CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The main objective of this study was to investigate CS by high and low proficiency learners in 3 different groups of proficiency pairs (Hi-Hi, Hi-Lo, Lo-Lo) in solving communication problems from an interactional perspective.

Chapter 1 outlined the problems, background and significance of this study. Also included is a brief overview on the history of Japanese education in Malaysia and the University of Malaya.

Chapter 2 looked at the theoretical and empirical aspects of existing CS studies and their relative importance to the present study. Special attention was given to studies on the interactional approach and studies using taxonomies similar to the present one. The taxonomical framework used in the classification and identification of CS was presented with a brief description of each CS type. The framework for analysis in this study is adapted with modifications from taxonomies suggested by Celce-Murcia, Dornyëi and Thurell (1995); Dornyëi and Scott, 1997; Tarone, 1977; Paribakht, 1985).

Chapter 3 described the methodology and instrumentation used in the data collection. 3 types of oral communication activities were conducted on 30 subjects. And a set of questionnaires were distributed to 165 students, with a 70% response rate (115 respondents).

The analysis and findings of the study were tabulated and presented in Chapter 4.

5.2 Research Conclusions

The present study suggests that Hi-Lo pairing gives low proficiency learners more edge in communication through valuable input from their high proficiency interlocutor. The high proficiency learners in the Hi-Lo pairs on the other hand, were provided with not only opportunities to reformulate and modify their own utterances but also opportunities to prompt their interlocutor to modify his utterances. This finding is consistent with a similar study on NNS-NNS dyads by Iwashita (1999:46):

> As in NS-NNS interaction where NSs modify their speech in response to the NNSs' signals of non-understanding, speakers/learners in NNS-NNS dyads are able to indicate difficulty in understanding their interlocutors' speech and to modify the speech that had caused the communication breakdown. Through negotiation of meaning, learners not only obtained opportunities to receive comprehensible input, but also to modify their output. In this NNS-NNS interaction, speakers/learners who modified their output provided comprehensible input to their interlocutors.

The Hi-Lo proficiency pairs also showed more enthusiasm in the conversation by using backchannel cues to indicate their participation in the interaction.

Results also indicated that both the high proficiency learners and the low proficiency learners in the Hi-Lo pairs demonstrated higher incidence of interactional strategies compared to their counterparts in the Hi-Hi and Lo-Lo pairs. This is particularly true for the high proficiency learners in the Hi-Lo pairs, as they showed to be the most users in almost all of the CS categories. This shows that they give more effort and are intent at conveying their message despite their interlocutor's inadequate proficiency level in the target language. This display of effort is beneficial to the lower proficiency level learners as they are exposed first hand to ways in which CS can be used in times of trouble. The amount of talk and the length of conversation in the transcripts are shown to be the highest for the Hi-Lo pairs as compared to the Hi-Hi and Lo-Lo pairs. The Lo-Lo pairs' amount of talk is shown to be the lowest among the 3 groups.

5.2.1 Research Question 1: Which Proficiency Pairs Use the Most CS?

Results showed that the Hi-Lo pairs are the highest CS users as they showed to be the most users in almost all of the CS categories compared to the other pairs. The disparity in the proficiency level for these pairs contributed to higher incidences of CS.

5.2.2 Research Question 2: Is There Any Significance between the Interlocutor's Proficiency and the CS Used?

There is significant difference between the interlocutor's proficiency and the CS used.

a) The high proficiency learners in Hi-Lo used a much higher frequency of CS in all CS categories compared to the high proficiency learners in Hi-Hi.

b) The low proficiency learners in Hi-Lo used a much higher frequency of CS in all CS categories except in the achievement strategy category compared to the low proficiency learners in Lo-Lo. Although findings showed a higher frequency of achievement strategy category in the Lo-Lo group, these strategies are mainly transfer strategies and non-linguistic strategies.

5.2.3 Research Question 3: Is There Any Significance between the Task and the CS Used?

There is significant difference between the task and the CS used. Results showed that CS vary by task. The highest frequencies of CS used in the 3 tasks are as follows.

(1) Task 1 – Confirmation Response

Confirmation Response were frequently used because the learners were merely responding to the researcher's interview questions most of the time.

(2) Task 2 – Confirmation Request

Learners needed to get confirmation on what they had just heard in order to understand the interlocutor's utterances and to continue with the conversation.

(3) Task 3 – Fillers and Gambits

Learners needed to come out with their own words when voicing their opinions and arguments on certain topic, therefore they needed more time to think. Fillers were used to stall time while they think and gambits acted as turn-taking strategy since task 3 was a two-way task which required both participants to interact rather than produce descriptions and receive instructions like the one-way task in task 1 and task 2.

5.3 Pedagogical Implications

This study is considered to have some implications for Japanese language education in higher institutions of learning in Malaysia, for example in the areas of syllabus and textbook design and the development of classroom activities.

Learners seem to be aware of CS and are able to employ them in oral interactions. However, learners of different levels of proficiency demonstrate a different degree of CS awareness and usage. Including CS in classroom instructions by means of modifying classroom activities to include CS practice may help remedy the situation.

The present study was conducted on the RPKJ students at the University of Malaya for quantity and homogeneity, therefore providing some indications on the CS used by Malay learners of Japanese in general. Unlike the RPKJ students, who are grouped into their respective proficiency levels, students of the same academic year in the bachelor program at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics of the same university are grouped in one class regardless of their proficiency levels. This causes a gap to exist between the good and the weak students. The gap continues to widen as the class progresses because the good students become better but the weak students become weaker due to lack of motivation. Classroom activities should accommodate for both type of students to keep both the good and the weak students motivated.

Strategic competence or CS should be incorporated in the objectives of the Japanese language syllabus, as it is an important component of communicative competence. The textbook used not only needs to be 'localized' in content, but it is also crucial to include communication strategy application in its content. There are very few locally developed

Japanese textbooks in the market at present. Therefore, a new comprehensive and locally developed textbook is highly anticipated.

5.4 Concluding Statement

There are many things learners can benefit through the use of CS regardless of who the interlocutors are and what the task is at hand. Different pairs of interlocutors and different types of tasks provide different application of CS. Learners should be exposed to all possible situations (inside or outside of the language classroom) that create opportunities for CS use and promote the development of their strategic competence, thus ultimately contributing towards their communicative competence.