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## **An Overview of Communication Strategy**

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*This study introduces strategies of interlanguage communication associated with developing solutions for limited English proficient learners as they become skilled at English as a second language. First, a significant classification of Faerch and Kasper's communication strategies will be presented. Second, the organizing methods of the other nine communication strategy classifications applied by the other earlier and more recent important scholars will be revealed. Third, Littlemore's newest classification, identifying communication strategies from perspectives of lexicon meaning analysis and applied linguistics, will be emphasized with several demonstration examples generated by English learners in a university in Taiwan. The main purpose of this study is to offer a temporary and flexible communication access for English speakers who use English as a second language to communicate in our current global village before their linguistic proficiency can be maturely developed.*

### **COMMUNICATION NEED**

In our current globalized world, English is the most prevalent communication tool in international situations. Although the beauty and logic in both the structure and lexicon of English are not regarded as a perfect language from the linguistic point of view,

English is becoming a global language because of the intercultural communication need in the contemporary globalized world. Just like Crystal (2003) mentioned: “Within little more than a generation, we have moved from a situation where a world language was a theoretical possibility to one where it is an evident reality” (p.28). As you can see, English as a global language is an unavoidable occurrence due to the efficient and effective communication demand of human beings.

### **EXPECTATION OF ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE**

In this second millennium of our small, globalized village, people around the world are demanding an international language, which contributes to the human beings’ prospect speedy progress generated by efficient and effective cross-cultural communication. However, due to several politics reasons of the current world, English has not played its special role as a mother tongue or an official language in all of the countries in the world yet, in spite of our communicating urgent need caused by globalization.

Crystal (2003) provided a factor why English has not played a special role in each country: “the situation where the people of a country feel so antagonistic or ambivalent about English that they reject the option to give English a privileged status, either as an official language or as a foreign language” (2003: 124). Because of the above factor, we might doubt how people around the world can survive well in the globalization phenomenon, and fulfill their urgent need of cosmopolitan communication before their English linguistic proficiency can be maturely developed. This is especially true for those people who live in countries of inner and outer circles.

Also, McKay has provided a solution for how people in the inner and outer circles deal with their intercontinental communication problems caused by the existing conflict between the political against the attitude of their governments and their urgent need for international communication. McKay (2002) suggested that the non-native like Englishes currently has a great deal of applicability. These forms of Englishes are acceptable because of our international communication needs:

It is important to recognize the social attitudes that are associated with particular varieties of English, it is also necessary to acknowledge that all varieties are fully adequate to serve particular communicative purposes. Hence, the varieties of English that have developed as a result of the spread of the language need to be recognized as appropriate valid for particular domains (p. 126).

It appears that the comprehensive theory created by McKay (2002) is consistent with the

application of strategic communication, because the varieties of non-native discourses generated by the Interlanguage strategies should contribute to carrying out the particular communication goals in diverse international academic and commercial situations. In other words, the English communication associated with strategy application requires a type of imperfect English communication. In fact, this type of flawed and non-native language production can be frequently found in cross-cultural encounters and in the international communications among native and non-native English speakers.

### **DISCOVERING FAERCH AND KASPER'S CLASSIFICATION**

Some of the most illustrious classifications of communication strategies are the strategies divided by Faerch and Kasper's book "Strategies in Interlanguage Communication" (Faerch and Kasper, 1983). They investigated and systemized several primary types of interlanguage, which involved the language productions "of second and foreign language learners, of migrant workers, of pidgin and creole speakers" (Faerch & Kasper, 1983). The systemized non-standard English is divided into two types of strategies according to human beings' reduction and achievement behaviors. Both of these two sets of strategies have no clear-cut, and they were all called as "formal reduction strategies". According to the speakers' different cultural backgrounds and various proficiency levels, they can resort to appropriate strategies to face the challenges existing in the intercultural communications.

....because of the different communicative status of items from different linguistic levels there are some significant differences with respect to whether the learner can reach his communicative goal by means of a reduced system or whether he has to adopt a functional reduction or an achievement strategy (Faerch and Kasper, 1983: 41).

We can therefore ascribe the comprehensive speech productions to the learners' best judgment upon which various types of linguistic behavior will proceed consciously during communication. Through strategy application, the speaker will be able to benefit from either reducing a tough communication goal or applying interlanguage to achieve an intended meaning in an imperfect but comprehensible fashion. Both of these resolutions belong to formal reduction strategies, as well as the reduction strategies and achievement strategies.

The strategies that Faerch and Kasper (1983) recognized and researched are mainly phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexicon level reduced strategies, which either

carry the reduction and achievement behaviors into execution in order to eliminate the communication difficulties caused by linguistic incompetence in pronunciation, grammar structure, vocabulary, and inter-cultural knowledge. In other words, these English speakers may consciously or automatically apply communication strategies and speak comprehensibly and fluently. Through preceding the processes for coping with the linguistic problems, English speakers improve mutual comprehension when facing the challenges of linguistic limitations of non-native speakers.

In the field of communication strategy, the classification of Faerch and Kasper (1983) is repeatedly introduced as the most significant classification, and their classification have been mentioned and discussed in numerous theoretical and empirical research papers related to strategic competence. For example, Ansarin & Syal (2000), Bialystok (1990), Corder (1983), Dornyei and Scott (2001), Ogane (1998), and Rababah (2002) have introduced their distinguished classification in their papers. Furthermore, Yoshida-Morise (1998) and Kocoglu (1997) have also employed this famous classification and completed in their recent empirical studies in Japan and Turkey. The general definition of Faerch and Kasper's classification was given as "strategies are potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal" (Faerch and Kasper, 1983: 36). That is, communication strategies are diverse types of formal reduction strategies, including functional reduction strategies applying meaning reducing methods, and achievement strategies applying interlanguage, cooperative attitudes, and non-verbal languages. Faerch and Kasper (1983) remarked on what communication strategies are as follows:

...formal reduction often closely related to functional reduction or achievement strategies. However, a distinction between formal reduction as such and the subsequent application of other strategies can often be made from an analytical point of view only, as no such clear cut distinction between the formal reduction and a following strategy of functional reduction or achievement exists in actual communication (Faerch and Kasper, 1983: 40).

As you can see, depending upon English speakers' linguistic levels, the functional reduction strategy or achievement strategy can be put into practice after the speakers consciously determine to reduce the native-like and formal level in their language productions in order to compensate for their linguistic limitations and interact smoothly and understandably. The descriptions and the examples of Faerch and Kasper's classification are as follows:

### *A. Functional Reduction Strategies*

The first set of communication strategies are called reduction strategies, which include “topic avoidance”, “message abandonment”, and “meaning replacement” (Faerch and Kasper, 1983: 43-44). First of all, the topic avoidance strategy means the speakers should formulate communicative goals when the topic is perceived and evaluated as problematic from a linguistic point of view. The English speakers’ reactions to this problematic topic are shown by either keeping silent or changing the topic. The second strategy in this set is the message abandonment strategy, which simply means to cut short the communication. When learners realized that they run into difficulty with an English form or structure rule, they can decide to give up their intentions of expressing the difficult meanings. Faerch and Kasper’s illustration for the meaning abandonment strategy is that, “The learner stops in mid-sentence, with no appeal to authority to help finish the utterance” (Faerch and Kasper, 1983: 44). The interlocutors might say “I don’t know how to explain”, “Forget about this”, or “It is hard to explain” to hint their interlocutors. On the other hand, they can also consciously abandon their intended meaning in mind, and continuously to talk about the other expressions. The third strategy in this set, according to Faerch and Kasper (1983), is the meaning replacement strategy. This strategy suggests that the speakers should operate within their intended propositional content and preserves their intended topic and meaning through means of generating more general expressions similar as the origin topic and meanings, when they are confronted by a planning or retrieval problem caused by their linguistic limitations. Although the meaning expressed might not be as accurate as the originally intended meaning, a basic concept of it might be probably transmitted. “The result of meaning replacement is a certain amount of vagueness” (Faerch and Kasper, 1983:44).

### *B. Achievement Strategies*

Faerch and Kasper (1983) described the communication strategies as being “compensatory strategies”. Also, they are what Corder (1983) calls “communicative recourses expanding strategies”. Faerch and Kasper (1983) continued this thought with “Achievement strategies aimed at solving problems in the planning phase due to insufficient linguistic resources” (p. 46). There are six achievement strategies, including “code switching”, “interlingual transfer”, “inter/intralingual transfer”, “Interlanguage based strategies” (generalization, paraphrase, word coinage, and restructuring), “cooperative strategies”, and “non-linguistic strategies” (Faerch and Kasper, 1983: 46-52). Firstly, “code switching” allows the first language as well as the mother tongue

to be applied in the English as a target language communication. The second strategy in the achievement set, “interlingual transfer”, suggests that the English learners literally transfer the first language into second language, which also includes the foreignized forms in pragmatic and discourse level. Third, the “inter/intralingual transfer” recommends that the corresponding first language structures can be applied in the communication. Fourth, the “interlanguage-based strategies” cope with communication problems by applying Interlanguage systems, which include strategies of generalization, paraphrasing, word coinage, and restructuring. Moreover, the cooperative attitude in humbly asking questions and the non-verbal application of mime, gesture, and sound-imitation are another two achievement strategies.

### **THE OTHER NINE EARLIER AND RECENT CLASSIFICATIONS**

In truth, the communication strategies already exist in the English as a target language learners’ mind, and they can be applied automatically without training. Originally, the concept of communication strategies was created by Selinker in his journal, named *Interlanguage*. Selinker (1972) indicted the strategies should be systemized as the identification of the strategy application. He stated,

Relevant behavioral events in a psychology of second-language learning should be make identifiable with the aid of theoretical constructs which assume the major features of the psychological structure of an adult whenever he attempts to understand second-language sentences of to produced them (1972: 211).

Although the pioneer of communication strategy, Selinker himself did not submit sufficient representative examples of systemized interlanguage formations to demonstrate what he meant by the phrase the “aid of the theoretical constructs”; many scholars agreed with his foresight by categorizing the interlanguage types and non-linguistic strategies applied by non-native speakers. Generally speaking, similar perceived strategies are catalogued by terminologies named from different perspectives of various scholars. The following paragraphs will introduce different scholar’s contrast and comparison concepts of grouping communication strategies.

First of all, Varadi (1973/1983:81-99) separated the strategies by the views of meaning reduction and meaning replacement. Moreover, he also distinguished the intentional and extensional reduction strategies. Generalization, approximation, circumlocution and paraphrase strategies were emphasized. Following that, Tarone (1977: 194-203) named nine strategies, including “topic avoidance”, and “message

abandonment” as “avoidance strategy”, “approximation”, “word coinage”, and “circumlocution” as “paraphrase strategy”, “literal translation” and “language switch” as “conscious transfer” strategy, “appeal for assistance strategy”, and mime strategy. In the earlier history of communication strategies, Tarone demonstrated communication strategy with a renowned coinage word, “airball”, which was a newly created lexicon for referring to “balloon” (Tarone, 1983: 92). Indeed, “airball” is a typical term of newly created language production that shows the characteristic in adult learners’ psychological structure.

After this, Faerch and Kasper, Bialystok (1983:105) simply divided communication strategies into first language-based, second language-based, and non-linguistic strategies. And, Paribakht (1986:132) perceived and investigated more than twenty of them in terms of “linguistic approach, contextual approach, conceptual approach, and mime”. In late 1980s, focused the on the lexicon simplification, Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1983) classified the communication strategies from learners’ possible motivations for avoidance. They believed the avoidance types for lexical alternatives can be “phonological avoidance, graphological avoidance, morphological avoidance, syntactic avoidance, and void avoidance” (1983: 124).

Moreover, agreeing with Faerch and Kasper’s perspectives of human being’s reduction and achievement behaviors, Raupach (1983:199) proposed to observe the target language speakers’ strategy application behaviors by the method of “analyzing the speakers’ deviant utterance, including hesitation phenomena and other signals”. With this analysis method, we can inspect how the learners struggle to meet certain stylistic standards with the unfilled pause, filled pauses, lengthening of syllables, false starts, self-corrections, and repetitions. The above temporal variables form a group of strategies that eliminate the evidence that the speaker is encountering a linguistic problem and taking the risk of proceeding to talk smoothly. Also, Raupach (1983:207) suggested to apply the method of evaluating the speakers’ systematic differences between their first language and second language performance, and distinguish that several strategies, like code-switching, ruptures, word coinage, paraphrase, and direct appeals, are “mostly learner-specific and only exceptionally activated by native speakers”.

Besides, a college faculty group, Kellerman, Bongaerts, and Poulisse (1989:225) at the University of Nijmegen in Holland, provided their cognitive process- oriented classification, which sorted communication strategies into conceptual strategies and linguistic strategies. Poulisse (1993:181) based his on the psycholinguistic model of speech production and drew a distinction between conceptual and linguistic levels of

language production. This well known classification consists of three strategy types, which are “substitution”, “substitution plus”, and “reconceptualization”.

And Littlemore (2003:331) attempted to assess the communicative effectiveness of Poulisse’s taxonomy. She analyzed eighty two French speaking English learners’ transcripts from linguistic perspectives and expanded three Poulisse’s strategies into twelve more specific ones. Littlemore (2003:331) analyzed the collected data in French speaking English learners’ transcripts, and classified communication strategies as six substitution strategies applying to linguistic analysis methods of original analogical/metaphoric comparison, conventional analogical/metaphoric comparison, literal comparison, word transfer with second language word approximation, super-ordinate and simple word transfer, one substitution plus strategy applying morphological creativity of the target language speakers, and five reconceptualization strategies applying linguistic analysis perspectives of componential, functional, activity, place, and emotion.

Moreover, Littlemore also investigated what Faerch and Kasper called functional reduction strategies. From her analyzed data, the word abandonment strategy and word avoidance strategy were identified. However, they were not regarded as effective strategies. According to Littlemore (2003, p. 339) “...it is better for a student to at least begin to attempt to describe an item, or whether it is better for them to give up before even trying” (Littlemore, 2003). Overall, there are fourteen strategies in Littlemore’s taxonomy, which includes the twelve mentioned above, as well as the word abandonment strategy and the word avoidance strategy.

## **EMPERICAL STUDY**

In an attempt to expand and confirm the findings of Littlemore, this study was conducted in a non-freshmen English course of Tunghai University in Taichung, Taiwan. Most of the university students in Taiwan have an urgent need of establishing their communication competence, because they tend to be better in reading and writing. This phenomenon is caused by the students’ examination preparation oriented study. However, we all know that the real English communication is one of the main purposes of English study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In an attempt to examine and reconfirm the findings of Littlemore (2003), this experiment focus on collecting the students' speeches created through applying communication strategies.

### *A. Subjects*

The subjects were twenty five English non-major freshmen of a Taiwan university. They are in a program of Non-Major English Course, which is a six credit required course in English education of all Taiwan universities. These twenty five subjects were freshmen in a highest level class in Business College in Tunghai Christian University. Students in this school had taken replacement exams and were divided into lower, intermediate, and high levels. Before entering the university, they had learned English for at least six years in high schools. However, their communication proficiency level was not as high of a level as their reading and writing proficiency because of the examination preparation oriented study in high school.

### *B. Task*

After the trainer introduced the concepts of communications strategies, the students were divided into five groups of five. They were assigned a specific topic to chat on. The trainer reminded the students to apply the strategy freely, but not coercively.

### *C. Data Collecting and Analysis*

The dialogues as well as students performances in applying the communication strategies were collected from students' twenty minute discussion activities. The data were collected for twice in these discussion activities; after five hour training and, again after ten hour training. For the first time, students were requested to write down their speeches on poster papers after two hours of training. And the second set of data was collected after students were trained for eight hours. The students' talks were audio recorded and transcribed. Based on Littlemore's taxonomy, the students' overall application frequency of the communication strategies are shown in the following table:

Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1. Original analogical/metaphoric comparison	3	5.17 %
2. Conventional analogical/metaphoric comparison	9	15.52%
3. Literal comparison	1	1.72%
4. Word transfer with L2 word approximation	6	10.34%
5. Super-ordinate	11	18.97%
6. Simple word transfer	1	1.72%
7. Substitution plus strategies	3	5.17%
8. Componential analysis	1	1.72%
9. Function	7	12.07%
10. Activity	9	15.52%
11. Place	3	5.17%
12. Emotion	1	1.72%
13. Word abandonment	3	5.17%
14. Word avoidance	0	0%
Sum	58	100%

### DEMONSTRATING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES WITH EXAMPLES

The follows are several examples that typically represent the communication strategies in Littlemore's taxonomy. The students' discussion topics are about their interest and their career goals.

#### *A. Substitution strategies*

1. Original analogical/metaphoric comparison: The participant compares the target item to another object in an analogical way. For example, "It is like the other half of your life" (spouse) or "from out" (overseas).
2. Conventional analogical/metaphoric comparison: The participant compares that target item to another object in an analogical or metaphorical way. For example, it is a kind of "shining stone" (Crystal).
3. Literal comparison: The participant compares the target item to another object in a non-metaphorical way. For example, "It is a computer operating system like Windows XP" (Firefox).
4. Word transfer with L2 word approximation: The participant uses an English word that resembles the Chinese one. For example, "a position" (Mandarin for occupation =

position).

5. Super-ordinate: The participant gives the name of the word family to which the target item belongs. For example “A lot of people study in business” (economics and accounting).
6. Simple word transfer: The participant uses a Chinese word without attempting to anglicize it. For example, “Jan Ju Nai Cha” (tapioca milk tea).
7. Substitution plus strategies: Making up an English word that is similar to the target item. For example, “it is a computer language” (Firefox). “It is fried potato” (chips). Also, “I want to be a “chair worker” (manager, principle, or leader).

#### *B. Reconceptualization strategies*

1. Componential analysis: The participant describes the individual features of the target item. For example, “A person who has a different idea from his government in mind, and likes to protest in action” (rebel).
2. Function: The participant states what the target item can be used for. For example, “It is a place that many people can sing many songs” (Karaoke). It makes others “smell good and feel comfortable” (perfume).
3. Activity: The participant describes something that the target item does. For example, “It is a software that can see webpage” (Firefox). “It is one whose job is to investigate crimes” (detective).
4. Place: The participant says where the target item can be found. For example, “A place near ocean and have many kinds of fish” (oceanarium). “My activity area is near the middle of soccer field” (mid-field).
5. Emotion: The participant mentions an emotion, which is often inspired by the target item. For example, “It is horrible boring, and you will never have freedom” (constrained and captive).

### **FEEDBACK FROM TRAINER AND STUDENTS IN USING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

At the end of training in winter, 2004, the researchers interacted through emails with the trained Taiwanese and discussed with them about their evaluations toward communication strategies. Generally speaking, the students and the American trainer in this project consented to the non-native style of language that had been created. However, they also uncovered various difficulties and disagreements that the students had in using communication strategies. In a discussion that took place toward the end of the training,

revealed that both the Taiwanese students and American trainer did not regard the communication strategies to be a permanent solution for resolving vocabulary difficulties. Their reasons were as follows.

Some speeches generated through these strategies somehow sounded either inappropriate or unnatural. As a result, the trainer and the students did not totally agree with the idea of applying all of the introduced strategies, because they felt that some of the language productions generated might not be easily understood by interlocutors from different languages and cultures. Also, some students felt that the inappropriate, unnatural, and non-native like speeches made them lose face.

Furthermore, the American trainer reflected that applying first language strategies like “code switching” might impede students’ opportunities in learning more vocabularies, and he mentioned that the speeches generated through Mandarin, Taiwanese, and Hakka appeared in the middle of communication might make the discourse sound too far removed from Standard English. The American trainer was concerned that this might discourage students’ motivation for establishing higher linguistic proficiency. On the other hand, some students reflected that it was not very easy to analyze problematical words and construct new ways of expressing it rapidly enough during communication. In spite of this, by viewing these interventions as a temporary solution, they were able to fully appreciate the challenges encountered in intercultural communication in the short future.

All in all, although the dialogues that Taiwanese students created using communication strategies are not like the English that is used by native speakers, the interactions and interlocutions that had improved by communication strategies were quiet perceivable and smoothly spoken. This was especially true in the cases of the substitution strategies and the reconceptualization strategies that were the most effective strategies for Taiwanese university freshmen in this empirical study. Most of the language productions are created with these Taiwanese students in the latter stage of training. In the coded transcripts, the percentage that the learners applied the substitution strategy is 53.44% and the percentage that the learners applied the reconceptualization strategy is 41.39%.

## **SUMMARY**

In summary, the Taiwanese ESL learners were able to convey their intended message more effectively and smoothly through applying communication strategies. In addition, a

lot of English learners in Taiwan who are not informed about the strategy application regard the native-like language as an important issue. However, since there is an urgent need to use English as an international language, we tend to suggest that the students in higher education and below should apply communication strategies to encounter the communication problems caused by linguistic limitations. Indeed, native-like and standard English might not be easy to achieve in a short time for non-native speakers, so this study recommends Taiwanese students should consider to apply the communication strategy and create their non-native like but comprehensible speeches.

In conclusion, this non-native type of imperfect language brought out through communications strategies should be allowed in various types of international communicating situations. Before the non-native speakers are able to perfectly build their linguistic proficiency, the communication strategy application provides them a short-cut to communicate with people of the world in international situations. In a word, the *urgent* need of international interaction can be fulfilled through strategy application, and the importance of communication strategy can not be understated.

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