

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This chapter summarizes and interprets the findings of the study. The discussions of the findings and the recommendations for further research are also provided.

5.1 Summary

In this research, 13 types of communication strategies were found and each strategy was used in different situations. Among them, some strategies were employed by most of the students, such as “Use of Fillers, Approximation, and Literal Translation”. Some strategies were used for few times, such as “Circumlocution, Word Coinage, and Appeal for Assistance”. In addition, more other types of strategies were employed, which contain “Topic Avoidance, Message Abandonment, Language Switch, Confirmation Check, Feigning Understanding, Clarification Request, and Mime”. Students used different types of strategies for several times separately. Some students employed these strategies for more than 30 or even 40 times, but some participants tended to use communication strategies very rarely, maybe for only 2 or 5 times. The other students used strategies among 10 to 30 times. Moreover, some participants preferred to use certain types of strategies frequently, and some students tended to use the strategies randomly.

5.2 Discussion for the Reasons of Communication Strategies-Use

Although the purpose of strategy-using is similar, which is to overcome the difficulties during communication, there are still different reasons for choosing each strategy, because of the insufficient language proficiency, or the culture influence, or the affect from the outside environment, or the other factors. All these points are grouped and analyzed as followed.

5.2.1 Lack of Linguistic Resource

Most of the Chinese students probably face the problem of lacking L2 vocabulary and accompanying grammatical knowledge to express meaning. During the conversions, some strategies were used because their lacking of language resource.

Students may encounter the words or phrases which happen to be their blind points, for solving these problems, such strategies were employed.

1) Approximation

“Approximation” strategy applied (84, 21.4%) by subjects indicates that they were trying very hard to state their ideas clearly even though they have to take risks by saying something which they know are not the items they intend to say. By using approximation, students would find the replacement of the suggested vocabulary, structures, and ideas to help them fill lexis-related knowledge gaps. Approximation thus, helps less proficient L2 speakers to solve the problems of what to say and how to say it. This result is supported by the theory that the approximation strategy enables subjects to cope with the problem of resource deficits during the initial phrase of speech processing (Dörnyei and Kormos. 1998). It is also similar with Anna (1997) findings that approximation strategies are very successful and frequently used in discussion tasks as long as the students understand the context correctly.

2) Message Abandonment

“Message Abandonment” was employed (4.6%, 18 cases) when the students couldn't continue the former issue for their insufficient language or other reasons, but they did not want to give up or they had not thought out of another topic to transfer to, so they would just stop there without utterance. This point is supported by Dörnyei and Scott (1977), who mentioned that message abandonment strategy is used to overcome lexical deficits, known as resource deficit strategies. Same with Poulisse (1990) opinion, message abandonment strategy is mainly related to lexical deficits which occur during the planning and encoding phase of the pre-verbal message, when a speaker cannot access a lemma in their mental lexicon.

3) Language Switch

The participants employed L1 (Chinese) and L3 (Thai) as “Language Switch” strategy (3.8%, 15 cases) to facilitate communication in the conversations. Findings of this study corroborate earlier studies on using L1 as a mediating tool in L2 communication activities (Lee. 2008) that language learners tend to use L1 for the establishment of mutual engagement and support for a shared task. With the help of L1, the participants were able to construct knowledge on L2 and other issues related to

the interviews, as well as providing feedback to the interviewer to maintain the natural flow of the conversations. In this study, L3 was more widely used by students when they couldn't figure out the L2 words, and the limited number of L1 usage almost happened to only one student whose English proficiency was obviously inadequate. Most of the interview topics were about the situations in the third country which is Thailand, and the participants are all Chinese, so the use of Thai and Chinese languages came up to be another strategy applied by the participants to convey meaning and to exchange ideas and thoughts with the interviewer. This result is supported by Anna (1997) research that "Language Switch" is efficient since the two interlocutors share the same L1. If, however, they were to have had different first language, the efficiency rate would most likely have been different.

4) Circumlocution

The use of "Circumlocution" strategy was 7 times, or equals 1.4%. It could be interpreted as that the participants were unable to think out of the vocabulary or any substituted one but they did not want to give up or transfer to other topics, so they turned to explain the item in other ways, for the interviewer to comprehend their meaning correctly.

5) Word Coinage

For "Word Coinage" strategy, it was rarely (1.5%, 6 cases) used by the subjects. It was selected when the students were not sure of the exact form of the intended item, but they had a little sense of the probable structure, so they would just combine the related words to a new one or a new word phrase which is not the correct one but sufficient in expressing their meaning.

5.2.2 Culture Background

Culture background includes many aspects such as the living environment, the language influence, the education system, the knowledge background and so on. These factors also affect students' strategy-use in certain ways.

1) Literal Translation

"Literal Translation" was the third mostly employed strategy, reaching to 35 occasions, or equals 8.9%. The possible explanation of this phenomenon is that students were deeply affected by their mother tongue Chinese, as a result,

when encountering uncertain structures, sentences, or phrases, students choose to translate directly according to their first language rules without considering the correct English forms. This result is in keeping with Sarah (2010) findings that when students were challenged to use language they were less familiar with, they used 'Literal Translation' to get their meaning across, which was a successful strategy, as it was understood by their partners due to their shared L1.

2) Feigning Understanding

"Feigning Understanding" was applied (12 times, 3.1%) when the students did not get the meaning of the questions due to the non-understanding of some key words or the fast speaking of the interviewer, but students were afraid or shy to request the interviewer to repeat or explain their questions in case of losing face or being given lower comments. Consequently, they would rather take the risk to continue the conversation by pretending that they understand the question than ask for explanation from the researcher.

The reason can possibly be related to the cultural backgrounds of the learners. Asian cultures encourage listening to others and discourage public discussion of feelings, especially disagreements or unpleasant feelings (Hong-Nam and Leavell. 2006). As the subjects in this study are Chinese, their upbringing and school experiences might have impacted their behavior in the text chats. When meeting the non-understanding points, they feel uncomfortable to ask, so they would choose to give up the stressful topics, or pretend to understand and continue the topic according to their own opinions.

3) Appeal for Assistance

The least used strategy is "Appeal for Assistance", which was employed by only 2 students for 3 occasions (0.8%). One possible reason for this phenomenon is that students feel embarrassed to ask the interviewer who is considered to be in an authoritative status. This corresponds with the culture that learners fear losing face in front of others (looking ridiculous by expressing non-understanding), or feel shy by giving others trouble (Sarah. 2010). Chinese students are very respect and also afraid of the people in a higher position, so they would rather choose to solve the problems by themselves although very difficult than ask for help from the question-givers.

This could be explained by the characteristics of Chinese students' education, in which activities are mostly hindered by the test-driven teaching culture, and learning should be serious, hard work (Hsing-fu. 2007). Consequently, students rarely communicate with the instructors about other issues out of their study. Gradually, students feel afraid or worried to communicate with the teachers, so they tend to try hard to solve the problems by themselves than ask help from the instructor.

In contrast to this result that "Appeal for Assistance" is the least used strategy, Anna (1997) research finding "Appeal for Assistance" strategy is the most efficient strategy due to the fact that both interlocutors and the researcher were present at the recording session. The possible explanation is that the task designs are different. The research done by Anna is a picture describing by two students, while this study is interview by students and the instructor. Students will not feel too stressed by asking help from their peer, but not from the instructor. Moreover, participants have to ask help for the describing of the unseen picture in Anna's study, but no need the description in this one. As a result, the results of strategy-use frequency are different.

5.2.3 Accommodation

It refers to the strategies that students used to request explanation of the parts that they missed or the points that they did not understand, or to confirm with the interviewer that if they got the meaning correctly.

1) Confirmation Check

"Confirmation Check" was employed for 14 instances, which equals 3.6%. It happened when the students were not confident if they had caught the exact meaning of the interviewer or not, as a result, they would ask the interlocutor again to confirm if the message was correct. This explanation is in line with claims made in other studies (Corrales and Call. 1989, Khanji. 1996, Oxford et al. 2004), which states that compensation strategies (comprehension check, confirmation check, guessing) were used to overcome comprehension problems which were caused by the task difficulty. For getting a clear understanding, students choose to confirm the information with the instructor.

2) Clarification Request

“Clarification Request” strategy was selected (2.8%, 11 cases) when the students could not follow the interviewer’s questions because of the missing of some important terms of the sentence. In this case, some students did not want to guess the meaning of questions by themselves, and some others totally had no idea of how to continue the conversation, as a result, they had to request for clarification from the interlocutor.

In this study, students did not employ these two strategies very frequently. The reason may be that questions were not so difficult that students could understand most of them. This explanation is in a line with Robinson (2001), who found more clarification request and comprehension checks are used on a completed map task with more elements. Besides of this reason, there is another one which is expressed as learners were trying to save the interlocutor the trouble of having to provide a difficult explanation (Sarah. 2010). It means that students did not want to give the interlocutor troubles, so they tried to use these strategies as less as possible.

5.2.4 Multiple Interpretations

This group contains of the strategies that applied by participants for various reasons, which is not proper to be classified into any specific one of them.

1) Use of Fillers/Hesitation Device

Among all these communication strategies, “Use of Fillers/Hesitation Device” appeared to be the most-frequently used one (40.5%, 159 cases) as they tended to be overused when the students performed their task. This could be explained that the use of this strategy allowed the students to process their cognitive demands required from the task as well as did help the speech to flow naturally. Generally speaking, the students “slipped” fillers in this actual conversation rather than “used” them. This was similar with Ying (2010) finding that the participants used fillers strategy the most in the video-conferencing conversation. During her research, the video communication channels at video-conferencing urge learners to make spontaneous oral responses. Learners need to organize ideas and pick the right language forms while they are talking, for the delay in this process produces gaps in the conversation. As a result, fillers strategy was frequently used in

videoconferencing. Although the videoconferencing conversation method is not exactly same with the audio-taping conversation which is used in this research, they both examined the oral English proficiency and the strategies used by the participants.

2) Topic Avoidance

“Topic Avoidance” strategy occupies 5.1%, or 20 cases. It was applied when the participants could not continue their previous topic for lacking of L2 language, or being unfamiliar with the issue, or realizing that the topic is not proper to be discussed in the interview, as a result, they would avoid the un-known one or the un-proper one and skip to another topic or end that topic without clear describing. Similar with Ying (2010) study, when the students encounter the culture-related issues, they tend to use more time to think of the proper words, or they would drift away from the pre-decided topics and talking about other issue, or they choose to lighten the topic.

Compared with this explanation, some scholars hold other opinions about “Avoidance” strategy, for instance, in Dörnyei (1995), “Topic Avoidance” is difficult to be identified because of different perception and interpretation. From Irene’s point, when the subjects fail to mention certain items, it may not be that he lacks the linguistic resources to communicate these items: he may consider these items not worth mentioning, or he may simply fail to notice them (Dörnyei. 1995). In a word, there are various reasons for using topic avoidance strategy. They may differ in different topics, or different persons, as a result, the interpretation is multiplied also.

3) Mime

”Mime” was taken for only 9 times (2.3%) by 5 students. One plausible reason is that the participants were totally lost in the question of the interviewer, so they could not figure out of any words to continue the previous theme, but they did not have enough courage or ideas of how to ask for some more information so they ended up by saying nothing there. Another reason is that some students did not want to answer the question directly or openly because they were worried if they showed their negative judgment or dissatisfaction about the topics they would be criticized. As a result, some participants showed their opinions by body gesture such as nodding head or smile but without saying anything, and some students just stop

making any utterance by waiting uncomfortably or pretending not hearing it. It is agreed by McNeill (2000) points that gestures are used to accompany the utterance to elaborate on what the speaker was saying.

5.3 Discussion on Other Significant Findings

5.3.1 The High-Used and Low-Used Strategies

It is very obvious that most of the students employed “Use of Fillers/Hesitation Device” and “Approximation” strategies, and some students used “Literal Translation”.

As the most used strategy, “Use of Fillers/Hesitation Device” is popular not only because the students want to gain time to think but also can reduce the embarrassment of non-utterance. “Approximation” is also preferred by the students, for their anxious or lacking of L2 vocabularies, it would be easy and effective to use another word to substitute the original one. Together with these two, the third most employed strategy “Literal Translation” is used for the influence of the Chinese language and culture.

In contrast with the finding in this study, Nani and Agatha (2004) results are different. In their research, the most used one is “Approximation”, and the next is “Use of Fillers”. The reason for the different results is due to the different research tasks. The design of Nani was story retelling, which had limited the issue, so students used approximate words to retell the known story. In contrast, this research tends to be open conversation, so students applied much focus on thinking of the language, as a result, “Use of Filler” strategy was more appeared.

Compared with the frequent used strategies, “Word Coinage”, “Mime”, and “Appeal for Assistance” strategies are rarely employed. The students are not confident enough to make up new words by themselves, so they try not to use “Word Coinage” very much in case of being wrong. Too much mime in a conversation may give the interlocutor feeling that the speaker is unfamiliar or uninterested about the topic, since no students want to behave negative in the interviews, they are all trying hard to give a good impression but not keeping quiet. “Appeal for Assistance” strategy is not liked by participants, for in proving their language proficiency, they have to face the obstacles by themselves but not asking too much help from the outsider.

5.3.2 Non-verbal Communication Strategy Use

In the present study, the participants hardly ever utilized non-verbal strategy to express non-understanding. From Si (1990) point, this might be correlated to the fact that in Chinese culture, regular use of gestures or body language in a conversation is considered impolite. Especially when communicating with someone who has more power or in a higher status, what the lower-position side need to do is to obey the instructors as much as possible, and too much body language will be interpreted as dissatisfaction or disrespect. Further studies are suggested to analyze the functions of non-verbal language in communication.

5.4 Conclusion

Overall, this study aims to investigate the type of Communication Strategies that these 20 Chinese students used and mostly used during oral English interactions. The main theory which supports this study is the framework about Communication Strategies from Tarone (1980). The data are collected from individual conversations of the interview which is held in the university. The data is analyzed by using simple statistical methods such as percentage and total number, and the findings are showed in three respects which are the overall communication strategies use, the CS categories and the individual CSs. The 13 types of Communication Strategies employed by the participants in this research comprise “Use of Fillers/Hesitation Device”, “Approximation”, “Literal Translation”, “Topic Avoidance”, “Message Abandonment”, “Language Switch”, “Confirmation Check”, “Feigning Understanding”, “Clarification Check”, “Mime”, “Circumlocution”, “Word Coinage”, and “Appeal for Assistance”. Among them, “Use of Fillers/Hesitation Device” is the mostly used strategy and “Appeal for Assistance” is the least used.

The result shows that Chinese students face many difficulties or breakdowns during their communication in English because they lack of L2 vocabulary or structures or some different reasons, and they all use various types of strategies and try to solve these obstacles. This phenomenon corresponds with the purpose of World Englishes, which is to get across the meanings of the interlocutors, so as to understand each other and to smooth the communication. As a result, even though a large number of

these students behaved unconfident about their English, they were still trying hard to use many CSs or other strategies to solve the breakdowns.

However, the result does not reveal the strategy-use difference between two genders for the huge differences in the number of female and male participants. While, the variation of strategies in terms of type and frequency used by each student was quite different, and is observed that the English major participants tend to use less strategies than most of the other students.

5.5 Recommendation

The present study involves a small number of participants from the similar background, and most of them are females. In order to obtain more meticulous results, the involvement of more diverse participants is strongly suggested for further study. The writer believes that gender and English proficiency may have a significant influence on the way English learners interacting for mutual understanding and how they cope with communication obstacles. Further research could also be expanded to, for instance, formal conversations between English-learners. It would be interesting to investigate how interactional students communicate with their fellows, especially how do they use communication strategies to solve the interaction breakdowns.

Video clips are suggested to be more advanced than audios, for the recording of non-verbal communications such as body language, gestures, facial expressions and eye contacts could also be interpreted as other communication strategies. As seen in this study, the audio conversations were not smooth and were often interrupted by pronunciation errors and accents. A more effective way to practice would be to use it between native speakers and non-native speakers instead of among non-native speakers. The authentic conversations can help non-native speakers to mimic the pronunciation of the native speakers, and to learn the pronunciation more effectively. However, even though there are drawbacks and limitations, this study builds on the authentic English conversations and it enriches our understanding of the situations about strategy use by some Chinese students during English communication. The findings cast light on the implementation of strategy using among Chinese users of English.

First, this present study centralized its investigation on how Chinese students negotiate meaning in English interaction using communication strategies. It would be useful for Chinese students who learn English as a second or foreign language because students learning English are usually worried, anxious and unconfident to communicate. Knowing and practicing these strategies will boost students' confidence to speak and interact in various real life occasions because communication strategies can be used as alternative devices of conveying meaning due to limitation of knowledge in the target language. Through the interaction, students are able to express their message as well as receive feedback or input with the help of communication strategies, and the communication strategies can help the students make their conversation go smoothly and clearly.

Then, it is important for the instructors to design real-time communication activities that focus on language acquisition, which is the major goal on the L2 classroom. As a result, providing the students with appropriate and accurate linguistic models may be necessary for them to know how to use oral communication strategies to good effect. Free discussions on real life issues require learners to ask and answer meaningful questions and exchange authentic information by using various communication strategies freely. According to Nunan (1989), free discussions are authentic but not pedagogical in nature, and should be encouraged. During the interactions, learners can find their own strategies to overcome the communication obstacles. Since some students are used to deploy their limited strategies, it may be desirable to encourage the students to adopt more effective strategies so as to produce accurate spoken language that can permit them to operate a higher level. As a result, the teaching of more challenging strategies (e.g., asking for confirmation, using self-correction, paraphrasing), which require deep processing seems to be necessary and effective.

With the widely spread of world English, the function of language are mainly used for communication. In terms of communication, there is no need to emphasize every single word, but to get across the meaning. This would be the most efficient benefits of communication strategies.