THE TASK TYPE EFFECT ON THE USE OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

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Abstract:
An argument that many foreign language students encounter oral communication problems while they try to express their meaning to their partners has encouraged a number of eminent scholars to analyze the use of communication strategies based on the type of the task activity and the level of proficiency. In this paper, the task type effect and the students' proficiency levels on the communication strategies employed by Kosovan and Bosnian speakers of English were investigated. The purpose of the study was to determine if the students' proficiency levels and the task type influenced the choice and the number of communication strategies at lexical degree in verbal communication. The study numbered 20 participants in total; Kosovan and Bosnian languages that use English as a foreign language. The subjects were selected upon their degree of proficiency (i.e. Elementary and Intermediate) levels and were asked to carry out three different types of the tasks: ten minutes of oral communication, picture story narration and photographic description. The data of the assigned tasks came from audio and video-recording. Thus, the current study used the taxonomy of communication strategies employed by Tarone (1977). Likewise, the communication strategies used by both levels of the students were observed and compared in special instances. It was summarized that the task type and the level of proficiency influenced the number and the choice of different communication strategies in verbal performances. To indicate the present observable facts, two main aspects of the nature of the given tasks were pointed out: context in the task and task demands, respectively.

Keywords: communication strategies; task type; proficiency level; language proficiency

1. Introduction

Communication is a crucial activity in daily life and it is regarded as a tool by which implication is allocated and the understanding between the students is developed. This type of the tool requires a *'vast repertoire of skills in intra and interpersonal processing, involving several individuals in the progression, paying attention, articulating, studying, monitoring, and assessing'* (Istifci, Lominadze & Demiray, 2011:2). There are different ways that communication can be used to convey meanings; some of these techniques are known as face to face (dyadic) interaction settings or through emails, and the main goal of this interaction is the successful communication of the messages to the listener (Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011). On the other hand, Matsumoto (2011) emphasizes that most

of the time learners argue special topics or describe actions in the form of comprehension in the course of interaction with their peers. Likewise, in some instances learners come up with interaction in which the message was not conveyed correctly during the communication with interactants, thus, high level students overcome these problems through compensated practices by using their ability in the target language (TL).

1.2 Literature Review

Scholars have defined communication strategies (CS) as learners' attempts to overcome linguistic problems during interactions due to their lexical deficiency in the TL. Thus, students employ different tools to solve communicative problems among their partners (Omar, Embi & Yunus, 2012). In the article of Cervantes and Rodriguez (2012), it is pointed out that CS are steps that learners take when they communicate with the purpose of transmitting the linguistic comprehension of the foreign language and the linguistic cognition among them in real communicative settings. Here, researchers usually measure students' produced items regarding the simplicity in comprehension, cognitive ability or intelligence, and their linguistic skills. Oral communication is a process of interaction among learners where students interchangeably take roles of speaker and listener. As a result, learners should try to develop their language learning competences in solving literacy skills, particularly speaking and listening abilities (Dörnyei and Schott, cited in Yaman, Irgin & Kavasoglu, 2013). In his paper, Dörnyei (1995), describes particular learners who try to communicate competently in the TL regardless of their linguistic deficiency, thus, they manage to interact by using their hands, imitating different sounds, narrating stories, employing code-switching, form new words, and utilize the CS according to their skills. In contrary, there are instances when oral communication cannot be successful in the TL acquisition, that is, learners frequently are not able to recall specific lexical items, they have insufficient command in grammar constructions and it might be as a result of cultural background related to the topic to be discussed. Additionally, when students attempt to convey their messages, they come across misunderstanding among their partners due to a problem of pronunciation. Hence, participants find very hard to understand a native speaker or non-native speaker because of their special pronunciation (Lewis, 2011). In his attempt to explain definitions of CS, Ghout-Khenoune (2012) assumes no unique definition of CS but researchers are in agreement that CS are learners' sufficient devices in the TL to convey their thoughts, ideas, and share knowledge with their peers. Here, CS are identified as students' spoken and non-spoken tools to solve communication breakdowns and discuss ideas in order to keep the flow of the dialogue. In line with this definition, Yani (2007) defines the CS as some methods that learners undertake to overcome communication problems in real life situations. Hence, when students are assigned to accomplish a task they encounters communication break-downs such as an appropriate expression and face difficulties with lexical items in the TL; likewise, participants cannot convey their meanings effectively, as a result they try to use some strategies to share their messages to their colleagues. Moreover, Lafford (2004) comments that the definitions of CS is mainly focused on learners' communication problems in the TL. The aforementioned breakdown may be accordingly to the learner's insufficient comprehension in a second language (SL) that arises by the interaction.

8

1.3 Taxonomy of Communication Strategies

The importance of developing different taxonomies of CS has been the main focus of many scholars to support the process of studying a foreign language. Tarone (1997) made efforts to construct the first taxonomy of CS that may assist learners in their attempts to communicate their meanings efficiently so that they can overcome communication problems due to their deficit in the foreign language. Tarone continuously has been working with other scholars to develop supplementary frameworks of taxonomies (Tarone, 1997; Faerch & Kasper, 1983:16-17, cited in Gumus, 2007:34). Table 1 shows the aforementioned framework of the taxonomy of the CS.

Table 1. Tarone's Taxonomy of Communication Strategies

1. Paraphrasing
a. Approximation
b. Word Coinage
c. Circumlocution
2. Borrowing
a. Literal Translation
b. Language Switch
c. Appeal for Assistance
d. Mime
3. Avoidance
a. Topic Avoidance
b. Message Abandonment

(Tarone, 1977; Faerch & Kasper, 1983:16-17, cited-adapted in Gumus, 2007:34)

1.3.1 Paraphrase

Approximation: speakers or learners use a particular vocabulary item or form of the TL despite the learner's awareness that the particular item is not correct but which in fact shares enough semantic characteristics in common with the item learner wanted to convey to his/her partners to fulfill his own needs (e.g. pipe for water-pipe).

Word Coinage: In this case students create a new word with the purpose of communicating their intended meanings in the target language (e.g. air-ball for balloon).

Circumlocution: 'learner describes the properties of the object or action instead of using the appropriate TL item or structure' (e.g. she is, us, smoking. I don't know its name. That's uh, Persian and we use in Turkey, a lot, Gumus, 2007:34).

1.3.2 Borrowing

Literal Translation: In order to convey their messages or describe an object, learners translate these items word for word from their mother tongue (e.g. He invites him to drink for they toast one another).

Language Switch: learner uses the native language term without trying to translate (e.g. balon for balloon, tirtil for caterpillar).

Appeal for Assistance: learner asks for the correct term (e.g. what is this? What called?).

Mime: learner uses non-verbal tactics in place of a lexical item or action (e.g. clapping one's hands to illustrate applause) or to accompany another communication strategy (e.g. it's about this long, Gumus, 2007:34).

1.3.3   Avoidance

Topic Avoidance: learner simply tries not to talk about concepts for which the TL item or structure is not known.

Message Abandonment: learner begins to talk about a concept but feeling unable to continue stops in mid-utterance (Tarone, 1997; Faerch & Kasper, 1983:16-17, cited in Gumus, 2007:34).

Moreover, CS are not interrelated directly with learners' linguistic comprehension; *'rather they are descriptive of the learners' model of use of what they recognize as they try to interact with interactants of the TL'.* To find out whether 'CS are related to language use, is to bring into question the relationship of these strategies to communicative competence' (Tarone, 1981: 287).

1.4 Task Type and Proficiency Level on the Use of CS

Teaching a foreign language through the task type activities is the focus of many researchers who consider it as pedagogical instruments to build up learners' CS or 'communicative competences' (Ghout-Khenoune, 2012:772). Here, interactional task is described as *'a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form'* (Nunan, 1989:10). The Task type is also defined as the overall activity that students try to employ their comprehension in different sub-fields in the TL (grammar, phonology, developing lexical meanings), to reach their communicative goals (Collings & White, 2014). Some tasks, such as language play are used as the tools to learn grammar. Here, learners by performing in the tasks can repair their mistakes so that they could make out the correct and incorrect language form and see it as an informal language (Gholami & Gholizadeh, 2015). Likewise, it is important to select well-made tasks, in this way learners are triggered to participate in activities in the TL, and the comprehension of FL (foreign language) can take place. Investigators implementing a psycholinguistic point of view are more concerned with interactional tasks, that is, the learners' attempts to convey their messages, they way how learners come across communication breakdown in accomplishing tasks and the strategy to prevail over the mentioned problems. The abovementioned concerns try to point out that different tasks may convey various problems during the communication, which can affect students' degree of interaction (Jung-K, 2016). However, previous studies found that various tasks may influence the use of CS together with proficiency levels in difficult ways. Hence, Perez (2016) presents a study that investigated learners' motivation to participate in challenging but reachable tasks, thus, their inspiration maintained as they were more prone to talk about important aims; exchange and distribute information with their interactants; they were more active in completing the tasks due to their own efforts; learners benefited from the tasks as they included real-life situations; learners stated that the tasks also developed their literacy skills, critical thinking and problem solving. On the other hand, proficiency level plays great role

in using linguistic items practically and creatively; hence, the more learners employ the mentioned resources the more proficient they become in the TL (Gholami & Gholizadeh, 2015). Furthermore, researchers found that, less proficient learners use more CS than more proficient ones. But, the situation differs in quality of employing CS. Lower proficient learners employ more L1-based strategies and higher proficient students use L2 more often (Karatepe, 1993; Philipson, 1984; Poulisse and Schills, 1989; as cited in Gumus, 2007:60).

2. Research Amis and Questions

The main aim of this study was to investigate the students' use of CS based on the proficiency levels and task type effect. The use of CS was analyzed derived from the taxonomy employed by Tarone (1997).

The study tried to find answers to the following research questions;

1. Is there any difference between students' proficiency levels in terms of types and numbers of CS in the three given tasks?
2. What is the student's view towards the use of CS based on the tasks accomplishment?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The subjects of this study numbered 10 Kosovan and 10 Bosnian speakers who were selected based on non-random quota sampling, that is, the required number of the respondents the researcher contacted. Five of the Kosovan participants had attended preparatory classes in the Turkish language. In the Kosovan group of speakers, there were some bilingual students, that is, along with their mother tongue they had also acquired a second language due to their intercultural communication (either Turkish or Bosnian) and one of the languages is dominant. Both groups were asked to accomplish the given tasks in dyadic interaction. In addition, one of the Kosovan students attended prep-classes at ELT department, Kocaeli University whose level was Intermediate (B1). The age range of all the participants was 18-28. An assumption was made that all the students attended courses of two different levels and had an equal degree of proficiency. Aside the students' attendance in an English course, control variable was established, that is, students stay in an English speaking country.

4. Design of the Study, Data Collection and Analysis

The present study was based on a qualitative research and placed into the group of Discourse Analysis. The novice researcher transcribed and decoded the data from audio and video-recordings of conversational interactions of the participants. Hence, natural conversational interactions among the students were regarded as more efficient and prone to employ the TL in a natural way; therefore, students were more at ease to produce language instances freely and felt comfortable to switch from topic to topic. Audio and video recordings provides linguistic and lexical information more than any other data collection tool as it allows us to retain every single utterance or word produced by the students. Moreover, the study

consisted of three types of tasks: ten minutes of oral communication-interview, picture story narration, and photographic description. After the data collection, two weeks later a retrospective study was conducted regarding students' view towards the use of CS. Previous studies observed that the task type may manipulate the CS use in different ways according to the students' proficiency levels (Poulisse, 1990, cited in Dobao, 2002:7). The three tasks were administrated in 17 sessions, while the retrospective included 34 sessions of 110.7 hours. The students were interviewed individually about their view on the use of CS. The tapes of collected data were transcribed, decoded and analyzed qualitatively, and the students' responses on the three tasks were identified according to Tarone's taxonomy shown in table 1. The abovementioned researcher was focused on the students' expressions, filled and unfilled pauses, lengthening of syllables, false starts, repetitions, and more explicit statements that could cause conversational problems among the students. Moreover the researcher's aim was not only the verbal part of the communication but also nonverbal elements, such as gestures. There is a possibility of some ungrammatical constructions, incomplete sentences, and repetitions due to the repeated data of the CS. The data collection of audio and video-recording was transcribed using the convention employed in Dobao's (2002) study of CS, as follows:

TRANSCRIPTION SYSTEM
(.)   Pause of less than a second
(1)   Pauses measured in seconds
The:::   Lengthened sound or syllable
The-   Cut-off of the prior word or sounds
(Laugh)   Laughter and other nonverbal noises

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Research Question 1: Is there any difference between students' proficiency levels in terms of types and numbers of CS in the three given tasks?

To answer the first question, the results demonstrated that the subjects employed all the strategies in Tarone's Taxonomy. Previous studies on task accomplishment illustrated that some students are more successful than others due to their more efficient use of the CS (Griffiths and Parr, 2001). The findings illustrated that there is a difference in the number of these strategies used by each group of the students in total, and a difference in types and percentages as well. Analyses indicated that there is a difference between less and more proficient students in terms of the number of L1-based and L2-based strategies employed in the three given tasks. To begin with, in the first task- ten minutes of oral communication interview, both levels of the students employed L2 strategies dominantly (64.3% and 85.9% respectively). These findings were in agreement with earlier studies that confirmed the use of communication strategies employed by various proficiency levels and that their choice was for L2 based strategies (Ting and Phan, 2008). In comparison to L2-based strategies, L1 were used less frequently (35.7% and 14.1% respectively). Additional analysis on the second task – the picture story narration demonstrated that students of the lower and higher levels used both L1 and L2-based strategies in different percentages and numbers (L2-based strategies were used more by both levels of the students). For the lower

level students, L2 constituted 64% of the communication strategies encountered by the students, and the higher level represented 89.7% of the total CS employed in the second task. In addition, L1 were 36% of the total for the less successful students and 10.3% for the more successful students. (Table 2. explains the difference of the CS in terms of numbers and percentages employed by both levels of the students in three different tasks).

Table 2. The Numbers and the Percentages of L1 and L2-Based Communication Strategies in the three given tasks

TASK	STRATEGY TYPE	ELEMENTARY STUDENTS		INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS	
		N	%	N	%
TASK 1	L1 BASED	143	35.7	44	14.1
	L2 BASED	257	64.3	267	85.9
	TOTAL	400	100.0	311	100.0
TASK 2	L1 BASED	98	36.0	22	10.3
	L2 BASED	174	64.0	191	89.7
	TOTAL	272	100.0	213	100.0
TASK 3	L1 BASED	51	31.0	16	11.9
	L2 BASED	114	69.0	119	88.1
	TOTAL	165	100.0	135	100.0

In the third task, students made use of L2 dominantly (the higher level employed slightly more 88.1% compared to the lowers level 69%). And L1 used less (11.9% and 31% by less proficient). The levels not only affected the number of CS but also the types as demonstrated in table 3.

Table 3. The Total Number and the Percentages of the Three Communicative Tasks

TASK	NUMBER	PERCENT
TASK 1	711	47.53
TASK 2	485	32.42
TASK 3	300	20.05
TOTAL	1496	100.0

Moreover, the findings also confirmed the numbers and the types used between

the tasks. There was a substantial decrease in the number of strategies encountered during the first task (ten minutes of oral communication interview) than in the second task and a subsequent decrease in the third task. Here, 47.53% of the total numbers of strategies were employed in the first task, 32.42% in the second task, and finally 20.05% of the total was employed in the third task.

5.2 CS Based on the students' L1 Strategies

It is assumed that these strategies were mostly employed by lower level students. Thus, they often couldn't find proper tools in their inter-language to overcome communication problems with their counterparts. These strategies are not effective when there are native speakers of a FL (foreign language) engaged in communication (Dobao, 2002). The following are two of the many examples that influenced learners' L1 based.

Language switch: Language learners employed these strategies in their own language without trying to translate it in the target language.

> (1) EXTRACT: "Wallpaper"
> INTERLANGUAGE SENTENCE: Tapetat e shtepise. CS ANALYSIS: Language switch: The student switched to his mother tongue or his own first language because he could not find the appropriate word in English for that item "wallpaper".

Literal translation: Learners tried to describe objects word for word in order to convey messages in their native languages. The following sample of extract illustrates an instance of literal translation.

> (2) EXTRACT: "Corpulent boy"
> INTERLANGUAGE SENTENCE: A:: the main object is:: this one, was you are not the strongest man in the world (.) a::: you have more, a::: they have more powerful mass (.) before you. CS ANALYSIS: Literal translation: The student wanted to convey the original explanation, but used borrowing strategies, a literal translation of the Albanian expression as "qellimi I tij kryesore ishte ky; ti nuk je njeriu me I forte ne bote, ne jemi me te fuqishem para jush".

5.3 CS Based on the Students' L2 Strategies

Students used most of these strategies differently and they were more demanding regarding linguistic and cognitive aspects (Dobao, 2002). The following were two of the many examples that influenced L2 strategies.

Circumculation: Learners describe an object as a substitute of employing the proper target language item or form.

> (1) EXTRACT: "Baby-bed"
> INTERLANGUAGE SENTENCE: Right (.) here (1) there is like (.) a::: baby chair (1) not chair. CS ANALYSIS: Circumlocution: The student in this case tried to describe "baby-bed" in place of using the appropriate target language item.

Word Coinage: Learners create a new word to communicate their meanings.

> (2) EXTRACT: "Mother tongue"
> INTERLANGUAGE SENTENCE: I know Albanian because my:: (2) my home (1) language…CS ANALYSIS: Word coinage: The student used "my home language" instead of "mother tongue" to create a description which he thought was appropriate for the meaning he wanted to express.

5.4 Research Question 2: What is the student's view towards the use of CS based on the tasks accomplishment?

To answer this question, students' comments based on the use of CS were transcribed and analyzed by researcher. The sample demonstrated students' ideas on their interaction with their counterparts (dyads). These might include the following indications, excerpted from various comments of the lower and the higher level students.

Awareness about instances of communication breakdown: Throughout the process of the task accomplishment majority of the students confirmed that their conversational interaction with their counterparts was very effective. According to the lower level learners, they faced communication problems because they didn't use English actively and learning a new language such as Turkish at the same time was affecting their English skills. An excerpted example of students' responses is given below.

> 232 T   *how was your conversation with your partner?*
> 233 S   *It was Ok. It wasn't very good but we understood each other.*
> 234 T   *Did you experience any problems or communication breakdown?*
> 235 S   *Yes, we had little bit problem because we don't know very well English and we used our mother tongues sometimes.*

Source and problem solving of communication: most of the lower level students affirmed that they were the source of the problem due to their limited command in English. As earlier studies in literature indicated that learners often faces problems in producing lexical items in the target language during the conversational interactions, thus, they often ask for help (Jung, 2004).

> 174 T   *Did you experience any problems or communication breakdown?*
> 175 S   *Yes, yes, especially when question came to, to:: describe the:: picture, that was difficult.*
> 176 T   *How often did this problem occur?*
> 177 S   *When I tried to communicate with my partner and sometimes when I tried to explain things that I had to explain.*

6. Conclusion

In the present study, the analyses of the data illustrated that the participants used all the strategies as shown in Tarone's taxonomy. Throughout the three tasks the participants were involved in 1496 CS in total. Both levels of the students employed dominantly L2 in the three given tasks. The more proficient students employed more L2 strategies due to their sufficient command in English than when compared to lower level. An interesting finding revealed that there was a decrease in the numbers and percentages of the CS employed as they progressed from the first, second and third task. The reason students used strategies in terms of types and numbers is because of the task demand, types, and students' proficiency levels. The results are in line with previous studies, the difficulty and complexity of the task type may interact with students' proficiency and particular CS (Dobao, 2002). The task type influenced the use of CS as the students could speak about their individual topics in the first task. Here, the students could switch freely form topic to topic as in natural conversations (the topic based on their everyday life). The last two tasks were demanding because

15

the students had to find appropriate lexical items to solve their communicative problems. In task II and III the pictures were presented in isolation, thus, the participants had to rely on their own CS to narrate and describe the pictures, while in the task I; the students could rely on the context. The higher level students made more use of paraphrasing strategies and produced more complex referential expressions compared to the lower level. These strategies led students to more successful communication. Thus, the more proficient students as a result of their sufficient command of the TL produced more language items that were more appropriate. The more achievement and reduction strategies learners employ the more frequently these strategies emerge in interactional situations, ultimately, influence the development of the TL (Wei, 2011:35). Learners have to be given more task activities in order to be aware of potential difficulties in completing the given tasks. Though, both levels of the students indicated that the shift from the oral communication task to the two other tasks brought some difficulties while completing the tasks as the students tried to find appropriate lexical items to describe the objects, actions and narrate the pictures. Finally, much further studies needs yet to be done to provide more understanding regarding the task effects and proficiency levels. Here, larger population and different degree of proficiency could be carried out to investigate the use of CS to show more reliable results. However, we hope that this paper will be an interesting source for those who want to know more about the CS of the Kosovan and Bosnian students used in the three different tasks.

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