

# The Impacts of Attitude towards Speaking English on the Use of Communication Strategies by English Majors in Thailand

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**Abstract**—The aim of the present study was to explore the communication strategy employment by 949 Thai university students, majoring in English in the Northeast of Thailand, as well as the relationship between communication strategy use and students' attitude towards speaking English. The communication strategy questionnaire (CSQ) and Attitudes towards Speaking English Questionnaire (ASEQ) were conducted. The data obtained through the questionnaires were analyzed by the descriptive statistics, the One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and the Chi-square tests. The results demonstrate that significant variations were found in relation to students' attitude towards speaking English. Students with positive attitude towards speaking English reported significantly greater overall strategy use than those students with negative attitude.

**Index Terms**—communication strategies, attitudes towards speaking English, English majors

## I. INTRODUCTION

Communication strategies are considered the chief part of strategic competence. As pointed out by Terrel (1977, p. 334), “communication strategies are crucial at the beginning stages of second language learning”. They are not only employed to overcome communication difficulties and to enhance the communication effectiveness, but they are also employed to negotiate meaning where both linguistic structures and sociolinguistic rules are not shared between a second language learner and a speaker of the target language (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). Also, some language learners are believed to be able to communicate successfully with only one hundred words because they rely mostly on communication strategies (Dörnyei and Thurrell, 1991).

Several past research works have been conducted on communication strategies in relation to teaching communication strategies (e.g. Dörnyei, 1995; Salomone and Marsal, 1997; Nakatani, 2005; Lam, 2006; and 2010; Lee, 2007; Maleki, 2007; Meyerhoff, 2009; and Kongsom, 2009). Most findings of the past research works (e.g. Dörnyei, 1995; Nakatani, 2005; Lam, 2006; and 2010; Lee, 2007; Maleki, 2007; and Kongsom, 2009) revealed that language learners who received instruction through communication strategies made a significant improvement related to both quality and quantity in their strategy use and oral performance. A study carried out by Lee (2006) revealed that students displayed higher self-efficacy after being trained in oral communication strategies. Similarly, Dörnyei (1995) found that students who were taught through communication strategy techniques had a positive attitude towards the training.

Apart from communication strategies, attitude towards speaking English is one of the chief predictors of success in English communication. According to Gardner, Lanlone and Moorcroft (1985), attitude is a factor that has an impact on foreign language learning since how much effort learners put on language learning relies partly on attitude. As supported by Dörnyei (2001, p.2), “My personal experience is that 99 per cent of language learners who really want to learn a foreign language (i.e. who are really motivated) will be able to master a reasonable working knowledge of it as a minimum, regardless of their language aptitude.”

Moreover, Elyidirim and Ashton (2006) found that negative attitudes toward the foreign language can obstruct the learning. On the other hand, learners who have positive attitudes toward language learning are likely to use strategies more frequently than those learners with negative attitudes (Sadighi and Zaradshan, 2006). That is to say, a positive and negative attitude to speaking English is one of the factors that may be associated with learners' speaking activities.

Oxford (1990) also affirms that attitude is assumed to have an effect on strategy use of learners. As pointed out by Cohen and Macaro (2007, p.15), “successful and highly motivated learners adopted more strategies, especially those involving planning, evaluation, and monitoring. Poorly motivated pupils, on the other hand, employed a limited set of strategies and were less ready to act strategically.” This is consistent with the findings of Dong and Fangpeng (2010), which revealed that the majority of Chinese students, majoring in English, had a positive attitude towards achievement strategies and a negative attitude towards reduction strategies. That is positive attitude has positive effects on learners' choice of strategy use; while, negative attitude can cause poor strategy use or lack of orchestration of strategies.

In order to investigate if the relationship between ‘attitudes toward speaking English’ and English majors’ choices of CSs in the Northeast of Thailand existed, attitudes towards speaking English were an investigated variable of the present investigation.

#### A. *Termed Use in the Study*

- Communication strategies

‘Communication strategies’ refers to attempts which students make to cope with communication breakdowns in English in order to convey an intended message to the interlocutor, to understand messages, and to maintain the conversation.

- Students

‘Students’ refers to Thai university students majoring in English studying in the Northeast of Thailand.

- Attitudes towards speaking English

‘Attitudes towards speaking English’ refers to students’ feelings, thoughts and emotions regarding spoken English. ‘Attitudes towards speaking English’ was divided into two types: positive attitude and negative attitude on the basis of students’ responses to the speaking English questionnaire.

#### B. *Objective of the Study*

The aim of the present investigation was to explore the relationship between English major students’ communication strategy use and attitudes towards speaking English.

## II. METHODOLOGY

#### A. *Participants*

In the present investigation, the stratified random sampling and the purposive sampling have been used to select the research participants in step 1 and step 2 respectively. The stratified random sampling was adopted based on the representativeness of the samples of the target population; however, the stratum data must be accurate (Neuman, 2006). Hence, in the first step, the population was stratified into three different types of institution. They consisted of four public universities, twelve Rajabhat Universities and five Rajamangala Universities of Technology Isan. After taking a proportion of a number of institutions, there were nine participating institutions: two public universities, four Rajabhat Universities and three Rajamangala Universities of Technology Isan. In the first step, the written communication strategy questionnaire and the attitudes towards speaking English questionnaire were administered to collect the data from 949 students majoring in English. Nine hundred and forty-nine participants were obtained from two hundred and twenty-five participants from two public universities, four hundred and seventy-nine participants from four Rajabhat Universities and two hundred and thirty-five participants from three Rajamangala Universities of Technology Isan.

#### B. *Instruments*

The questionnaire of communication strategies was modified on the basis of Dörnyei and Scott (1995), Nakatani (2006), Mariani (2010), and Somsai and Intaraprasert (2011). The researcher also adopted English Speaking Attitudes Questionnaire (ESAQ) by Bui and Intaraprasert (2012) in order to investigate students’ attitudes towards speaking English in relation to communication strategy use. In order to maximize ease of administration and ensure greater accuracy of findings, the question items were checked for the content validity by three experts whose English and Thai are comparatively good and then translated into Thai by the researcher. More importantly, before administering the questionnaires, the participants were informed to ensure that they knew the aim of study, the importance of the study, the organization in charge of investigating the study, stating there is no right or wrong answer, requesting honest answers, promising confidentiality, and expressing appreciation.

#### C. *Procedure*

During August and October, 2013, the researcher went to the nine universities in the Northeast of Thailand in person to gather the data from the Communication Strategy Questionnaire (CSQ) and Attitude towards Speaking English Questionnaire (ASEQ), to which 949 university English major students gave their responses.

#### D. *Analysis*

The data obtained were analyzed through five steps as follows:

1. Information about the students’ CS use and type of study program was coded.
2. The input of data into SPSS was done and cross-checked to avoid mistakes that might affect the results. The strategy items were categorized into three main categories: strategies to convey a message to the interlocutor with 21 items, strategies to understand the message with 12 items, and strategies to maintain the conversation with 10 items
4. First, the reliability was examined to see whether the data would be qualified for quantitative analysis. The results of Alpha Coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) or Cronbach Alpha were used to check the internal consistency of the CSQ. The reliability estimates based on the responses of 949 participants are: .89 (as a whole); .81 (for the SCM category); .84 (for the SUM category); and .83 (for the SMC category). As stated by Fraenkel and Wallen (2007), the acceptable reliability

coefficient of .70 is a rule of thumb for research purposes. That is to say, the reliability estimate of this present study seemed acceptable.

5. ANOVA and the Chi-square tests were carried out. The data were scrutinized at three levels: CS use in overall, CS use in the three categories, and individual CS use.

### III. RESULT

#### A. Variation in Frequency of Students' Overall Reported CS Use

TABLE 1:  
VARIATION IN FREQUENCY OF STUDENTS' OVERALL REPORTED CS USE

Attitude towards Speaking English	Positive (n=894)		Negative (n=55)		Sig.	Comments
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D		
Overall CS Use	2.75	.32	2.62	.33	p<.01	Pattern of Variation Positive>Negative

Note: S.D.: standard of deviation; Sig. level: significant level; N.S.: not significant

The ANOVA results reveal that the frequency of students' overall strategy use varied significantly according to their attitudes towards speaking English (p<.01). The mean frequency scores of the students with positive attitude towards speaking English and those with negative attitude towards speaking English were 2.75 and 2.62 respectively.

#### B. Variation in Frequency of the Students' Use of CS under the Three Categories

TABLE 2:  
VARIATION IN FREQUENCY OF STUDENTS' USE OF CS UNDER THE THREE CATEGORIES

Attitude towards Speaking English	Positive (n=894)		Negative (n=55)		Sig.	Comments
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D		
Strategy Category						Pattern of Variation
1) SCM	2.67	.34	2.60	.34	N.S	-
2) SUM	2.82	.45	2.72	.43	N.S	-
3) SMC	2.82	.48	2.55	.47	p<.001	Positive>Negative

Based on the ANOVA results, significant variations were found in the frequency of students' CS use to maintain the conversation. Students with positive attitudes towards speaking English reported employing CSs significantly more frequently than those with negative attitudes towards speaking English. However, no significant variations were found in the use of CSs of students to convey a message to the interlocutor (SCM) or to understand the message (SUM) according to this variable. The mean frequency scores of these categories are considered 'medium' frequency of CS use.

#### C. Variation in Frequency of Student's CS Use at Individual Level

TABLE 3:  
VARIATION IN FREQUENCY OF STUDENTS' CS USE AT INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Individual Communication strategies Used more by students with positive attitude - 13 strategies	% of high use (3 and 4)		Observed $\chi^2$
	Positive	Negative	
SMC2: Paying attention to the speaker's eye contact, facial expression and gestures	89.8	76.4	$\chi^2=9.62^{**}$
SUM8: Trying to catch the speaker's main point	87.7	76.4	$\chi^2=5.90^*$
SCM10: Making use of expressions found in some sources of media	85.2	65.5	$\chi^2=15.15^{***}$
SMC1: Trying to relax and enjoy the conversation	84.5	72.7	$\chi^2=5.24^*$
SMC3: Actively encouraging oneself to express what one wants to say	82.4	61.8	$\chi^2=14.46^{***}$
SMC7: Speaking more slowly to gain time to think and keep the conversation going smoothly	76.4	63.6	$\chi^2=4.58^*$
SUM1: Trying to catch every word that the speaker uses	74.4	52.7	$\chi^2=12.37^{***}$
SCM3: Giving examples if the listener doesn't understand what one is saying	67.9	52.7	$\chi^2=5.39^*$
SMC6: Changing the way of saying things according to the context in order to continue conversation	64.1	45.5	$\chi^2=7.72^*$
SCM8: Correcting one's own pronunciation, grammar and lexical mistakes	59.2	45.5	$\chi^2=4.01^*$
SMC4: Feeling all right for taking risks while speaking	51.1	23.6	$\chi^2=15.65^{***}$
SMC5: Not minding if one can't understand every single detail and trying to keep speaking	51.1	27.3	$\chi^2=11.79^{***}$
SCM21: Preparing the message by trying to anticipate what the interlocutor is going to say based on the context	47.5	25.5	$\chi^2=10.17^{***}$

Note: S.D.: standard of deviation; Sig. level: significant level; \*: p<.05; \*\*:p<.01; \*\*\*<.001

The results from the Chi-square tests shown in Table 4.15 reveal the significant variations in students' use of individual CSs related to their attitudes towards speaking English. A significantly higher percentage of students with positive attitudes towards speaking English, than those with negative attitudes towards speaking English, reported high use of all 13 CSs.

A significantly greater percentage of students with positive attitudes towards speaking English reported employing high use of CSs to convey a message to the interlocutor than those with negative attitudes towards speaking English. Examples are "Making use of expressions found in some sources of media" (SCM10); "Giving examples if the listener doesn't understand what one is saying" (SCM3); "Correcting one's own pronunciation, grammar and lexical mistakes" (SCM8); and "Preparing the message by trying to anticipate what the interlocutor is going to say based on the context" (SCM21). A significantly higher percentage of students with positive attitudes towards speaking English, than those with negative attitudes towards speaking English, also reported employing CSs to understand the message. These reported strategies are: "Trying to catch the speaker's main point" (SUM8); and "Trying to catch every word that the speaker uses" (SUM1).

#### IV. DISCUSSION

In this present study, the findings revealed that great significant variations had been found in the overall strategy use, in SMC category as well as in the individual items. It showed that English majors with positive attitudes towards speaking English reported significantly higher use of 13 strategies than did those with negative attitude. That means that 13 out of total 43 communication strategies varied significantly in relation to attitudes towards speaking English. When compared with the other three variables, students' attitude has been found to be the strongest factor related to their strategy use. Furthermore, when encountering communication difficulties, at the individual level (as presented in Table 5.10), self-reliant achievement strategies were more frequently used by the students who hold positive attitudes towards speaking English. This finding was confirmed the results of studies by Bui and Intaraprasert's (2012) and Tao and Intaraprasert (2013).

The first possible explanation for the findings of the present study related to the link between use of individual CSs and attitudes towards speaking English is motivation. Attitudes are considered as components of motivation in language learning (Gardner, 1985). Skehan (1989) mentions that those students who do well experience reward, and are encouraged to try harder whereas students who do not do so well are discouraged by their lack of success, as a result, lack persistence. In addition, Oxford (1990) states that more motivated learners tended to employ more strategies than less motivated learners. According to a study by Oxford and Nyikos (1989, p. 294), conclude that "The degree of expressed motivation to learn the language was the most powerful influence on strategy choice."

The findings of this present study were in line with a study by Coleman (1996 cited in Cook, 2001), reporting the ten most popular motivations by UK students studying modern languages. Those are 1) For my future career.; 2) Because I like the language.; 3) To travel in different countries.; 4) To have a better understanding of the way of life in the country or countries where it is spoken.; 5) Because I would like to live in the country where it is spoken.; 6) Because I am good at it.; 7) Because it is an international language; 8) To become a better-educated person.; 9) To meet a greater variety of people in my life.; and 10) To get to know/make friends among the people who speak it. Besides, Kariacou and Kobori (1998) explored the views of 226 Slovenian pupils (aged 14-15 years) regarding their motivation to learn English and the views of a sample of 95 student teachers regarding their motivation to become an English teacher. They found that the most frequent reasons given by pupils were 'Because English is an international language', 'Because English helps me with advanced study' and 'Because English will help me with my future career'. The most frequent reasons given by the student teachers were 'English is important to me' and 'I want to help children succeed'.

Obviously, several studies have revealed that more motivated students tend to learn EFL or ESL better than less motivated students (e.g. Kariacou and Kobori, 1998; Shabann and Ghath, 2000; Peng, 2007; Bernuas and Gardner, 2008; and Huang, 2010). Peng (2007) investigated the willingness to communicate in English and motivation among Chinese college students. She reported that motivation was strongly related to students' willingness to communicate in English. Her result was consistent with a statement of Hynes (2011), stating that a lack of motivation is another obstacle to learning whereas a barrier related to motivation is lack of willingness. A study by Huang (2010) also confirmed that motivation was one of the powerful factors of oral communication strategy use. Particularly, Bernuas and Gardner (2008) also indicated that students with higher levels of motivation performed better on English tests than the students with lower motivation. Consequently, it makes sense to say that when language learners have a strong motivation to acquire language, they are more willing to practice and use it without fear of making mistakes, as well as learning new things. This may have enabled the students who held positive attitudes to use more self-reliant achievement strategies, than those with negative attitudes.

Remarkably, students' motivation not only has an effect on their language learning, but also their language proficiency. As reported by Liu (2007), students' attitudes and motivation were positively correlated with their English proficiency. Similarly, Kitjaroonchai and Kitjaroonchai (2012) demonstrated that there is a significant positive relation between students' learning motivation and their academic achievement (GPA). Hence, language/oral proficiency is also hypothesized to be a factor which may explain such significant differences. As stated by Ellis (1994), the relationship between students' strategy use and their language proficiency level is a bi-directional relationship. Moreover, MacIntyre

(1994, p. 188) mentions that "...this might be interpreted to mean that either proficiency influences the choice of strategies or that strategy choice is simply a sign of proficiency level".

A number of previous studies (e.g. Huang and Van Naerssen, 1987; Margolis, 2001; Nakatani, 2006 and 2010; Lam 2010, Tao and Intaraprasert, 2013) have been conducted to demonstrate the relationship between language/oral proficiency and learners' use of communication strategy. They confirmed that learners' oral proficiency has an impact on learners' CS choices when confronting oral communication breakdowns. For example, Chen (2009) and Huang and Van Naerssen (1987) found that the students who have good communicative competence are more willing to communicate. Huang and Van Naerssen (1987) also suggest that successful students are not afraid of losing face when tackling communication problems. Learners tended to use strategies more often because of their improved English proficiency (Gao, 2002).

In a Thai context, the results of past research works (e.g. Weerarak, 2003; Pornpibol, 2005; Prinyajarn, 2007; and Chuanchaisit and Prapphal, 2009) also confirmed that students' language/oral proficiency was a factor influencing different CSs used to different degrees. Able students preferred risk-taking strategies while weaker students tended to use more risk-avoidance strategies when confronting speaking problems (Wannaruk, 2002; Pornpibol, 2005; and Chuanchaisit, 2009). These findings were consistent with what Intaraprasert (2000) states that successful learners may be highly motivated to seek opportunities to expose themselves to English outside the classroom setting. It could be said that high language learning proficiency students, who are dedicated and motivated to practice speaking English, are likely to use achievement strategies; as a result, they achieve higher levels of language proficiency.

The other possible explanation hypothesised by the researcher is that the students' attitudes towards speaking English is attributable to their prior learning experience. Cook (2001) argues that what the students have learned in class does not mean that it is equally productive for all of them as their minds work in different ways. Students base what they do on their previous experience of learning and using language. As stated by Mariani (2011, p. 29), "the choice of a particular strategy in response to a problem or communicative situation depends on variety of factors, linked to the context of strategy use, the personality of the speakers, their level of proficiency, and the teaching approach to which learners are exposed". This means that language learners, who are good at learning language, are likely to have a positive attitude on speaking English. In the meantime, language learners, who had a positive experience of learning English, are likely to have a positive attitude towards speaking English as well. In other words, student's prior learning experience not only affects their attitudes towards speaking English, but also communication strategy use.

Several researchers (Robertson et al, 2000; Hellsten, 2002; Wong, 2004; and Sawir, 2005) have attempted to investigate language learners' language difficulties. They found that language learners lack of confidence speaking English due to their prior learning experience in which their English teachers mainly focused on grammar and reading skills, not conversational skills (Wong, 2004; and Sawir, 2005). Sawir (2005) also suggested that this belief had then become manifested in students' communication behavior, so that they were not able to communicate effectively, socially and academically, and the learning of conversational skills was retarded.

Based on the findings of this present study, it can be said that students' attitudes towards speaking English is an essential factor that is related to the failure or success of EFL/ESL learners. Not only Motivation and language/oral proficiency, but also prior learning experience has a great influence on students' attitude, which will lead them to either positive or negative attitudes towards speaking English and the frequent employment of CSs as well.

Galileo (cited in Carnegie, 1981, p.101) said 'You cannot teach a man anything, you can only help him to find it within himself.' One thing that the teacher can do to help their students have a better attitudes towards learning and speaking English is to encourage and facilitate them when they face language difficulties. Teachers of English, therefore, should raise students' awareness of the importance of English language and encourage students to speak English inside and outside the classroom which will lead them to utilize their language skills in real-life contexts.

As suggested by Noom-ura (2013) English language learning is obviously insufficient if it takes place only in the classroom. Teachers, thus, should be trained to offer strategies and guidance that promote or encourage students' self-directed learning and create their inclination to learn. For those who love learning, the more they study or learn, it will naturally follow that both their comprehension and production skills will be improved. Particularly, communication strategies are needed to be taught as well as students should be encouraged and raised awareness to take risks when communicating including opportunities to use communication strategies (Dornyei, 1995; and Mariani, 2010).

The last possible explanation hypothesized by the researcher is that the students' attitude towards speaking English is attributable to opportunities to speak English. As stated by Littlewood (1984), another important effect on the students' proficiency they achieve will be the quality of the learning opportunities which the environment offers. In Thailand, Thai students have been taught by most proficient at reading and least at speaking and listening. This leads those Thai learners to a lack of opportunity for improving their speaking and insufficient command of English skills for real-world communication (Karnawakul, 2004; Kimsuvan, 2004; and Choomthong, 2014).

Based on the results of the present study, the strongest relationship between students' CS use and attitude towards speaking English was found. The students with positive attitude towards speaking English reported high use of certain strategies than those with negative attitude. Apparently, the students who hold positive attitude towards speaking English reported significantly different employing some certain strategies, for instance "Feeling all right for taking risks while speaking (SMC4)"; and "Not minding if one can't understand every single detail and trying to keep speaking

(SMC5)". Supported by the results of semi-structured interview, lacking opportunities to speak English with native speakers, some interviewees reported that when they had a chance to talk with them, they felt nervous and did not know what to do. However, all of them reported that they did not give up when encountering communication difficulties because they wanted to practice and improve their speaking skill. This result is in line with Bui (2012), students who hold positive attitude towards speaking English have more opportunities to communicate orally in English than those students who hold negative attitude towards speaking English. Hence, it is hypothesized by the researcher that opportunities to speak English may be contributed to the variations of individual CS use in students with different attitude towards speaking English.

To sum up, based on the findings, we found that students who held positive attitudes reported employing significantly more frequently than those students who held negative attitudes for dealing with communication breakdowns. Three factors, namely, motivation, language/oral proficiency, prior learning experience, and opportunities to speak English have been possibly hypothesized that significant variations in individual strategy use according to students' attitudes towards spoken English. Yet, we cannot be definitely certain about what really caused these significant differences; hence, research to examine these aspects is still required.

## V. CONCLUSION

From the research findings summarized in Section 6.2 in response to the research questions, it was found that English majors, generally, studying at the tertiary level in the Northeast of Thailand mostly used communication strategies at the moderate level. There is a relationship between students' attitudes towards speaking English and their strategy use at all three levels: overall use of CSs, CS use in the SMC category, and individual CS use. Arising out of the findings, the students with positive attitude towards speaking English reported greater use of communication strategies than did those with negative attitudes towards speaking English. It is advisable that the teachers should stimulate and encourage the students, especially those who hold negative attitude, by creating relaxing and safe classroom. As proposed by Maslow's (1970 cited in Goodall and Goodall, 2006) theory of human motivation, there is a hierarchy of human needs which are ranked from lower order needs, for example, food, clothes, air, safety, love, and sense of belonging, to higher order needs, for example, self-esteem and self-actualization. Maslow also suggests that the most basic needs have to be met first. This means that when the classroom atmosphere is virtuous and innocuous, the students will feel more comfortable and harmless, which will lead them to be more willing and motivated to learning.

Moreover, teachers should encourage students to continuously use CSs by using reinforcement in order to cheer them up and foster their language learning motivation. For example, if a student tried to use CSs while studying in the classroom and the teacher gave a compliment to him, his behavior would be reinforced, and he would be more likely to use it in the future. Likewise, if a student tried to use CSs while studying in the classroom and the teacher blamed him, his behavior would be punished, and he would be less likely to do it. As argued by Skinner (1948 cited in McLeod, 2007), responses that were reinforced would be repeated, and those that were punished would not.

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