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## Examining the Oral Communication Strategies Used by a Group of Nepalese Adult Learners in an ESL Context

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper sought to examine the oral communication strategies (CSs) used by a group of Nepalese adult learners in an oral task in an ESL context. There has been a long history of CS studies in L2 acquisition research; however, there are no studies yet reporting the CSs employed by Nepalese learners in an ESL context. Hence, six Nepalese learners with intermediate language proficiency were engaged in a picture storytelling task. Their narrations were recorded and transcribed, and their responses during the interview were elicited. Four significant results were revealed. Firstly, the Nepalese learners experienced a considerable amount of communication difficulties as manifested by various gap markers. To overcome these problems, the learners simultaneously used a variety of non-verbal CSs alongside verbal CSs. Secondly, linguistic errors were abound in their narrations but were ignored due to their communication goal. Hence, there are areas of communication (e.g., vocabulary and sentence structure) where the learners were having trouble, and these concerns should require instructional attention. Thirdly, the majority of the verbal CSs were avoidance strategies while most of the non-verbal CSs were achievement strategies. Lastly, examining the CSs used by the learners paved the way to culture-based strategies that were employed during storytelling. These CSs provided new inputs to the existing CS frameworks used by English language learners. Implications for language teaching and learning as well as future research are discussed.*

*Keywords: oral communication; communication strategies; gap markers; Nepalese adult learners in an ESL context; culture-based strategies*

### INTRODUCTION

Speaking is an important component of learning a foreign language. However, not all learners can master this skill because of several factors such as motivation, cognitive skills, and other contextual factors. To be able to communicate effectively, one must possess not only sufficient linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence but also strategic competence. Research in second/foreign language learning suggests that learners can improve their language proficiency using specific communication strategies that will compensate for L2 deficiency known as communication strategies (CSs) (Ellis 2015, Nakatani 2006). Although there has been a long history of CS studies in L2 acquisition research, there is a paucity of studies reporting the CSs employed by Nepalese learners in an ESL context. Thus, this study investigated the CSs used by a group of adult Nepalese learners during an oral communication task. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions: (1) How do the Nepalese learners manifest their communication difficulties? (2) What verbal and non-verbal communication strategies do Nepalese learners employ during the oral task?

### COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Communication strategies (CSs) refer to the speaker's attempt to overcome linguistic problems (Littlemore 2001, Tarone 1980). Researchers have examined the use of CSs from two perspectives (Rahmani Doqaruni 2015): the psycholinguistic view and interactional view. Those (e.g., Tarone 1980, Nakatani 2005) who approach CSs from an interactional view believe that CS is a mutual attempt by the participants to maintain communication.

Alternatively, those (e.g., Bialystok 1990, Faerch & Kasper 1983) who approach CS from a psycholinguistic perspective claim that CS is a mental response to a communication problem. Because of this difference in theoretical views, CS taxonomies also vary.

From an interactional perspective, CSs are classified into approximation, word coinage, circumlocution, literal translation, language switch, appeal for assistance, mime, and avoidance (Tarone 1980). Psycholinguistically speaking, CSs are clustered into two general categories: avoidance strategies and achievement strategies (Faerch & Kasper 1983). Avoidance strategies occur when learners resort to stopping from making a communication to solve the communicative problems (Nakatani 2006). These avoidance strategies comprise of formal reduction (linguistic avoidance) and functional reduction (semantic and topic avoidance or message abandonment) strategies. Conversely, achievement strategies include compensatory strategies and retrieval strategies. Compensatory strategies (e.g., code switching, use of first language, cooperative strategies, nonlinguistic strategies, transfer, interlanguage-based strategies, and appeal for help) refer to making alternative strategies available to learners to achieve any communicative goal (Nakatani 2006) while retrieval strategies (e.g., keyword mnemonic and summarizing) relate to learners' conscious attempt to recall a known lexical item (Krings 1986, Liu 2010).

Despite the various propositions on how CSs should be classified, an accepted approach to dealing with CSs is still elusive (Smith 2003). Hence, the present study used a combination of these two perspectives in classifying the CSs of Nepalese learners.

#### STUDIES IN ORAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF ESL/EFL LEARNERS

Many studies have investigated the oral communication strategies used by EFL/ESL learners. While some of these studies were done in a non-computer mediated face-to-face mode (e.g., Mei & Nathalang 2010, Hua, Nor & Jaradat 2012, Zulkurnain & Kaur 2014, Yaman & Ozcan 2015), others examined CS in a virtual context such as social networking sites (e.g., Shih 2014, Smith 2003). For instance, Mei and Nathalang (2010) analysed the CSs used by 117 undergraduate students learning English in a Chinese university using one-way (i.e., concept identification task) and two-way oral tasks (i.e., role play tasks). Their findings revealed that task type and students' academic major and language proficiency influenced the use of CSs. The results further showed that the most frequently used CSs for both one-way and two-way tasks were repetition, paraphrasing, generalisation, approximation, and restructuring.

Similarly, Hua, Nor and Jaradat (2012) investigated the oral CSs used by international students during group discussions. Twenty international students participated in the study. Using self-report questionnaire and audio-recordings, they found that code-switching was the most frequently used CS by the students. The findings also revealed that low proficiency learners used a greater number of CSs compared to high proficient ones. It suggests that the use of CSs vary depending on the learners' proficiency level.

More recently, Yaman and Ozcan (2015) examined the oral communication strategies employed by Turkish students learning English as a foreign language. Specifically, it sought to identify the differences in the use of oral CSs concerning gender and language proficiency. A total of 294 students participated in the study. In this study, students did not perform any task; instead, they accomplished the Oral Communication Strategy Inventory developed by Nakatani (2006). The findings revealed that compensatory strategies and negotiation for meaning were the most frequently used CSs while planning strategies and message abandonment were the least used. No statistical difference was obtained concerning language proficiency. Regarding gender, the findings showed that female students used message abandonment frequently while male students used affective strategies more often than the female.

In a computer-mediated environment, Smith (2003) examined ESL learners' use of CSs during a task-based computer-mediated communication (CMC) via an IRC program known as "ChatNet." Eighteen intermediate ESL students from an American university participated in the study. Using jigsaw and decision-making oral tasks, Smith (2003) found that there was modest evidence suggesting that task type influences CS use. This finding suggests that learners employed a variety of CSs when performing a task-based CMC. The results also showed that non-verbal CSs were more frequently used compared to verbal CSs.

Another study that explored CSs in a virtual context was that of Shih (2014). She investigated the influence of task type on EFL learners' use of CSs in a multimodal communication. Five female students from Taiwan participated in this longitudinal case study by performing open-ended discussions and role-playing tasks. The results revealed that students used different CSs simultaneously and that there was an interplay between non-verbal and verbal CSs to ensure a smooth conversation. The findings further showed that the task type accounts for the differences in the number of CSs employed by the participants. Specifically, role-playing provided greater opportunities for eliciting CSs compared to discussion type. Unlike Smith's (2003) findings, Shih (2014) found that verbal CSs (e.g., paraphrase, borrowing, appeal for assistance, and avoidance) were more prevalent than non-verbal CSs (e.g., haptics, kinesics, paralanguage, and object communication).

Although there have been several studies that examine the oral communication strategies used by EFL/ESL learners, there is no study yet that reports the CSs employed by Nepalese learners in an ESL context. On this note, this study examined the CSs used by the Nepalese learners during their oral communication in the Philippine English classroom.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

The six freshman Nepalese students who took part in this study were enrolled in the subject Communication Arts at a state university in the Philippines whose medium of instruction is English. They were taking up Bachelor of Science in Nursing and had an intermediate language proficiency level based on a 60-item institutional language proficiency test. Thus, none of them was a native or near-native English speaker. Nonetheless, they were exposed to English instruction since kindergarten in their home country and have been staying in the Philippines for two years already. All participants were female and came from various social and linguistic backgrounds with age ranging from 17 to 18.

### PROCEDURE

The participants engaged in a picture storytelling task to elicit language samples for analysis. A series of six pictures were used to guide the learners in their storytelling and served as the stimuli for students to perform the oral task. These pictures tell a story of an accident experienced by a boy when riding a bicycle. The task was administered by the participants' teacher and lasted for 10 to 15 minutes for each participant. The researcher observed and video-recorded each learner during the oral communication task to capture both the verbal and non-verbal CSs employed. An informal interview was also conducted with the students to determine the reasons for their use of gap markers and use of communication strategies. Gap markers are verbal or non-verbal manifestations that are not used by learners to help them get their messages across; instead, these are manifestations of communication difficulty. It was done by showing the video to the learners and asking them about what they were thinking during the time that they used specific gap markers and communication strategies.

Elicitation tasks have been extensively used in many recent CS studies (e.g., Idrus 2017, Razmjou & Ghazi 2013, Mirzaei & Heidari 2012, Mei & Nathalang 2010, Nakatani 2010, Maleki 2007, Wannaruk 2003) to generate data that can be easily quantified (Littlemore 2001).

#### DATA ANALYSIS

After the data gathering, the learners' utterances were transcribed incorporating the non-verbal cues for analysis. Normal orthography was used in the transcription. The symbols that were used in the transcription of data were taken from Padillo (2001). These symbols include a colon (: ) for a lengthened word and ellipsis (...) for a one-second pause. One dot was added for an additional second.

In identifying communication strategies, the criteria set by Tarone (1980, p. 419) were adopted. These are as follows: (1) the speaker aims to convey a message to the listener; (2) the speaker believes that the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure to convey meaning is not shared with the listener; (3) the speaker decides to avoid communicating meaning, use alternate means to communicate ideas, and stop using the alternative means when he believes that there is already a shared idea. Then, the identified communication strategies were analysed and coded using the following figure. It should be noted that the analytical framework used in this study was a combination of interactional and psycholinguistic perspectives in classifying the CSs of Nepalese learners.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study set out to examine the CSs employed by the Nepalese learners during their oral communication in the Philippine English classroom. The findings revealed that the participants manifested their communication difficulties through gap markers. These gap markers include gestures that signalled the learners' communication problems and were captured through direct observation. These observations were then tallied for analysis. Table 1 shows the gap markers observed among the Nepalese learners during communication difficulties.

TABLE 1. Gap markers observed among the Nepalese learners during the oral task

Gap Markers	Number of Occurrences
Pointing at a particular detail in the picture	19
Looking at the instructor	9
Stepping movement	6
Circling of hands	3
Waving of hands	2
Putting/removing the hand in the pocket	2
Toying with the identification card (ID)	1
Scratching the head	1

Among the eight identified gap markers, *pointing at a particular detail in the picture* was the most frequently used gap marker when the participants experienced communication difficulties. Specifically, they pointed at the car and the boy in the picture twelve times, at the old man four times, and at the bicycle three times. The next gap marker is *looking at the instructor* and a *stepping movement*. The stepping movement was performed by moving the right or left foot forward or backwards. The least observed gap markers were *toying with the ID* and *scratching the head*. These gap markers also appeared alongside filled and unfilled pauses, lengthening of words, repetitions, and verbal utterances of the participants.

The findings obtained from the interview with the participants revealed that their use of gap markers was an indication that they were experiencing communication difficulties during the oral task. Zulkurnain and Kaur (2014) explained that difficulties occurred during an oral communication situation due to learners' lack of English language knowledge. Note that these gap markers were observed when the participants were unable to sustain their talk or when they could not find the words they needed to continue their utterances.

During the oral task, the Nepalese students used specific strategies to overcome their communication difficulties. These strategies were categorised into verbal and non-verbal CSs. According to Padillo (2001), verbal CSs are those that entail the manipulation and use of words to get the speaker's meaning across while non-verbal CSs are those that do not involve the manipulation of words. The following table shows the number of occurrences of verbal CSs employed by the Nepalese learners.

TABLE 2. *Verbal communication strategies employed by the Nepalese learners from an interactional perspective*

Verbal Communication Strategies	Number of Occurrences
Approximation	20
Repetition	12
Restructuring	9
Introducing	6
Valuing	6
Circumlocution	4
Lifting	2

As shown in Table 2, the most frequently used verbal CSs are approximation, repetition, and restructuring. These data support the earlier findings of Mei and Nathalang (2010) that these three are some of the most frequently used CSs by EFL learners. Specifically, approximation occurred twenty times. Tarone (1980) says that approximation is used when the learner uses a single target language (TL) vocabulary item or structure, which s/he knows is not correct, but which shares enough semantic features in communication with the desired item to satisfy the speaker.

TABLE 3. *Verbal communication strategies employed by the Nepalese learners from a psycholinguistic perspective*

Verbal Communication Strategies	Number of Occurrences
Avoidance Strategies	
Formal reduction	29
Functional reduction	10
Achievement Strategies	
Compensatory Strategies	12
Retrieval Strategies	8

As shown in Table 3, majority of the CSs employed by the learners from a psycholinguistic perspective are the avoidance strategies. Of these strategies, 29 were related to linguistics. The remaining ten were instances related to topic or semantic avoidance. In terms of achievement strategies, majority of the CSs were compensatory strategies while the rest involved retrieval strategies.

Consider this language sample from the Nepalese learner, "In this village, the two person is driving and **cycling**... One man (points at the man) is driving a car, and a small boy (points at the boy) is **cycling** the **cycle**" [Transcript 5]. The approximated words used in the oral communication task were *cycle* for bicycle and *cycling* for riding. Note that *cycling* was considered an approximation because the English used in the context of the study and learners is American English. Other approximations in all transcripts were *cycled* for rode, *scratches* for bruises, *gets burned* for overheat, *horning* (the bicycle) for rang the bell, *strike*

for knocked, *is slow* for slowed down, *to difficult* for hard up, and *ok* for well. These approximated words appeared in the corpora once or several times. Despite a limited command of the TL, the learners could tell a story using an approximation.

Repetition, which is a time-gaining communication strategy, is another verbal CS that the Nepalese learners frequently used during the oral task. When the learners used repetition as a CS, they were perceived to be having difficulties continuing their present train of thought; thus, they repeated the words to sustain their production, and at the same time they searched for the needed item or word.

In this study, the learners used repetition in twelve instances. Words and phrases were repeated in the corpora.

He then passed across the old man **without helping him**.... **without helping him** on making his car since at the beginning the old man had done the same to the boy. So... (moves hands), the moral of the story is **if...you... if you** (looks at the teacher) lend your hand for help to others, then only they'll help you in return [Transcript 1].

The repeated phrases in the transcript were *without helping him* and *if you*. Other phrases that were repeated in the corpora were *the boy*, *in this story*, and *he saw*. On the other hand, repeated words that transpired were *maybe*, *he*, *then*, *the*, *that*, *because*, *to*, and *what*. These words and phrases that were repeatedly uttered by the learners were very minimal considering that they have an intermediate level of proficiency. This finding validates the observation of teachers in the university where the study was conducted about the speaking rate of Nepalese students. It is likely that these students avoided repetition of words and phrases. However, further studies are needed to confirm this claim.

Restructuring ranked third among the most frequently used verbal CSs with nine occurrences. Mei and Nathalang (2010) identify this as an interlanguage-based strategy where the learner deals with the language difficulty by manoeuvring the TL. The speaker is unable to complete her/his initial sentence pattern; thus, s/he breaks off and starts differently. The following are the two restructured parts of Transcript 1:

In one fine day (looks at the instructor), an old man was driving his car (points at the car), **and a young boy was passing the way on his bicycle** (points at the bicycle). Suddenly (scratches head), the boy the boy was hit by the car and..., and **he lost his consciousness of cycling on his way, and he got fall on the road**.

The first example of restructuring in this transcript indicates that the learner would like to say *...and passed by the boy who was riding his bicycle*. The use of restructuring here shows that this CS may not only be used to change a word but to restructure all the words in the utterance. The second restructured part is highlighted in the transcript, *“he lost his consciousness of cycling on his way, and he got fall on the road.”* The language sample is ungrammatical, but the meaning is kept. Perhaps the learner wanted to say *...he was knocked off his bicycle*. This restructured part of the transcript, just like the first one, suggests that the learner developed an alternative constituent plan for her to get her message across.

Introducing and valuing both occurred six times during the oral task. Introducing is a CS that does not appear in various typologies, but it was found a CS in this study because it was used to bridge the gap between the learner and the pictures as materials for the oral communication task. It refers to the opening line that is used to launch the actions of the story. This CS was used once by all six participants. The learners found it difficult to start their stories, so they used a verbal strategy for them to begin their talk. This starter helped them to move on to another structure, and this led them to transmit their messages across successfully.

**Today, I'm going to...** (inhales deeply) **to give you a story.** In one fine day (looks at the teacher), an old man was driving his car (points at the car), and a young boy was passing the way on his bicycle (points at the bicycle) [Transcript 3].

Introductions in the corpora are a sentence length or two. The participants had varying ways of introducing their stories, but they all landed into opening statements. The learners explained that they were oriented by their Nepalese instructors in literature to introduce their story before moving on to the rising action. They further explained that this strategy is observed among Nepalese whenever they tell stories. Storytellers have to launch their talk using words or expressions that may initiate their story and build their confidence as they progress in their narration. This finding implies that the Nepalese learners could integrate into their oral narration the training that they received from their formal education and cultural orientation. With this knowledge, the learners became knowledgeable in storytelling as evident in their performance.

Just like introducing, valuing is another CS that occurred in the corpora. Evidently, this CS consistently appeared six times at the end of the transcripts, and it served as the take off or the final statement. The learners terminated their stories with a statement imparting values to the listeners. These values were obtained from the events of the story and further formulated into a final declaration. Note this corpus from the learner's language sample, "Moral of the story goes like this (looks at the teacher), **whatever you do to others you will get the same response, so try to do good to others if you want help in need**" [Transcript 4].

More often, the learners found a problem in terminating their stories; however, the use of a verbal CS bridged this difficulty. Evidently, the Nepalese successfully ended their stories, albeit grammatically incorrect, through an ending with values or lessons that they extracted from the picture. This finding further supports the literature that the Nepalese learners have a remarkable cultural orientation of storytelling. According to the interviewed learners, valuing is a way for them to signal the listeners that they are coming to an end. They typically concluded their stories through valuing or moralising.

Circumlocution ranked sixth among the most frequently used verbal CSs. It appeared four times in the corpora. Tarone (1980) defines circumlocution as a CS utilised by the learner when s/he tries to describe the characteristics or elements of the object or action instead of using the appropriate TL item or structure.

Starting from the first scene, I can see that an old man and a boy are **riding their own transportation.** A boy who is riding a cycle comes on the way of an old man who is driving a car (points at the car) [Transcript 2].

The learner failed to identify the appropriate words, so she employed the general terms instead. Therefore, *riding their own transportation* was used in place of *car and bicycle*. This result implies that the TL vocabulary items were not yet retrieved while the learner was narrating the story. It shows that the learners' use of circumlocution entails their attempt to describe a TL vocabulary item and their means of describing a problem, an event, or an action.

Among the verbal CSs, lifting was the least used with only two occurrences. Lifting as a CS was identified by Padillo (2001) when she studied the CSs employed by senior Filipino students. She said that lifting is a label given to expressions which language learners have memorised from slogans, logos, quotations, advertisements and which laces the language learner's utterance. Though this is the least used verbal CSs employed by the learners, it is a signal of the learners' love of stories.

The lifted phrase appeared in the fourth transcript when the learner introduced her story, "**Once upon a time** (circles hands), there was a boy who have just gifted a bicycle by

his family.” The phrase, *once upon a time* is used in children stories, specifically in fairy tales. This time expression has been the rhetorical expression to introduce events and signal the occurrence of events or another event in a story. It means that the learner had in mind the memorised introductory phrase of a story which resorted her to use it, too, in introducing her own.

Another instance of lifting appears in the second transcript, “Thus: (looks at the teacher) the moral behind the story is **do unto others what you want others do unto you.**” The lifted line, *do unto others what you want others do unto you* is considered a CS which language learners have memorised as the golden rule. Though it is classified a lifting CS, it also functions as a valuing CS. Therefore, the lifted line or statement can be used in introducing as well as in terminating a story. It is a mark of the learner’s sensitivity, orientation, or attachment to stories. Therefore, lifting was utilised by the learner to substitute what she had in mind to serve her purpose.

TABLE 4. *Non-verbal communication strategies employed by the Nepalese learners from an interactional perspective*

Non-verbal Communication Strategies	Number of Occurrences
Gesture	34
Unfilled pause	22
Indirect appeal	9
Lengthening of words	4
Avoidance	2
Filled pause	2
Mime	2

Table 4 shows the non-verbal CSs employed by the Nepalese learners during the oral task. These findings uphold with Smith's (2003) findings that non-verbal CSs are more frequently used compared to verbal CSs. If the learner found that a verbal CS is ineffective, then a non-verbal CS is used. This is shown in the following transcript.

**Once a while.... there was a competition in between the old man (points at the old man) and the boy (points at the boy).** They are having the race. The old man was rich where the boy was not. So the old man preferred car (points at the car) and the boy preferred a cycle (points at the bicycle). I can see in the sad and hurried to win the competition in the face of old man (points at the old man). Boy (points at the boy) was patience and trying to do the best. On the way the boy (points at the boy) was ahead the car (points at the car) so due to this the old man (points at the old man) hit the boy's cycle (points at the bicycle). The boy (points at the boy) fell down. Although he was down he did not back out the competition. He always wants to give his best. The old man car's (points at the car) was in very speed so his engine gets burned. At the mean time the boy (points at the boy) again get ahead the car hence the boy wins. And this was a million of smile in his face because he was just trying his best in the cycle which was extremely far from car and he won (looks at the teacher). **The moral is everything you do just do it from your heart and be confident.**

TABLE 5. *Non-verbal communication strategies employed by the Nepalese learners from a psycholinguistic perspective*

Non-verbal Communication Strategies	Number of Occurrences
Avoidance Strategies	
Formal reduction	0
Functional reduction	4
Achievement Strategies	
Compensatory Strategies	43
Retrieval Strategies	28

Table 5 presents the non-verbal CSs as coded using a psycholinguistic perspective. It can be seen that almost all of the nonverbal CSs employed by the Nepalese learners were achievement strategies totalling to 71 instances. Of these 71, 43 were compensatory strategies through the use of gestures while 28 were retrieval strategies using unfilled pauses (22),



lengthening of words (4), and filled pauses (2). Only four were coded as avoidance strategies which were used by the learners to retrieve some lexical items. These findings concur with Yaman and Ozcan (2015) who found that compensatory strategies were the most frequently used CS by foreign learners.

Among all non-verbal CSs, *gesture* was the most frequently used to overcome communication difficulties. Based on the elicited data, gestures refer to the movements of the hands, arms, and legs that were used by the learners for them to express their ideas and demonstrate their attitudes toward the communication situation. The gestures that appeared thirty-four instances during the oral task were *pointing at a particular detail in the picture, stepping movement, circling or waving of hands, putting or removing the hand in the pocket, toying with the identification card (ID), and scratching the head*. Examples of these gestures are illustrated in the second transcript.

Maybe... maybe, an old man was in hurry he just strike... (**steps right foot forward then backwards**) his car on the boy's bicycle due to which the boy fell down (**circles left hand**) with his bicycle, but an old man did not care about the boy and went on his way.

These gestures surfaced while the participants were talking. It shows that they could transmit a message and employ gestures at the same time which helped them to continue their talk despite their linguistic errors.

*Unfilled pause* is another frequently used CS by the participants with 22 occurrences. It refers to unfilled gaps in an utterance (Lennon 1990). These ranged from three seconds to the longest documented unfilled pause in this study – a ten-second pause. They were usually accompanied by gestures and are considered as a time-gaining strategy that allowed the language learner to access stored information. Although an unfilled pause helped the learners convey their message, it also slowed down their talk which contributes to disfluency.

In this story..... (looks at the teacher), we can see that there are two person - one young boy who ride a bicycle and another a older man who drive a car. In this picture (points at the picture), we can see that:... that the older man was in hurried, and the younger boy is saw like beginner because he was to difficult in riding bicycle [Transcript 6].

Although the learners struggled to talk with unfilled pauses and gestures, they attempted to talk fast. According to the learners, they talked fast because they wanted to sound like a native speaker of English. Significantly, talking fast with minimal unfilled pauses did not affect the message transmission, but its effect is found on the linguistic errors they committed during the storytelling task.

Another occasionally employed CS was the *indirect appeal* with nine occurrences. Indirect appeals are also gap markers that signal communication difficulty among the Nepalese learners. These appeals for help were used as a non-verbal CS that assisted the learners in overcoming their linguistic problems. They appeared alongside other non-verbal strategies hoping that the other members of the group would realise their need and help. Consider this language sample from the first transcript, “So... (moves hands), the moral of the story is if...you... if you (**looks at the teacher**) lend your hand for help to others, then only they'll help you in return.” The indirect appeal for help in the corpus was prompted by the learner when she was looking at her instructor. She was on her journey of finishing her story at a fast pace, so she continued talking despite the lack of assistance. The transcript shows that the learner was encountering difficulty in speaking that led her to employ an indirect appeal for her teacher that is accompanied by other CSs to strategise her talk and achieve her communication goal.

The last four CSs were less frequently used than gestures, unfilled pauses, and indirect appeal. For instance, *lengthening of words* was used only four times during the oral

task. Lengthening of words surfaced when the learners were at a loss for words. It allowed them to keep the communication going and at the same time searched for the needed words.

Faerch and Kasper (1983) consider lengthening of words or syllables as a hesitation phenomenon. Its use further illustrates that it is a CS that helps the learners to carry out their communicative goals. Two of the lengthened words in the transcript occurred within unobstructed words, one emerged before a gesture (Transcript 5), and another surfaced before a three-second unfilled pause which is also followed by a repetition of words (Transcript 6). Consider this language sample from the fifth transcript, “It means to say **that**: (looks at the teacher) help first you help then then only others help you give and take should be always there.”

Based on the transcript, the word *that* is lengthened alongside the indirect appeal *looking at the teacher*. This lengthening of word signals that there is an absence of vocabulary in the learner's linguistic repertoire. This lack of vocabulary is often the problem why learners cannot proceed to their next word; hence, they appeal for help. If the word is not available, the learners usually resort to a distorted linguistic output that manifests their incompetence in grammar.

Furthermore, this lengthening of words shows that a CS may appear alongside other CSs. Given that there was only a minimal instance of lengthening, it suggests that the learners did not prefer to use this CS. This finding also provides some evidence on the fast speech rate of the Nepalese learners. Consequently, this speech rate was a result of avoiding the lengthening of words.

The least used non-verbal CSs were *avoidance*, *filled pause*, and *mime* with each occurring twice during the oral task. Avoidance, according to Brown (2014), is a CS that can be classified as a lexical, phonological, or topical avoidance. In this study, avoidance surfaced when the learner kept away from uttering a lexical item within a semantic category. This strategy is illustrated in the fifth transcript, “At this time the the car strike the cycle because of the manner for... (puts right hand in her pocket). The small boy is fell down. But the man is not helps he..... to the boy.” The learner was trying to avoid lexical items due to their absence in her linguistic repertoire. Also, the second instance of avoidance is found in the last sentence. The learner did not attempt to continue another independent clause in her utterance due to her inability to retrieve the lexical items that could represent her thought. This retrieval of lexis is evident in the unfilled pause that transpired during the moment of retrieval. When the learner could not retrieve such words due to the lack of vocabulary, she resorted to a phrasal construction. She wanted to say, *the boy was knocked off his bicycle, but the man did not help him*. Hence, avoidance of lexical items affects the syntactic construction of the utterance. From the simple sentence, *the small boy was fell down*, and the assumed independent clause, *but the man is not helps he...* the restructuring of the sentences may create a compound sentence.

Thus, the minimal occurrences of the learners' use of avoidance suggest that the learners were risk takers. The Nepalese tried to transmit their message across through CSs despite their linguistic errors.

Just like avoidance, filled pause was one of the least frequently used CSs employed by the learners. Filled pause is a pause which otherwise would have been silent if not for fillers that mark them (Lennon 1990). Fillers are also called “tail words” (Hashim, Soopar & Hamid 2017), and they are used as spoken discourse markers of various languages. They mark the speakers' awkward and careless speech that may distract or irritate the listeners. Filled pause is evident in the sixth transcript which interestingly appeared before the conclusion of the story, in which case they served for planning purposes.

Although the younger boy saw him in the problem but he don't want to help him because in that time when the younger boy want help the older man wasn't help

him.....ahm.....ah... Moral of this story is (looks at the teacher) what what what do the older, the younger is learn. The younger are image of the older [Transcript 6].

Despite the use of *ahm* followed by *ah* within seven- and three-second pauses, this finding shows that the Nepalese learners preferred to stop and remained silent during their narrations than filling the silence with distractive words. It further indicates that they did not use many filled pauses because their goal was to transmit the story of the pictures as fast as they could.

Similarly, the learners did not use mimes more often. In this study, a mime refers to the use of gestures to substitute a word that is not available at the time of speaking. Mimes are also gap markers in general and gestures in particular. However, what separates a mime from other gestures is the disparity of purpose. A mime is an instance of gesture that was used in this study to replace a lexical item that was not successfully retrieved at the time of speaking. Other gestures that were identified were also movements of the hands, arms, and legs, but they were not necessarily meant to replace a word but to help keep the trail of thought. Hence, a mime was observed only in two instances wherein one of it can be seen in the following transcript.

After that when the boy is on the go... (removes right hand out of her pocket) way, he saw that the old man who is strike him is on the road maybe his car engine is.....problem and the old man and give smile to him and went from...to **(points at the car)** and gave him a big horn [Transcript 5].

The occurrence of a mime was preceded by one unfilled pause and the possibly confused preposition *to* then followed by the conjunction *and*. Pointing at the car is a mime, a non-verbal communication strategy that was used in place of the word *car*. This finding implies that the learner was having difficulty accessing the target word; thus, she pointed at the object instead of saying the target language item. Since she was unable to give the target word, she tried a different strategy to put her message across. As explained by Tarone (1980), learners mime in place of a lexical item or action.

## CONCLUSION

The present study attempted to investigate the CSs employed by the Nepalese learners during the oral task in an ESL context. Based on the results, the learners experienced a considerable amount of communication difficulties as manifested by various gap markers. To overcome these challenges, they frequently employed approximation for verbal CS and gestures for non-verbal CS from an interactional perspective. From a psycholinguistic perspective, majority of the verbal CSs were coded as avoidance strategies. A different picture is revealed when it comes to non-verbal CSs in which the majority were achievement strategies. Given that the selected students had an intermediate level of proficiency, linguistic errors were still abound in their narrations. However, these errors were ignored due to their communication goal. The goal and context of communication coupled with their cultural and English language and literature orientations contributed to their performance in the oral task. Notably, this paper found two culture-based CSs, introducing strategy and valuing strategy, that were consistently manifested by the Nepalese learners during their narrations and were found absent in the reviewed CS typologies of Tarone (1981), Faerch and Kasper (1984), Chesterfield and Chesterfield (1985), Brown (1994), and Padillo (2001).

One significant implication of this study is that it offered insights as to how Nepalese learners manifest their communication difficulties. These gap markers and non-verbal CSs are useful in alerting their teachers when to provide assistance during communicative tasks.

These findings are also helpful in determining the areas in which these learners are having troubles. Hence, appropriate pedagogical interventions can be provided to them. As pointed out by Barrot (2014, 2015), Dörnyei (1995), Dörnyei and Thurrell (1994), Faerch and Kasper (1986), Maleki (2010), and Nakatani (2005), CS instruction is necessary for developing learners' strategic competence. Another implication of this study is on how teachers assess learners' oral performances. There is a need to reexamine how teachers interpret the learners' use of CSs for them to determine if these strategies are students' attempts to overcome their communication difficulties or an indication of other critical communication problems. Teachers need to be sensitive to the linguistic knowledge of their students when they consider whether the use of the students' language is CSs or not. They must be cognizant not to impose their linguistic knowledge. Also, teachers should be observant to emerging oral communication strategies of learners because these may contribute to the discovery of additional communication strategies. Lastly, future studies may use various oral tasks with increasing complexity. In this way, scholars and practitioners would know how the use of CSs changes as tasks become more complex.

Although the current study provided some interesting insights, its limitation should be noted. There was a limitation on the number of participants because there were only six Nepalese students who enrolled in the university at the time of the investigation. If the aim is to improve the generalizability of the findings, more participants should be involved in the study. However, this limitation was compensated by the opportunity to investigate the learners' oral CSs providing the idea that the use of CSs served as facilitating strategies for the Nepalese learners to become successful in transmitting a message. Future studies should also embark on a qualitative study which focuses on why Nepalese students or other EFL students use a particular CS. In this way, a clearer view of the phenomenon shall be achieved.

Research on CSs has yet a lot to offer and will throw more light in the second/foreign language acquisition process. Teachers need to be aware of their students' learning styles and observe the strategies already in use. They should consider a change of their role in the classroom, where they would act as facilitators of learning to help them develop a successful, individual way of expressing themselves in the target language.

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