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COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES UNDERLYING LEXICAL SIMPLIFICATION[1]

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Abstract

Several papers have appeared on the strategies of communication used by L2 learners. However, very little work has been done to determine the underlying psychological processes that generate communication strategies (CS). This paper assumes that any description of CS should be based on a description of the processes governing CS. The paper attempts to correlate CS with psychological processes by analyzing interlanguage (IL) written discourse produced by advanced Tamil learners of English as a Second Language. The analysis aims at isolating instances of lexical simplification, identifying co-relative CS and inferring probable psychological processes. The data chosen for study show that the learners employed eight communication strategies (extended use of lexical item, lexical paraphrase, word coinage, L1 equivalence, literal translation of L1 idiom, C1 mode of emphasis, C1 mode of linking constructions and C1 cohesive devices) corresponding to three psychological processes, namely, (a) overgeneralization, a process in which second language learners violate certain semantic/stylistic/collocational restrictions, (b) creative transfer, a process in which learners seem to effect required morphological and syntactic transformations to the items they transfer to L2 discourse, and (c) cultural relativity, a process in which learners appear to operate in the mode and sequence of thought patterns characteristic of their native culture. In the light of these findings, probable implications for second language learning and teaching are discussed.

Introduction

Second/foreign language learners appear to adopt a number of strategies with a view to achieving their communicative goals despite their inadequate syntactic, semantic and pragmatic capability in their target language (TL). The crucial role played by learner strategies in L2 developmental sequences has been well emphasized in the second language acquisition literature (see, for instance, Wode 1981, 1983 and the references thereof). The learners' attempt to fulfil their communicative needs results in simplification. It is not as if the learners consciously simplify any linguistic item, because as Corder (1975) points out, they cannot simplify what they do not possess; but to the analyst, the interlanguage (IL) of second language learners represents a simplified code of the TL. Simplification, then, is a descriptive term denoting a psychologically real process derived from cognitive constraints on learnability and expressibility (Meisel 1983). It can operate at phonological, syntactic, lexical and pragmatic levels of language use. The present study is concerned with lexical simplification which, according to Blum and Levenston (1978: 399), is "the process and/or the result of making do with less words". This definition conflates the distinction between process and result. In this paper, I maintain the distinction. Lexical simplification, then, is the result of the language learner's lack of awareness of semantic, collocational and idiomatic restrictions on lexical choice. It appears to operate according to universal principles derived from the individual's semantic competence in his/her mother tongue. The universal principles involved are probably based on systematic relationships between lexical items such as hyponymy and converseness. The awareness of these relationships, together with the ability to use circumlocution and paraphrase, is part of every speaker's semantic competence and enables him/her when the need arises to express complex meanings by employing appropriate communication strategies (CS).

In the current literature on second language acquisition research, one comes across two definitions for CS — one is interactional and the other is psycholinguistic. The interactional

definition states that CS are mutual attempts of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where the requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared (Tarone 1980). As per this definition, interactive procedures employed by interlocutors become crucial to the concept of CS. According to the psycholinguistic definition proposed by Faerch and Kasper (1980: 81), CS are "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal". As per this definition, the learner's problem-orientedness and consciousness become crucial to the concept of CS. Presumably, the former definition relates mainly to spoken discourse and the latter to spoken as well as written discourse. As Faerch and Kasper (1984) point out, yet another significant difference between these definitions is that CS can be directly identified in performance data according to interactional definition whereas this is not always the case with strategies defined on the basis of the psycholinguistic definition. In the latter case, the analyst is forced to rely on indirect evidence to a large extent. For my immediate purpose of analysis and interpretation, I rely on the psycholinguistic definition because my study deals with interlanguage *written* discourse where the interactional component is less obvious and also because I am interested in focusing on isolating probable psychological processes underlying CS.

Psychological processes are cognitive activities which take place in the learner's mind (see Clark and Clark 1977, Faerch and Kasper 1980 for details). It is only by inference that analysts attempt to reconstruct the mental processes which lie behind the learner's observable behaviour in the IL communication. Process is an overall, unconscious psychological phenomenon which underlies learner IL production whereas strategy is marked by at least two criteria: problem-orientedness and consciousness (see Faerch and Kasper 1980, 1984 for a detailed discussion).[2]

It has been widely accepted that CS are governed by certain psychological processes. However, very little work has been done to determine the underlying processes that generate the various CS. It is assumed here that any descriptive taxonomy of CS should be based on a description of the processes underlying those CS. Keeping this assumption in mind, this study was devised to elicit from IL written discourse data details of simplified lexical items, dominant mode of simplification and process of simplification. The first gives us the result of lexical simplification, the second suggests CS and the third implies psychological processes. In the context of the present study, then, psychological processes are inferable from CS just as CS are identifiable from simplified lexical products which, in turn, can be gathered from the IL of learners of a second/foreign language.

Method

Learners chosen for this study were, at the time of data collection, in the first year of their undergraduate programme. All these learners share the following features in common: (a) age (17 plus), (b) sex (male), (c) mother tongue (Tamil), and (d) almost the same level of proficiency in the English language, (e) taught through the same method of teaching, (f) about the same period of exposure to the target language (eight years of formal second language education in English) and (g) similar cultural and social background. They were required at short notice and without preparation or the use of dictionaries, to write the story of any film they had recently seen, stating why they liked or disliked the film. They were given fifty minutes, the usual duration of a class. I selected the first draft of the composition of ten learners who have written about films which I had also seen. I did this in order to have a better understanding of what they would write about. Besides, this also facilitated an attempt to study CS not in isolated deviant IL production, but in IL discourse derived from situational context. These ten pieces of expository prose formed the data. The texts were then reformulated. Reformulation involves tidying up of the learners' utterances to conform to the L2 norm. Two native speakers and experienced teachers of English did the reformulation. Perhaps, is is worth mentioning here that no two native speakers reformulate an utterance in identical ways. How-

ever, what matters here is the fact that most of the learner utterances required reformulation one way or another. By comparing the original text with the reformulated version. I identified all the products of lexical simplification and then classified them into types. I considered only those items which have occurred at least five times in the data. Later I classified these types in terms of CS and finally attempted to infer psychological processes governing CS. A post-analysis interview was conducted with the subjects in order to get access to their intended meaning. This interview was conducted by the researcher and in the L1 of the subjects. The interview also helped the researcher determine whether the subjects were actually using a strategy and not an IL rule.

Results and Discussion

Communication Strategies

The analysis yielded the following eight CS[3] : (1) extended use of lexical items, (2) lexical paraphrase, (3) word coinage, (4) L1 equivalence, (5) literal translation of L1 idioms, (6) C1 mode of emphasis, (7) C1 mode of linking constructions, and (8) C1 cohesive devices. Strategies 1-4 have very well been documented in the literature (see Bialystok and Frohlich 1980, Paribakht 1983 and Tarone 1980). Strategy 5 has been discussed in the literature but with differing interpretations (see Paribakht 1983, and Kellerman 1983). The data analysed for this study shed new light on this issue. Strategies 6-8 are new strategies proposed in this paper. I illustrate and discuss below all these strategies. For the sake of completion, I have included a brief discussion of those strategies which have already been documented in the literature.

Extended use of lexical item

This strategy results when the learners stretch the semantic dimensions of the L2 vocabulary that they already possess. Consider the following (T = IL text; RF = reformulated version):

1. T: . . . steals one of   RF: . . . kidnaps. . .
       the two sons. . .

Presumably, "steal" is a common lexical item learners have learnt in lower classes. Selectional restrictions are violated here as the lexical item restricted to − human is stretched to + human object as well.

2. T: The whole film is   RF: . . . is realistic.
       interesting.
3. T: The scenery. . . was   RF: . . . is beautiful.
       interesting.
4. T: The lakes and oceans   RF: . . . picturesque.
       are interesting.
5. T: The paradies and jokes   RF: . . . are hilarious.
       are interesting.

The above examples show how learners attempt to extend a known lexical item to different contexts which demand specific words. Too much semantic load is placed upon the generalized usage 'interesting' and is extended indiscriminately to contexts where four different lexical items are required. The post-analysis interview with the subjects in their L1 revealed what they actually had in mind was not 'interesting' but words similar to the ones used in the reformulated text. For the learner, one lexical item 'interesting' takes on the meaning of four different words.

The following examples show that the learners, in order to communicate, make use of lexical items which may be semantically and conceptually appropriate but are collocationally unacceptable. Though these words are adequate to convey the intended message, they sound strange to native speakers of the target language:

6. T:	. . . wireless contact also snaps	RF:	. . . wireless contact is also lost.
7. T:	. . . everyone compelled	RF:	. . . everyone encouraged
8. T:	. . . the name of the film	RF:	. . . the title of. . .
9. T:	. . . his senior. . .	RF:	. . . his boss. . .

Lexical paraphrase

This is a strategy in which the learners have recourse to elaborate descriptive paraphrasing where speakers of the target language prefer a single lexical item to capture the meaning of a high level word.

10. T:	. . two sons who resemble one another	RF:	. . . twins
11. T:	. . . comedy actors	RF:	. . . comedians
12. T:	. . . writer of poems	RF:	. . . poet

A characteristic feature of such a paraphrase is the introduction of separate words to specify some of the semantic features of the defined word. For instance, 'two sons who resemble one another' contains some of the semantic specifications of the reformulated word 'twins'.

Word coinage

This strategy involves the introduction of a word which is not at all part of the L2 lexis. This shows how creative the learners can be. However, their creativity is not wild as evidenced from the examples given below:

13. T:	. . . drunker	RF:	. . . drunkard
14. T:	. . . drinkman	RF:	. . . drunkard
15. T:	. . . the music man	RF:	. . . the music director
16. T:	. . . is bad natured	RF:	. . . is a bad character

The learners are aware of the technique of word formation by adding a suffix. They also, presumably, know that we can add '–r' or '–er' to form words like *baker, dancer* etc. and 'man' to form *policeman, postman* etc. They tend to follow the same analogy unaware of the restrictions imposed on certain words. In the case of 16, the learner obviously knows the word 'good natured' and also knows that the opposite of good is bad; therefore, if 'good natured' is an acceptable word in English, why not 'bad natured'?

L1 equivalence

L1 equivalence is a very common strategy employed by second language learners. Consider the following:

17. T:	He drank *well.*	RF:	He got drunk.	L1:	*nalla kudichaan*
18. T:	*outshows* love.	RF.:	. . shows love	L1:	anbu *veli kaatukirathu*
19. T:	*drive* on the donkey	RF:	. . ride on. . .	L1:	. . *ottinaan*
20. T:	*released from* the habit of drinking	RF:	. . . gave up drinking	L1:	. . kudi pazhakkathil *irunthu vidupattaan*

If translated into L1, the lexical items used by the learners make perfect sense semantically and collocationally. To elaborate, consider the L1 version of 18:

anbu	veli	kaatukirthu	=======⇒	outshows love
love	out	shows		

Similarly, consider the L1 version of 20:

kudi	pazhakkathil	irunthu	vidupattaan	
drink	habit	from	======⇒ released	released from the habit of drink

As the examples clearly show, the learners while transferring L1 equivalent lexical items effect such transformations as are demanded by L2 rules of morphological derivations and syntactic transformations.[4]

Literal translation of L1 idioms

Literal translation of L1 idioms is clearly related to L1 equivalence. There is, however, an important difference between the two because literal translation of L1 idioms indicates the learners' lack of metalinguistic awareness in L1. The learners seem to be unaware of the fact that idioms in any language are a class apart. This lack of metalinguistic awareness is not reflected in the CS, L1 equivalence. It has been reported that Persian learners of English also employ the same strategy (Paribakht 1983). The data present the following examples:

21. T:	add beauty to her beauty	RF:	add to her beauty	L1:	aval azhahukku azhahu oottukirathu
22. T:	calm the mind	RF:	make us feel peaceful	L1:	manathai amaithi paduthukirathu
23. T:	will be green in my mind	RF:	I shall never forget	L1:	enathu manathil pasumaiyaaha irukkum
24. T:	the heart to bear anything	RF:	stout-hearted	L1:	ethayum thaangum ithayam

As reported in the previous section, in the case of idioms too, the learners suitably modify the morphological and syntactic features of their lexical products in tune with the demands of the structure of the TL. Notice the word ordering effected by the learners in the L2 versions of 21:

aval	azhahukku	azhahu	oottukirathu	
			=====⇒	add beauty
her	beauty + to	beauty	add	to her beauty

Again, in 23

enathu	manathil	pasumaiyaaha	irukkum	
			=====⇒	will be
my	mind + in	green + as	will be	green in my mind

C1 mode of emphasis

This is a strategy in which the learners use two semantically redundant words in the same sentence. I shall call this strategy C1 mode of emphasis because the learners appear to follow the native (C1) cultural thought pattern (see discussion below) according to which such usages are an acceptable mode of emphasis.

25. T:	. . . to obey only the words of her brother	RF: . . . obey only her brother
26. T:	. . . have a real and true affection for her	RF: . . . was very fond of her
27. T:	Songs are very nice and sweet.	RF: Songs are very sweet.
28. T:	The songs are wonderfully melodious to hear.	RF: The songs are melodious.

Native speakers feel that the idea of obeying the words of somebody is lexicalized in the word 'obey'; therefore, to say 'obey the words of' seems to them to be repetitive. In other examples, the use of semantically redundant words is quite apparent: 'real and true', 'nice and sweet' etc. Levenston (1978) and Bartelt (1983) report similar tendencies among L2 learners.

C1 mode of linking constructions

29. T:	He drank well and he was returning home and on the side of the road in an accident he lost his left hand.	RF: He went and got drunk. While returning home, he met with an accident and lost his left hand.
30. T:	The heroine has a sister and her husband wants to marry the heroine.	RF: The heroine had a married sister whose husband wanted to take the heroine as a second wife.
31. T:	The hero defeat them and became a famous writer of poems.	RF: The hero showed his mettle by becoming a a famous poet.

The above examples reveal the strategy the learners follow for linking constructions. Notice that almost all the ideas in the above illustrations are coordinately linked and that there is very little subordination. Kaplan (1966) reports similar tendencies among Arabic learners of English.

Examples like the following

32. T:	The innocent child of the culprit is punished unlawfully by the influence of the lawyer.	RF:	Because of the influence of the lawyer, an innocent child of the criminal is punished,
33. T:	The hostess then guides the plane safe from what would have been sure death by her courage.	RF:	Showing great courage, the hostess guides the plane to safety from what would have been certain death.
34. T:	... the climax the story was building up into.	RF:	... the story builds up to a powerful climax.

show that the learners execute a sequence of operations designed to produce native language utterances in accordance with Cl mode of thought.

Cl Cohesive devices

Yet another strategy followed by the learners is to draw from the ideas of cohesive devices peculiar to native cultural thought pattern. The corpus studied here presents three types of such usages. The first type is illustrated by the following examples:

35. T:	But one thing...	RF:	However, one thing...
36. T:	But at last...	RF:	So, at last...
37. T:	so they wanted...	RF:	and they wanted...

where the learners seem to be aware of the need for cohesive markers but introduce the wrong ones. In the second type, they introduce cohesive markers where none is needed. E.g.:

38. T:	But he got...	RF:	$\emptyset$ He got...
39. T:	So the people...	RF:	$\emptyset$ The people...
40. T:	But the engineer...	RF:	$\emptyset$ The engineer...
41. T:	So, the film...	RF:	$\emptyset$ The film...

The third type of examples:

42. T:	$\emptyset$ He takes...	RF:	As a result, he takes...
43. T:	$\emptyset$ At the end...	RF:	But, at the end...

shows that the learners do not use any cohesive marker where speakers of the target language would use one.

Psychological Processes

The eight CS discussed above lead us to infer from them three psychological processes: overgeneralization, creative transfer and cultural relativity.

Overgeneralization

The first strategy discussed above – extended use of lexical item – involves the use of a general term with wide range of meaning in contexts which require a more specific term. It is undoubtedly a case of semantic overloading. The second strategy, lexical paraphrase, however, involves the substitution of a high level word by a descriptive phrase. Blum and Levenson (1978) suggest that such renderings can at best supply referential meaning of the original but not its connotative meaning. The third strategy, word coinage, indicates that, as the learners' exposure to the target language is inadequate, they tend to produce incorrect forms by false analogy. In the corpus on study, the technique of word formation by adding a suffix has misled the learners in creating unacceptable lexical items.

These three strategies appear to be triggered by various aspects of the same psychological process namely overgeneralization. That is, learners make inductive generalization about the target language system on the basis of the data to which they are exposed (Corder 1975). In the context of lexical simplification, overgeneralization may be defined as a process in which a language learner, under communication pressure, violates certain semantic, collocational selectional restrictions in order to communicate in the target language. The underlying assumption here is that the language learner as an active participant involved in the process of second/ foreign language learning will deal with the TL directly without any extensive use of his native language. There are surely occasions when the learners are forced by communication pressure to rely extensively on their native language. This explains yet another psychological process namely, creative transfer.

Creative Transfer

In the context of lexical simplification, creative transfer may be defined as the process in which a language learner attributes to a lexical item of the target language all the functions – referential and conceptual meaning, connotation, collocability, register restriction – of its assumed first language translation equivalent (Blum and Levenston 1978). Notice that the learners studied here do not blindly transfer an L1 lexical item into L2 discourse, but effect required morphological derivations and syntactic transformations. The way the transfer from L1 to L2 has been effected is controlled and constrained. In other words, transfer is not a mechanical process; it is rather a creative one. The present study indicates that this process has resulted in two communication strategies: L1 equivalence and literal translation of L1 idioms. When the former strategy is employed, the learners seem to perform a relatively simple task of transferring certain semantic features of L1 lexical items to L2 vocabulary which results in the production of semantically deviant utterances. The latter strategy, however, appears to be a complex process by which learners translate a language-specific idiomatic usage and produce highly creative and equally unacceptable usages.

It is not out of place to point out that examples 21 to 24 stand as counter evidence to the Kellerman hypothesis which states that such idioms will be felt by the language learner as language-specific and consequently transfer will be blocked. Explaining his hypothesis, Kellerman (1983: 117) states: "if a feature is perceived as infrequent, irregular, semantically or structurally opaque, or in any other way exceptional, what we could in other words call 'psycholinguistically marked', then its transferability will be inversely proportional to its degree of markedness. Transferability is not itself a predictor of performance, but is one of the determinants of whether an L1 structure will be treated as *language specific* (not transferable to a given L2) or *language neutral* (that is, tranferable to a given L2)" (emphasis his). But the learners studied here do not seem to have been constrained by 'psycholinguistically marked' features of L1 expressions. A counter evidence to the Kellerman hypothesis has also been provided by Fakhri

(1984). In a case study on the use of CS in narrative discourse of a learner of Morroccan Arabic as a second language, he reported that his subject expanded the use of formulaic expressions to syntactic and semantic contexts in which they never occur in native speech.[5]

Cultural Relativity

The data under study have a number of simplified lexical products which can hardly be classified under overgeneralization or creative transfer. It appears that there are extra-lingual factors governing certain aspects of IL phenomena. The key for their explanation perhaps lies in what Kaplan (1966) calls 'cultural thought patterns'. He argues that a particular form of logic, which is the basis of rhetoric, evolves out of a culture; it is not universal. Quoting evidence from the written discourse of learners belonging to three basic language groups, Kaplan states that "the foreign language student who has mastered the syntax of English may still write a bad paragraph or a bad paper unless he also masters the logic of English" (p. 15). Saville-Troike (1975: 84) states that "a great deal of cross-cultural misunderstanding occurs when meanings of words in two languages are assumed to be the same, but actually reflect differing cultural patterns". Recent research on contrastive rhetoric (see Kaplan, ed., 1983) bear immense evidence to the fact that certain lexical meanings and meaning relations in a language are rooted in cultural factors. Bartelt (1983) alludes to the possibility that the rhetorical redundancy he found in the Apachean English IL could be traced to the "thinking process" of Apachean speakers.

The three CSs – C1 mode of emphasis, C1 mode of linking constructions and C1 cohesive devices – derived from examples 25-43 are probably the result of a process which can be called cultural relativity. As these examples reveal, the learners appear to be confused in their logic probably because they are operating on a mode of thought peculiar to their culture to produce utterances in a language which reflects a different cultural thought pattern. In the context of lexical simplification, cultural relativity may be defined as a process in which second/foreign language learners operate in the mode and sequence of thought patterns characteristic of their culture which leads them to produce utterances in the target language which appears to be deviant from the rhetorical norms of the target language. Presumably, cultural relativity is governed by certain psycholinguistic aspects of a general processing system that reflects on and interacts with the norms of native thought patterns. It also appears to be a kind of top down processing where higher level predicates which are aspects of one's organization of thought influence lower level predicates like word meaning, discoursal features, etc. In other words, culture-specific thought patterns appear to interact with language-specific discourse features in as yet undetermined ways. In this interaction, it appears, at least in the context of IL narrative written discourse produced by the subjects under study, that the influence of cultural relativity is both qualitatively and quantitatively higher than that of native language. The study revealed that the largest number of simplified lexical items (45%) produced by the learners come under overgeneralization; followed by those which can be explained within the framework of cultural relativity (40%); and only a small proportion (15%) could be accounted for by creative transfer.

I shall call the thought process of learners' native language community 'C1 thought pattern' and that of the target language community 'C2 thought pattern'. The C2 thought pattern is the weakest link in the repertoire of second and foreign language learners. However, it is obvious that learners do make an attempt to closely approximate to C2 norms of thought pattern. If this approximation were not there, then, there would be a considerable breakdown in IL communication.

IMPLICATIONS

The notion of CS, in general, is useful in helping us understand certain crucial aspects of IL phenomena. Besides, it may be useful for evaluating L2 communicative performance as well.

Ellis (1984), using the notion of CS, proposes a chart for assessment of communicative ability of second/foreign language learners. Regarding the findings of the present study, more research on the IL of learners from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds should be conducted before implications can be drawn with any certainty. However, certain tentative suggestions are in order.

In a multi-lingual and multi-cultural society, the processes of cultural relativity and creative transfer pose crucial impediments for helping language learners reach the level of acceptable linguistic capability. In other words, it is a fairly difficult task for learners to assimilate the thought process peculiar to the TL community. Extensive reading of TL materials, classroom tasks in cogent paragraph writing and oral communicative exercises using appropriate rhetorical devices would enable the learners to develop a feel for C2 thought process.

Further, advanced learners of a second/foreign language may be made aware of the rhetorical deviance in their speech and writing. This is possible if classroom teachers keep themselves posted with experimental results of contrastive discourse analyses and make judicious use of these results for teaching purposes to highlight rhetorical features peculiar to C1 and C2 thought processes.

The present study is constrained by certain limitations: no attempt was made (a) to study the learners' passive knowledge of lexical alternatives, (b) to know and correlate the learners' semantic competence in the first language, (c) to correlate the learners' simplified lexical products with syntatic products, and (d) to assess the communicative effect of the learners' utterances. These areas may be taken up for further study the results of which might shed more light into various aspects of IL communication in particular and second/foreign language acquisition in general.

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NOTES

1. Revised version of a project report submitted to the Department of Linguistics and Modern English Language, the University of Lancaster, 1981. I wish to thank Chris Candlin, Mahavir Jain, Larry Selinker and Elaine Tarone for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.
2. A different perspective on the relationship between process and strategy has been proposed by Hawkins (1987). He conceives of a continuum from the covert and unconscious at the process end to the overt conscious at the technique end. He plots strategy towards the technique end.
3. Most of the CS discussed in the literature are based on a taxonymy proposed by Tarone (1977). Recently, however, attempts have been made to reconceptualize CS taxonymy. Bialystok and Kellerman (1987) and Poulisse (1987), for instance, propose two basic CS typology: conceptual and linguistic.
4. Cf: Poulisse's (1987) "morphological creativity" and Zimmermann's (1987) "form-oriented approximations".
5. For a detailed discussion on counter evidence to the Kellerman hypothesis, see Kumaravadivelu, in preparation.

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