquisition assignment**, for Mr. Alim" (Text 2)

Code-switching strategy was also employed by the participants. Dornyei and Scott (1997) define this strategy as including L1/L3 words with L1/L3 pronunciation in L2 speech. The participants use this strategy by switching code to their L1 that is Bahasa Indonesia. It can be seen from the following examples, first example shows that instead of saying *theatre*, the speaker says *bioskop*, and in the next one they say *mercusuar* to refer to *lighthouse*.

"when the movie showed in the **bioskop**" (Text 1)

"you know that, the tower … **mercusuar** right?" (Text 2)

Another way of compensating difficulties used by participants is message reduction or also known as topic avoidance. This strategy is defined as communication strategy in which speakers reduce message by avoiding certain language structures or topics consider problematic or by leaving out some intended elements. For instance, a participant said "*yeah… you know*" as cited in the following example to avoid a certain topic, in this case participants' presentation in a lecture.

"but not…just so so…**yeah… you know**".(Text 2)

The next identifiable type of direct strategy is circumlocution. It is a strategy in which the speakers describe, illustrate, or exemplify the target object or action (Dornyei and Scott, 1997) instead of using appropriate target language items. The following evidence shows the speaker intention of saying *lighthouse*, however they describe it as *the house with the lamp* instead.

"the tower with the lamp." (Text 2)

The two last direct strategies observed in the conversation are other-repair

and mime. Besides repairing their own mistakes in the conversation, repairing interlocutor's mistakes is also one of communication strategies called other repair. This strategy is identified in the data. In text 2, participant 1 was trying to say the existence of something by using the word *there,* participant 2 repaired the utterance by saying the word *exist.* The last communication strategy employed by the participant is a non-verbal strategy that is mime. It is used by describing a concept non-verbally or verbally accompanied by gestures. A participant in the conversation tried to describe *cave* by saying the word accompanied by making cave-like hand gesture.

Interactional strategies

The identification of the data shows that participants also appear to employ interactional communication strategies whereby they carry out trouble-shooting exchanges cooperatively (Dornyei and Scott, 1997). The most frequent sub-strategy used is appealing for help. Here are evidences of using the strategy found in the conversation:

"I just pass it in the Magelang and **what is that**?" (Text 1)

"…but in my opinion, **what is it?**" (Text 2)

As can be seen from the excerpts, participants' use of specific expressions such as *what is that?* and *what is it*" shows that they use the strategy of appealing for help in their communication.

Comprehension check is also found in the conversation whereby the speakers ask question such as *do you know …?* to check interlocutors' understanding of what they say. It can be seen in the following excerpt:

"**Do you know** cave?" (Text 2)

Factors influencing the use of frequent CSs

Regarding the second research objective about factors influencing the use of frequent CSs, the explanation was limited only for two frequent sub-strategies in each typology strategy of Dornyei and Scott (1997). Further, findings of actual information in the field get confirmed with interview session data from the speakers.

Indirect strategies

The use of indirect strategies, especially fillers is significantly greater than other strategies. This phenomenon is related to cognitive process in which the speakers are trying to gain some time to arrange utterances conveying their

intended meaning. As supported by several scholars that the presence of fillers is to maintain the communication (Canale, 1983; Dornyei, 1995; Dornyei and Kormos, 1998). A study by Uztosun and Erten (2014) demonstrates similar finding with the current study explaining that speakers utilize fillers and repetition to obtain time to arrange utterances conveying their intended meaning.

Having similar function with fillers, repetition becomes a way to fill pauses in conversation. As involving in spontaneous speech production, speakers may have no time for much forward planning. Thus, they use it to retain turn and to organize their message (Eggins and Slade, 1997). Therefore, by doing this strategies the speakers indicate they does not accomplish encoding their intended meaning yet and demand interlocutors to follow it. Actually, repetition is also normally used by native speakers as one of spoken features in stalling time (Thornbury, 2005).

In confirming the statements about reason to use fillers and repetition, the participants answer that they use those lexical and non-lexical fillers to gain time to think what they are going to say next. The use of fillers and repetitions does not necessarily mean speakers are less competence in target language because they may take time to formulate and construct understandable utterances in target language in order to achieve communication goal. As stated by Ellis (1994), second language learners may be more competence in theory of target language but may be less in practice it. However, these strategies becomes dangerous according to several authors when it is not adequately contextualized and superficial among second language learners (Celce-murcia, 2008).

Direct Strategies

The most frequent direct strategy used by the speakers is self-repair. Sometime second language learners are conscious about producing imperfect language in the first place so that they repair the wrong part soon after speaking it up. Implementing this strategy mostly indicates speakers' ability to monitor their performance or in other words they have sufficient knowledge in target language. However, Uztosun and Erten (2014) argue that high number of self-repair also shows speakers need to develop their accuracy to lessen creating incorrect utterances.

Another high number of frequency direct strategy is self-rephrasing. Having close function to self-repair, in wider aspect of linguistic system, this strategy makes speakers possible to rearrange phrases they have made become more understandable. The rephrased utterances also avoid misunderstanding that is possible to make communication breakdowns.

Interactional strategies

In facing difficulties to fully express intended meaning, the speaker may exploit interlocutors' knowledge to reach a communicative goal. Appealing for help or also known as help-seeking strategies are present when the speakers try to solve communicative difficulties by demanding assistance from their interlocutors directly or indirectly. In signaling a help from partners, speakers may rising intonations or pauses (Nakatani as cited in Chuanchaisit and Prapphal, 2009). This such strategy vigorously appeared in the conversation suggests both pairs are close each other by means of no doubt to involve in interactive communication. Further, the status as advance learners drives the participants to be active as supported by Chuanchaisit and Prapphal (2009) that high-ability learners tend to be active and not to be afraid of losing face when seeking help from others.

The findings also emerge comprehension check mostly appears in the conversation. This strategy is seen when speakers ask questions to interlocutors to check whether they follow the speakers' flow. As cooperative-based strategy, this is applied whenever the speakers need interlocutors' interactions in term of making sure that flow of information exchanges smoothly runs in conversation. The assumption of different learners having different language repertoire may be a reason why speakers several times utilize this strategy. Checking in whenever meeting particular terms during conversation is an attempt to gain mutual understanding.

In addition, the insufficient linguistic resources may take into account in terms of confirming the CSs used in the conversation. This argument is also supported by the result of interview with participants when asked regarding the difficulties that they experience during engaging in the conversation. All of them responded mentioning similar answer. They generally experience difficulties to express their intended message using appropriate words in the L2.

"It is hard for me to arrange sentences to express my idea" (Participant 1)

"The difficult thing is I don't have sufficient vocabulary to say what I want to say" (Participant 2)

This fact is in line with Dornyei and Scott (1997) that one of problems that arise during conversation is speakers' resource deficit concerning the gaps in their L2 knowledge which prevent them from verbalizing planned message. In the other word, this result also confirms Rastegar and Gohari (2016) that there is a strong relationship between the use of speaking strategies and learners' English speaking skills.

Conclusion and Limitations

The use of communication strategies aims to negotiate intended meaning and compensate communication breakdowns. Several frequent CSs used by Indonesian advance English learners in this study are fillers, repetition, appeal for help, and self-repair. Those are utilized due to insufficient communicative language use by the speakers. Nervousness may still be an enemy for foreign language learners (Budiharto and Amalia, 2019). Further, application of CSs in authentic environment becomes a pertinent factor in drilling speakers' strategic competence. In addition, as an ongoing process, knowledge of CSs should be implemented explicitly. Therefore, embedding CSs in English teaching and learning process may become a wise decision.

This current study has revealed CSs used by speakers in situated conversation. Though the participants were given a freedom to speak, authentic aspect is still far from adequate one. Therefore, it is expected for further researcher to focus on authentic casual conversation among Indonesian EFL speakers or even interlanguage communication such as conversation between Indonesian and other non-English speaking countries.

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