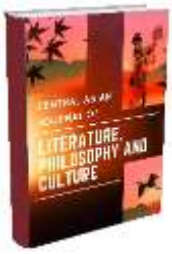

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Learners' Perception and Attributions to the Selection of Communication Strategies

Davlataliyeva Z.A

Master's Degree of English Language (linguistics), Namangan state University

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Abstract: Reaching beyond the long-discussed attribution of communication strategy use in relation to limited target language competence, the current study was begun in the hope that identification of a more complete set of the factors affecting undesirable selection of communication strategy may lead to pedagogical suggestions for classroom culture that better promotes effective communication strategy use for second language learners. Four major attributions to the selection of communication strategy, are the affective factor, socio-cultural factor, L2 learner's learning history in the classroom, and their experiences of watching or listening communications of native speakers outside the classroom.

Keywords: communication strategy, affective factor, socio-cultural factor, learning history, exposure to CS.

INTRODUCTION

The last four decades have seen fruitful research concerning communication strategies for L2 learners. Major concerns have been typology and categorization of communication strategies, teachability of communication strategy in the classroom, and the relation to target language proficiency. Yet, the factors affecting the decision-making process of L2 learners' about the type of communication strategy they select both in the psychological and socio-cultural perspectives have seldom been discussed. Given that a learner's underlying psychological process may be revealed in the form of communication strategy use, thorough investigation of the possible factors hindering successful communication by selection of an inefficient type of communication strategy may be the first step to eliminate possible problems learners may encounter in communication.

The study suggests that English classes promote first, the meaning negotiation through interactions in English using paraphrasing rather than L1 insertion; second, L2 learners' active engagement favoring achievement strategies such as asking for repetition or clarification over reduction strategies such as message abandonment or feigning understanding; third, an anxiety-free environment where learners can initiate the conversation, ask questions, and deliver the intended meaning without fear of being incorrect. This may in turn lead to the better pedagogical approach to communication strategy in classroom. The present study hopes to

identify Korean L2 learners' difficulties selecting appropriate communication strategy and suggest appropriate classroom interactions to better promote efficient communication strategy

Theoretical Background

Since Selinker (1972:229) defined communication strategy as "an identifiable approach by the learner to communicate with native speakers", communication strategies have often been considered problem-solving tactics that learners can rely on to circumvent the troublesome situation caused by their linguistic deficiency (Faerch and Kasper 1983b, Harder 1980, Canale 1983, Rost and Ross 1991). Faerch and Kasper (1983a:36) articulate that a communication strategy is "a potentially conscious plan for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal"[1]. Yule and Tarone (1997:18) also advocate that communication strategies are utilized "when faced with difficulty". Since its introduction as an important component of communicative competence, "strategic competence" (Canale and Swain 1980) has long been suggested for effective L2 learning (Stern 1983, Færch and Kasper 1986).

While the former focus on the differences between CSs used by L1 speakers and those used by L2 learners and suggest the need to improve the efficacy of L2 learners' CSs, the latter focus on L1/L2 connections and on the transferability of strategies from L1 to L2. It must be noted that if learners are taught the strategies explicitly as metalinguistic knowledge without incorporating such knowledge into implicit competence through their own observations in classroom activities, positive effects cannot be expected. Bialystok's (1990:143-147) suggestion that learners need ''language'' as ''the means'' to solve their communication problem, rather than explicitly taught knowledge of strategies, seems persuasive in this regard. However, if the pedagogical approach to the CS is to promote learners' realization that ill-chosen strategies may cause undesired outcomes and thus help them to find more effective strategies, the learners will guard themselves from the risk of misunderstanding, especially in regard to social and cultural faux pas. Previous research has also explored the relation between learners' proficiency and the use of CSs (Bialystok 1990, Bialystok and Fröhlich 1980, Kim 2010, Salahshoor and Asl 2009).

It has been suggested that the CS user's perception of effectiveness of CS types affect the selections of CSs (Littlemore 2003). This may be more convincing for the case of L1 or proficient L2 speakers with a variety of feasible options at their disposal. In the case of less proficient L2 learners with limited awareness of CSs, the particular CS perceived to be ineffective may possibly be the only option or one of the few options they have. With regard to proficiency, as one may expect, achievement communication strategies, circumlocution (paraphrase) in particular, were attempted more in proficient participants' utterances while reduction strategies were used more in the less proficient participants.

Main part

Rather than focusing on the relationship between the L2 learner's proficiency and CS types, the current study tries to weigh all the factors affecting the decision-making process of CS use. It was found that CSs which appeared to be identical on the surface level, turned out to have different attributions. It should be noted at this point that there is no clear-cut distinction between the categories of the attributions, and that more than one attribution may be simultaneously considered. The details will be discussed as follows:

[1] Clennel, C. 1995. Communication Strategies of Adult ESL Learners: A Discourse Perspective. Prospect 10, 4–20.

It is suggests that when they are nervous, shy, or diffident, they tend to choose ineffective CSs. In addition, there was one case that indifference or dislike of the interlocutor lead to message abandonment. An interesting finding is that five participants reported a change in their own personality when communicating in L2 as compared to L1. Two participants considered themselves more freewheeling and risk-taking in L2 than L1. They reported using CSs such as asking for repetition and asking for clarification, which were avoided by other subjects, so as to actively solve the problem during the communication. One possible explanation may be that culture is embedded in a language, and their perception of western culture has been formed from their experience in an English speaking country, which they find to be less rigid and restrictive. On the other hand, the other three participants reported that the lack of confidence in their target language affects their self-perceived personality in L2 performance. This may explain why they chose reduction strategies, such as message abandonment, over achievement strategies, such as asking for repetition.

Socio-cultural factors "In conversational interactions, speakers will choose different communicative patterns in order to maintain their self-image. The particular types of facework behaviors in which speakers engage varies from culture to culture" (DeCapua and Wintergerst 2004:60). Feigning understanding was employed as a face-saving technique for L2 learners in the study. Participants admitted choosing feigning understanding over asking for repetition when they did not understand what their interlocutors said in the communication[2].

Four of them added another reason for feigning understanding: the NS interlocutor may feel interrupted by the L2 learners' asking for repetition, which can be understood as a face-saving technique for the interlocutor. In addition, one participant responded that she felt obligated to agree with the interlocutor. Other cultural factors affecting the selection of CS are high-context communication, stereotype and hierarchy. Given that "communication through the context of the social interaction (e.g., speakers' social roles, gender, age, status)" is prevalent, "high-context communication makes extensive use of subtle nonverbal behaviors" (DeCapua and Wintergerst 2004:71). Since this is still significant in culture, the participants' attempts to use cues from non-verbal context rather than explicit clarification may be understandable. Furthermore their stereotype of English-speakers being English teachers, who are generally considered to have higher status, may have affected their own culturally biased "politeness theory" (Brown and Levinson 1978).

L2 learner's learning history in classroom Comparing L2-based and L1-based strategies in terms of effectiveness — even if the disadvantages of L2-based strategies such as "demands on the addressee's patience" and "impression of vagueness" and the advantages of L1-based strategies such as aid to "outperform his competence" are all taken into consideration — L1-based strategies are still problematic for a number of reasons. First, taking a long-term view, the genuine advancement of second language learning is hardly expected on the basis of L1-based strategies.

Second, due to the difference of linguistic and pragmatic properties in two languages, L1 transfer frequently results in lexical and pragmatic failure The results show that L2 learners are not familiar with CSs. In L1-medium English classes the interactions in L2 are limited, and thus sufficient opportunities for meaning negotiation cannot be expected. L2 learners in this setting tend to rely on

[2] Brown, P. and S. Levinson, 1978. Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

their L1 when faced with lack of L2 linguistic competence, rather than trying effective CSs such as paraphrasing also suggest that CS teaching helps to raise "student's meta communicative awareness about the factors that determine appropriate strategy selection". For L2 learners who do not benefit from sufficient opportunities to develop strategic competence in interactions with English speakers, the strategy of instruction, promoting awareness of possible failure of using L1-based strategies, may be useful as an alternative. This should not however be interpreted as a replacement for other parts of learning, as Haastrup and Phillipson (1983) point out, but should rather be considered as complementary. In the test-oriented learning environment, if a learning goal is set based on the design of the tests, the learners may be concerned about accuracy in their utterance and thus choose reduction strategies with the fear of being incorrect[3]. Furthermore, if the classroom culture does not encourage the learners' active involvement by initiating a conversation or asking questions, as revealed in the participants' simulated recall, it may explain their preference for message abandonment or feigning understanding over achievement strategies such as asking for repetition or asking for clarification.

Given that "communication strategies can occur in the absence of problematicity" and that CSs are used in one's native language for more effective communication, the L2 learners may have observed how their NS interlocutors use CSs and become aware of the benefits of using CSs through the interactions.

Conclusion. As it has been found in this study that various factors may affect the selection of the particular CS L2 learners prefer to make, pedagogical considerations regarding how to promote more desirable CS use should be discussed beyond the issue of proficiency. L2 learners' learning environments in class, and quality interactions in particular, play significant roles in promoting more effective CS use. It should be noted, however, that teaching typology of CSs itself is not the suggestion.

The study suggests that English classes promote first, the meaning negotiation through interactions in English using paraphrasing rather than L1 insertion; second, L2 learners' active engagement favoring achievement strategies such as asking for repetition or clarification over reduction strategies such as message abandonment or feigning understanding; third, an anxiety-free environment where learners can initiate the conversation, ask questions, and deliver the intended meaning without fear of being incorrect. Future studies may include the relationship between L2 learners' cognitive styles and CS preferences, which is not included in the current study.

[3] Canale, M. 1983. From Communicative Competence to Communicative Language Pedagogy.

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