Communication Strategies Among EFL Students - An Examination Of Frequency Of Use And Types Of Strategies Used

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Abstract

This study investigated how and when oral communication strategies are used in group discussions by international students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, a public university in Malaysia. It aims to examine the differences in the use of communication strategies between high and low proficient speakers. The participants were a group of ten low proficient Arabic speakers of English and a group of ten high proficient Chinese and Arabic speakers of English. Data elicited from audio recordings of oral group discussions and a self-report questionnaire was used to identify communication strategies used. The findings showed that the subjects resorted to ten out of the twelve types of communication strategies specified by Tarone (1980), Faerch and Kasper (1983), and Willems (1987). The most frequently employed communication strategy was code switching; an interlingual strategy and the least used strategy was word coinage; an intralingual strategy. Further investigation indicated that different levels of oral proficiency influenced the use of communication strategies from two aspects. They are the frequency of use and the selection of types of communication strategies. This implies that international students studying at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) need to be made aware of the use of communication strategies depending on their level of proficiency and the fact that raising the awareness of both low proficient and also high proficient speakers to strategies that are used by speakers of different proficiency levels may well help ease communication.

Keywords: Communication strategy; classification; EFL; oral discussion; English language proficiency

Introduction

Communication is one of the crucial skills that challenge learners to different degrees. The main reason why communication has attracted attention across disciplines is that communication permeates virtually all human interaction activities. What makes human beings unique is that human communication is cognitively, emotionally, and socially complex.

For ease of communication, it is necessary for the learners to find efficient means through which they can convey their ideas. This may be due to the absence of strategic, linguistic, or sociolinguistic competence in a language. These efforts to eliminate the gaps are known as communication strategies ('CS's henceforth). As Bialystok (1990) puts it, the familiar ease and fluency with which we sail from one idea to the next in our first language is constantly shattered by some gap in our knowledge of a second language. Although it is hard, both native and non-native speakers manage to take resort to certain expressions or grammatical structures to make themselves understood (Faucette, 2001).

This research is carried out based on the belief that international students studying at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) need to be made aware of the use of communication strategies depending on their level of proficiency. Hence, this paper seeks to address the following questions:
1. What are the types and frequency of use of CSs by low proficient (LP) and high proficient (HP) international students?; and
2. What are the international students' perceptions toward the use of each type of communication strategy?

The main contention of this paper is to pave the path for a better understanding of the communicative abilities of international students in general and UKM students, in particular. When it is learned how students use CSs, it is possible to help improve the way lecturers teach communicative classes and so assist students with limited oral proficiency to communicate better in English.

Background of EFL studies in Communicative Strategies among Arab and Chinese students

Learning a foreign language includes the ability to communicate. Communication assists people to send and receive messages effectively and negotiate meaning (Rubin & Thompson, 1994). Nowadays, how to communicate effectively in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting has turned into an essential skill next to reading and writing.

Much research has been conducted discussing the various problems of Arab learners of English, but there has been very little attention paid to the ways of solving these problems or tackling the importance of the development of EFL learners' strategic competence to solve their communication problems. The significance of the issue can be seen in the great number of erroneous utterances that Arab learners of English produce in oral performance and their recourse to CSs (1637 CSs instances), as shown in Rababah's

study (2005). But further research needs to be conducted to identify how these CSs can be used effectively. The Chinese EFL learners, on the other hand, also have problem when they communicate in English. According to Walker (1996), their communicative behavior is influenced by cultural aspects such as harmony, social hierarchy, and compliance. Chinese learners tend to accept status differences as legitimate and they also tend not to say what they really mean if they think it might hurt others in the group. Liu (2001) added that face-saving and politeness strategies used by Chinese students in American classrooms affect their oral communication. He observed that Chinese students' silence in the classroom is related to the Chinese cultural concept of saving face and not a lack of communication skills.

Cultural notes such as these may also influence the choice and use of CSs. Other researchers (Tarone & Yule 1989; Oxford 1990; O'Malley and Chamot 1990) recognize these aspects too and support the idea of teaching CSs to help develop EFL students' communication skills either by raising learners' consciousness or training them. Therefore, learning CSs is undeniably useful for EFL learners.

Framework of Communicative Strategies

Communication is simply defined as a process in which a message is sent from senders to receivers. Technically, it is said that the sender encodes a message and the receiver decodes it (Thao, 2005). The term communication strategy was coined by Selinker (1972); it refers to the approach that a learner employs for communication with a native speaker. According to Surapa and Channarong (2011), CS typologies and classifications have been classified differently following the principles of terminology and categorization of different researchers. To date, there is no agreement on these classifications.

Bialystok (1990) comprehensively analyzed CSs for second language use and Dornyei (1995) classified different types of CSs. The psycholinguistic perspective of Faérch and Kasper (1983, 1984) and the interactional view of Tarone (1980) have been widely employed to investigate the application of CSs. In the psychological problem-solving framework proposed by Faérch and Kasper's (1983; 1984), when speakers are short of linguistic resources, they resort to CSs to solve their communicative problems. By restructuring the utterances, they manage to compensate for the lack of certain linguistic information. Based on the psychological problem-solving framework, the strategies are classified into reduction strategies and achievement strategies. Reduction strategies such as meaning replacement, message abandonment and topic avoidance are used for the purpose of giving up a fragment of the original communication goal. On the other hand, achievement strategies such as appeal, literal translation, code-switching, restructuring, word coinage, paraphrasing and nonlinguistic strategies are used to maintain the original goal of the language user. The use of achievement strategies can help the interlocutors bridge the communication gaps.

In the interactional view presented by Tarone (1980; 1981), however, the main attention is directed to the joint negotiation of meaning between the speakers. This means that the

partners can consciously make decisions based on their communicative intentions and when they lack sufficient linguistic resources in a conversation, they can employ CSs by asking for assistance or offering help to fill the gap in communication. In Tarone's classification of CSs, there are communicative strategies including transfer (for example, language switch and literal translation), paraphrase (for example, word coinage, approximation, and circumlocution), appeal for mime, assistance, avoidance (for example, message abandonment and topic avoidance). These strategies resemble Faérch and Kasper's (1984) framework, but the emphasis is that both the addressor and addressee actively make use of the CSs to assist each other when they face problems.

Tarone's framework supports the frameworks suggested by Paribakht (1985) and Labarca and Khanji (1986). Myriad studies (for example, Bialystok, 1983; Bialystok and Frohlich, 1980; Haastrup and Phillipson, 1983; Lafford, 2004; Kellerman, Ammerlaan, Bongaerts and Poulisse, 1990; Poulisse and Schils, 1989) have employed Faérch and Kasper's (1984) psycholinguistic framework. To support these two established frameworks, Clennell (1995) introduced a discourse perspective of CSs which is, in fact, based on strategies of Faérch and Kasper's (1984) notion of advance planning. Though known for their psychological problem-solving view of CSs, Faérch and Kasper believe that advanced learners can predict a communication problem before it occurs and resort to related CSs for smooth and fluent communication.

The first systematic analysis to clarify the concept of CSs was conducted by Varadi (1980), who defined CSs as a means which a learner uses to convey his message when linguistic resources fail to do so. Accordingly, CSs refer to a conscious attempt to communicate the learner's thought when the interlanguage structures are inadequate to convey that thought. To Faerch and Kasper (1983), CSs refer to the employed techniques when one fails to explicitly express oneself. While some strategies may be utilized at a higher frequency, others are hardly used (Avval, 2009).

Dornyei (1995) put forward two branches of CSs which vastly differ from each other: avoidance and compensation. The first one refers to the tendency of the learner not to use certain linguistic elements due to phonological, syntactic, or lexical constraints. It can also be related to the topic of discussion (Brown, 2000). Topic avoidance may be the most frequent means that students have ever employed. For instance, when asked a specific question, the student who does not know the answer will just keep silent about it, hence, although useful for day to day interaction, the avoidance strategy may not be the best way for EFL students to learn a foreign language.

The second branch of CSs is the compensatory strategies which involve compensation for missing knowledge. According to Dornyei's (1995) classification, there are eleven types of compensatory strategies with varying degrees of application, for example, circumlocution, word coinage, prefabricated patterns, appealing for help and stalling, time-gaining strategies, etc. To Tarone (1980), CS refers to the mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared. The central concept is the joint negotiation of meaning. Figure 1 shows Tarone's taxonomy of CSs.
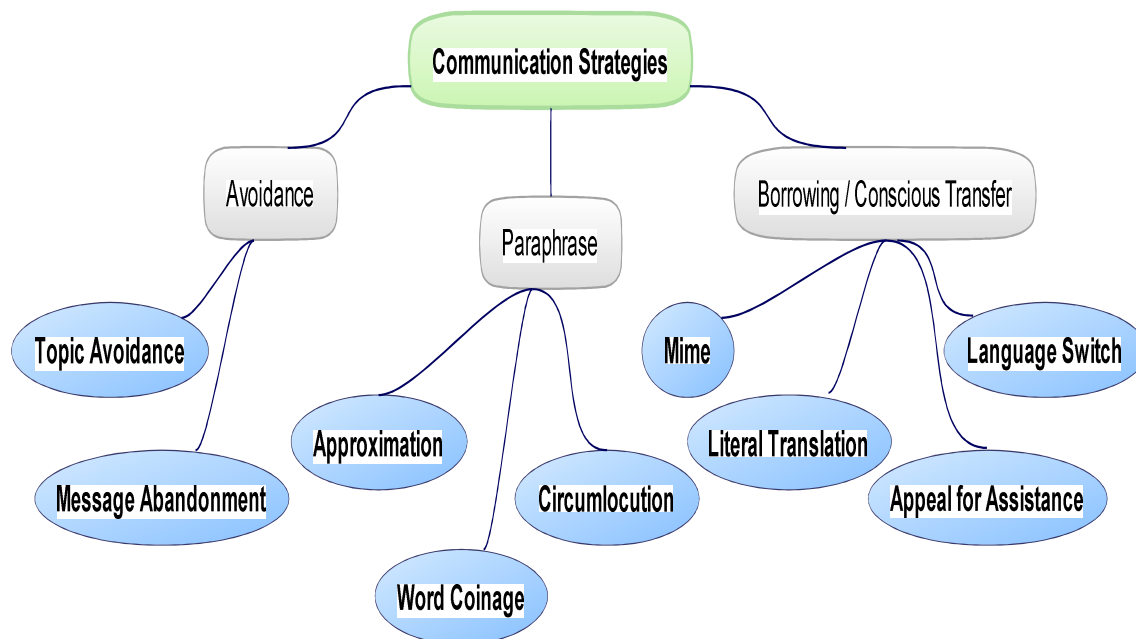
Figure 1: Tarone's taxonomy of communication strategies (1980)

Tarone's typology comprises several categories including a) avoidance which is divided into topic avoidance and message abandonment, b) paraphrase, including approximation, word coinage, and circumlocution and c) transfer encompassing literal translation, language switch, appeal for assistance, and mime.

According to Bialystok (1990), generally, the varieties of taxonomies proposed in the literature differ primarily in terminology and overall categorizing principles rather than in the substance of specific strategies. Table 1 shows the most common classification of CSs.

Table 1: The classification of the most common communication strategies adapted from Tarone (1977), Faerch and Kasper (1984), and Willems (1987)

Avoidance or Reduction Strategies		
1	**Message Abandonment:** the interlocutors start their talk but fail to keep talking because of language difficulties, so they give it up.	**Avoidance**
2	**Topic Avoidance:** the learners refrain from talking about the topics which they may not be able to continue for linguistic reasons.	
Achievement or compensatory strategies		
3	**Literal translation:** the learners literally translate a word, a compound word, an idiom, or a structure from L1 into L2.	**Interlingual Strategies (strategies**
4	**Borrowing or code switching**; the learners use an L1 word or phrase with an L1 pronunciation.	
	Foreignizing: the learners utilize an L1 word or phrase by	

5	morphologically or phonologically adjusting it to an L2 word.	**that involve transfer from L1 to L2)**
6	**Approximation or Generalization**: the learners employ an L2 word which is semantically in common with the targeted lexical item.	**Intralingual strategies (strategies that involve only L2)**
7	**Word coinage**: the learners coin a non-existing L2 word by overgeneralization.	
8	**Circumlocution**: the learners describe or exemplify the action or object instead of using the right L2 structure or item.	
9	**Use of all-purpose words**: the learners use a general word to fill the vocabulary gaps.	
10	**Self-repair or restructuring**: the learners establish a new speech plan when their first attempt fails.	
11	**Appeals for assistance**: the learners turn to partners for assistance (e.g. Do you understand?; Can you speak more slowly? what do you call?).	
12.	**Stealing or Time-gaining strategies**: the learners employ such hesitation devices as fillers or gambits to gain time to think.	

Based on Table 1, which is adapted from Tarone (1977), Faerch and Kasper (1984), and Willems (1987), there are 12 CSs which EFL learners employ in their communication to varying degrees. Some learners may make use of all of them and some may choose to employ a few of them. However, these strategies help the learner to establish successful communication.

Methodology

This study adopts both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. Triggered by the communicative strategies proposed by Tarone (1980), Tarone (1977), Faerch and Kasper (1984), and Willems (1987), this study is designed to elicit and describe the CSs used by the international students at UKM.

Participants

The participants were selected based on their willingness to participate and on their level of proficiency in the English language. According to the university language proficiency regulation, all international students who do not have IELTS or TOEFL certificates as proof of their language proficiency have to sit for a University Placement Test referred to as the 'English Proficiency Placement Test (EPPT). Students are tested on the four language skills; speaking, listening, reading and writing. They are graded based on four bands starting from band four to band one, i.e., very good user, good user, limited user, and very limited user. In this research, students who fall in the category of bands four and three are regarded as High proficient (HP, henceforth) in English and those who scored bands two and one are labeled as Low Proficient (LP, henceforth) in English.

The participants for this research included twenty volunteered postgraduate students from the Engineering, Science and Technology, Information Science and Technology faculties at UKM. There was a demographic distribution of 10 LP Arab students in one group and ten HP Arab and Chinese students in the other group. They were all males aged 20-25 and these two groups represented the majority of the international students at UKM.

Instruments

Two types of research instruments were used in the present study. Data were collected through a self –report questionnaire and the audio recordings of the group discussions.

Questionnaire

The aim of this self-report questionnaire was to obtain detailed information on the learners'self-awareness of the employment of CSs and their attitudes toward the use of each type of communicative strategies. The questionnaire adapted from Oxford (1990) contained ten types of CSs defined in the classifications of Tarone (1980) and Tarone (1977), Færch and Kasper (1983), and Willems (1987). The subjects were asked to rate the frequency of use for each strategy and its effectiveness. The rating scales included five points: (a) always, (b) often, (c) sometimes, (d) seldom, (e) never or (f) not sure. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part was meant to gather personal information about the subjects' gender, age, the course that they are majoring in, and how many years they had studied English. The second part consisted of ten items in order to rate the frequency and the effectiveness of the use of CSs.

Oral Discussion

The participants divided into HP and LP were separately invited for the oral discussions. The oral discussions were meant to be casual; therefore, they were provided food. They were informed that their communication performance was important in the programme and their discussions would be audio-taped.

Procedure

The quantitative analysis involved frequency count of CSs employed by the participants. To measure this, a self-report questionnaire (see Part B, Appendix) was adapted from Oxford (1996) and distributed among the respondents. The qualitative dimension, however, was analyzed manually by the participants actual use of CSs in their recorded oral discussions.

As this study aimed to investigate the oral CSs employed by the international students at UKM, the oral group discussion was deemed as appropriate to elicit speech data from the participants. The oral group discussion reflects learner's oral performance in a communication setting where it is possible to observe spontaneous speech production (Gradman & Hanania, 1991).The oral group discussion was systematically carried out by asking similar questions in order that the consistency of format would be taken into account and each group would have an equal length of time for the same amount of information. For instance, each group was asked a main question, 'Do you think that

studying overseas is better than studying in your country?' In addition, several questions were added depending on each participant's response. Predetermined questions in relation to the main question asked were questions such as 'What is the main advantage of studying overseas or in your country?', 'Financially, do you think it is better studying overseas or in your country?', 'How do you find the way classes were conducted overseas and in your country?'. These questions were selected based on the fact that they are of relevance and they are simple enough to trigger further discussion. Each oral group discussion lasted approximately 15-25 minutes and was audio taped and then transcribed verbatim for data analysis.

Data Analysis

After the questionnaires were completed and the oral discussions conducted, the data were analyzed using SPSS version 19. The following gives an overview of the analysis:

a) The CSs employed by the HP and LP speakers of the English language during the oral group discussion were categorized according to the typology by Tarone (1980), Tarone (1977), Færch and Kasper (1983) and Willems (1987)

b) Following the identification of the types of CSs, the frequency of use for each type of CS by the participants in each group discussion was tallied and tabulated.

c) The answers to the self-report questionnaire were compared and analyzed.

d) The oral group discussions were transcribed according to Atkinson and Heritage's (1984) method of transcription. The transcripts of the group discussion were analyzed by systematically organizing the answers into categories according to the CSs use.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the discussion is organized according to the two main research questions:

1. What are the types and frequency of use of CSs by low proficient (LP) and high proficient (HP) international students?

To examine the CSs that the interlocutors used in the group discussion, the CS typology proposed by Tarone (1980) and Tarone (1977), Færch and Kasper (1983), and Willems (1987) was used for the analysis of the data. The classification contained ten types of CSs: (1) topic avoidance, (2) message abandonment, (3) code switching, (4) literal translation, (5) word coinage, (6) approximation, (7) appeal for assistance, (8) self-repair, (9) use of all-purpose word, and (10) circumlocution. The findings revealed that all the ten types of CSs were used in the oral discussions by both HP and LP speakers. Table 2 shows the frequency of use of these CSs by both the HP and LP students.

Table 2: Types of communication strategies used by the international HP and LP students
in the oral group discussion.

Rank Order	Communication Strategies	Frequency	% Frequency
1	Code Switching	135	17.64
2	Literal Translation	120	15.68
3	Topic Avoidance	118	15.40
4	Message Abandonment	115	15.01
5	Appeal for Assistance	92	12.01
6	Self-Repair	63	8.22
7	Approximation	43	5.61
8	Circumlocution	32	4.17
9	Use of All-Purpose Word	27	3.52
10	Word Coinage	21	2.74
Total		**766**	**100**

The results in table 2 showed the CSs employed by both the HP and LP speakers of English in the oral group discussion. According to the table, there are ten types of CSs employed in the oral group discussion and according to the frequency of CSs; the most frequently used was code switching strategy which was used 135 times (17.64%), followed by literal translation strategy 120 times (15.68%), and the least used CS, word coinage, at 21 times (2.74%). To facilitate discussion of CS utilized by the speakers of the two levels of proficiency, data are presented separately in Tables 3 and 4. The findings on the communication performance of the LP learners are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Communication strategies employed by LP speakers in the oral group discussion

Rank Order	Communication Strategies	Frequency	% Frequency
1	Code Switching	101	19.06
2	Literal Translation	93	17.55
3	Message Abandonment	84	15.85
4	Topic Avoidance	82	15.47
5	Appeal for Assistance	76	14.34
6	Approximation	28	5.28
7	Circumlocution	19	3.58
8	Use of All-Purpose Word	17	3.21

9	Self-Repair	16	3.02
10	Word Coinage	14	2.64
Total		**530**	**100**

The results in Table 3 indicated that the highest level of CS used by LP learners is allocated to code switching by a frequency of 101 (19.06%), while the lowest level goes to word coinage by a frequency of 14 (2.64%). In order to know if the students with different levels of oral proficiency make different uses of CSs, the application of CSs by the HP speakers were viewed separately as given in Table 4:

Table 4: Communication strategies employed by HP speakers in the oral group discussion

Rank Order	**Communication Strategies**	**Frequency**	**Frequency %**
1	Self-Repair	47	19.92
2	Topic Avoidance	36	15.25
3	Code Switching	34	14.40
4	Message Abandonment	31	13.13
5	Literal Translation	27	11.44
6	Appeal for Assistance	16	6.78
7	Approximation	15	6.36
8	Circumlocution	13	5.51
9	Use of All-Purpose Word	10	4.24
10	Word Coinage	7	2.97
Total		**236**	**100**

The results in Table 4 indicated that the highest level of CS used by LP learners is allocated to self repair by a frequency of 47(19.92%), while the lowest level goes to word coinage by a frequency of 7 (2.97%) and Use of All-Purpose Word at 10 (4.24%).

The findings of this study indicated that international students at UKM employed ten types of CSs among the twelve types adapted from Tarone (1980) and Tarone (1977), Faerch and Kasper (1983), and Willems (1987). These CSs are topic avoidance, message abandonment, code switching, literal translation, approximation, circumlocution, word coinage, use of all-purpose words, appeal for assistance and self-repair.
It was also found that different levels of oral proficiency affect the use of CSs from two aspects:

1. The frequency of use: The total number CSs employed by the learners with a low level of oral proficiency greatly outnumbered the CSs employed by the learners with high levels of oral proficiency.
2. Selection of types of CSs. There is a difference in the selection of the types of CSs by the two groups of students: the HP speakers and the LP speakers. Students with a low level of oral proficiency used interlingual CSs significantly more than

those with a high level of oral proficiency. Intralingual strategies were employed more often by those with HP level.

Several studies (Wannaruk, 2003; Lam, 2010; Aliakbari & Karimi Allvar, 2009) indicated that learners at different proficiency levels employ CSs at varying degrees. If participants are fully equipped with linguistic resources, they make less use of compensation strategy than those who have less linguistic access. Thus, LP learners employ CSs more frequently than HP learners do. This suggests that learners at different proficiency levels employ CSs in different quantities (Chanawong, 2007). According to the study conducted by Tajeddin and Alemi (2010), HP learners employed guessing strategies more frequently and demonstrated less preference for limitation strategies but used them more efficiently. By contrast, LP learners took advantage of L1-based and avoidance strategies to overcome limitations. In a study on Thai students (Wannaruk, 2003), the most frequently employed communication strategy was modification devices followed by paralinguistic strategies, L1-based strategies, L2-based strategies', and avoidance strategies. Following this, the participants' perceptions toward the use of each type of communication strategy are discussed. The descriptive statistical analysis of the LP group's perception toward the use of CSs is presented in table 5.

Table 5: Descriptive statistic analysis of the perceptions toward the use of CSs strategies by the LP group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Message Abandonment Strategy	10	3	6	4.60	.97
Topic Avoidance Strategy	10	3	6	4.80	1.14
Literal Translation Strategy	10	2	6	3.60	1.26
Code Switching Strategy	10	4	6	5.10	.74
Approximation Strategy	10	2	4	3.40	.70
Word Coinage Strategy	10	1	4	2.50	.85
Circumlocution Strategy	10	1	4	2.90	.99
Use of All-Purpose Word Strategy	10	2	5	3.10	.99
Self-Repair Strategy	10	2	5	3.30	.95
Appeal for Assistance Strategy	10	3	6	4.80	.92
Value N (listwise)	10				

Table 5 shows a mean range between 2.50 (Word Coinage) and 5.10 (Code Switching). For Code Switching strategy has the highest mean among the other strategies with a minimum mean of 4 and maximum mean of 6. However, the lowest mean amongst all strategies, which is 2.5, is word coinage strategy with a minimum mean of 1 and maximum mean of 4. The descriptive statistical analysis of the HP group's perceptions toward the use of CSs strategies is given in Table 6.

Table 6: Descriptive statistic analysis of the perception toward the use of CSs strategies
by the HP group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Message Abandonment Strategy	10	2	4	3.10	.74
Topic Avoidance Strategy	10	2	4	2.90	.74
Literal Translation Strategy	10	2	6	3.60	1.26
Code Switching Strategy	10	2	5	3.20	1.03
Approximation Strategy	10	3	6	4.90	.99
Word Coinage Strategy	10	2	5	3.60	.97
Circumlocution Strategy	10	2	5	3.40	.97
Use of All-Purpose Word Strategy	10	2	6	4.10	1.20
Self-Repair Strategy	10	3	6	5.00	.94
Appeal for Assistance Strategy	10	1	6	2.70	1.49
Value N (listwise)	10				

Table 6 shows a mean range between 2.70 (Appeal for Assistance) and 5.00 (Self Repair). Self repair strategy has the highest mean among the other strategies with a minimum mean of 3 and maximum mean of 6 which worked towards an average mean of 5.00. However, the lowest mean amongst all strategies, which is 2.70, is appeal for assistance strategy with a minimum mean of 1 and maximum mean of 6.

In relation to the frequency of use (Tables 5 and 6, the results of the oral group discussion and the self-report questionnaire are close to each other. Firstly, in the LP group, code switching has the highest frequency (101 times, 19.06%) and the highest perception frequency mean in the self-report ($M = 5.10$). Similarly, word coinage strategy has the lowest frequency in the oral group discussion (14 times, 2.64%) and the lowest perception frequency mean in the self-report (2.50). In the HP group, self-repair has the highest frequency (47 times, 19.92%) and the highest perception frequency mean in the self report ($M = 5.00$). This means that both groups of students (LP and HP) perceived themselves as using the strategies as frequently as they are actually using in real life communication.

However, there is a mismatch between the perception of both groups with regard to the selection of types of CSs often used. The comparison between the self-report questionnaire and the oral group discussion for the LP and HP groups indicated that the most employed CSs by the LP speakers included code switching strategy followed by topic avoidance and appeal for assistance, whereas the results of the self report questionnaire indicate that the high frequency strategies used by the LP speakers were code switching, literal translation and message abandonment. While code switching is consistently perceived as being the strategy selected, literal translation and message abandonment did not match their real life use. CSs that were perceived as being least

selected to be used by the LP speakers were word coinage and circumlocution while the results of the group discussion show that the least used strategies were word coinage and self-repair strategies. Again, there is a mismatch between circumlocution and self-repair strategies.

Similarly, for the HP speakers, the CSs that were selected to be used by the HP speakers were self-repair strategy and approximation strategy, whereas the oral group discussion results show that the high frequently used strategies by the HP speakers were self-repair and topic avoidance strategies. There is a mismatch between approximation strategy and topic avoidance strategy. Additionally, the selection of CSs that were least employed by the HP speakers in the self report questionnaire were appeal for assistance strategy and topic avoidance strategy whereas the group discussion results showed that word coinage and use of all-purpose word strategies were the least frequently employed strategies. This indicates that the perception toward the use of CSs is different from the real oral use of CSs.

As the experiment conducted by Nakatani (2005) on two groups of Japanese students indicates, the students in the strategy training group significantly improved their oral test scores compared to the students who did not have the training. It also revealed that compared to the control group, the strategy training group made use of longer utterances, more achievement strategies, such as modified interaction, modified output, time-gaining, and maintenance strategies, but fewer reduction strategies, such as message abandonment. Clearly, more training in strategy use and awareness raising on the use of CSs are needed among EFL learners, and by extension of different proficiency levels.

The discrepancy between self-awareness of what the learner might potentially use and what they may actually employ in their real communication can be attributed to the lack of awareness of what the strategies are and how they should be employed. This is a call for more systematic training in communicative strategies awareness raising among students of different proficiency levels.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have implications in the field of foreign language teaching for higher education, particularly UKM, her lecturers and international students. Raising awareness of international students of the communication problems they might come across and of the advantages for applying different CSs to overcome their communication problems in different contexts can be included as part of the teaching agenda. The ability to choose more appropriate CSs and to use them in a more creative and efficient way are useful skills that these students can acquire. The findings of this research also invite all of those who are interested to further validate and verify the results at a larger scale across varied levels of proficiency among not only international students, but also local students.

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APPENDIX

Self-Report Questionnaire

Dear respondent,
This questionnaire is part of a research project on the use of communication strategies. Please spare some time to answer the questions as carefully as possible. The information will only be used for this research project.
Thank you

Part A: General information

1. Gender: (   ) male   (   ) female
2. Age: (   )
3. Major: (   )
4. Years of learning English: (   )
5. (You BAND score on English Placement Test at UKM (   )

Part B

Directions: You are going to specify your perceptions toward the use and effectiveness of 10 types of communication strategies. Please choose the appropriate answer to each question

1. You begin to talk about a concept but are unable to continue and leave a message unfinished because of language difficulties.
a) Always b) Often c) Sometimes d) Seldom e) Never f) Not sure

2. You avoid talking about topic areas or concepts which pose language difficulties.
a) Always b) Often c) Sometimes d) Seldom e) Never f) Not sure

3. You translate literally a lexical item, an idiom, a compound word or structure from a native language into a target language.
a) Always b) Often c) Sometimes d) Seldom e) Never f) Not sure

4. You use a native language word or phrase with a native language pronunciation.
a) Always b) Often c) Sometimes d) Seldom e) Never f) Not sure

5. You use a target language word which shares enough semantic features in common with the desired lexical item (e.g. *ship* for *sailboat*).
a) Always b) Often c) Sometimes d) Seldom e) Never f) Not sure

6. You make up a non-existing target language word on a basis of a supposed rule (e.g. *vegetarianist* for *vegetarian*).
a) Always b) Often c) Sometimes d) Seldom e) Never f) Not sure

7. You describe or exemplify the object or action instead of using the appropriate target language item or structure.
a) Always b) Often c) Sometimes d) Seldom e) Never f) Not sure

8. You use a general or empty lexical item to fill gaps in vocabulary command (e.g. the overuse of *thing, make, do*).
a) Always b) Often c) Sometimes d) Seldom e) Never f) Not sure

9. You set up a new speech-plan when the original one fails.
a) Always b) Often c) Sometimes d) Seldom e) Never f) Not sure

10. You turn to the interlocutor for help (e.g. What do you call …?, Can you speak more slowly?, Do you understand?)
a) Always b) Often c) Sometimes d) Seldom e) Never f) Not sure

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