CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

5.0 Introduction

In chapter one, a description of the problems faced in English communication by the international postgraduate students in the University of Malaya. In chapter two related literature and studies on communication strategies are discussed. Chapter three provides an account of the research site, the participants, and the data collection techniques. Chapter four provides the analysis of data. The communication strategies employed by the learners to achieve their communication goals were discussed.

5.2 Some useful features of this study

Throughout the follow up interview and the video-recorded conversation of this study, the study used video-tape method that caught non verbal (body language) communication, as previous studies did not use. The non-verbal communication (facing expression, head and eye movement, gestures) of the participants also provide important information on the negotiation the meanings. L2 learners have limited linguistic means that may rely extensively on non-linguistics and paralinguistic to convey their referential message and in establishing mutual knowledge.

5.3 Summary of key findings

The study examined the interactions between International postgraduate Middle-Eastern students with IPS counter staff in the University of Malaya. The study was based on data that video recoded natural conversation which took place while the participants were acquiring information. The use of triangulation method of data collection supported the finding that emerged from the study. The data were collected through the use of video recordings, an informal interview, and transcriptions. The study shows that language learners were able to maintain the flow of their conversation by using different types of communication strategies.

The study answered the following research questions:

5.3.1 How do postgraduate Middle Eastern students at University Malaya overcome communication problems with staff at service encounters in the Institute of Postgraduate Studies (IPS)?

Generally, the researcher found that the language learners employed different types of communications strategies to avoid conversation breakdown. The strategies used by the participants were determined by the knowledge of the language they possessed. The learners fell back on strategies as a result of the imbalance between communicative needs and their actual ability to use the target language.

It also appears that in solving their communication problems, the learners drew on other knowledge sources such as, non-verbal communication strategies to compensate for their

deficiencies in the target language. The use of non-verbal communication strategies enable learners to convey messages which their linguistic resources do not permit them to express successfully.

The study shows that although the learners faced communication problems, this did not prevent them from attempting to solve these problems. The learners were able to use different communicative strategies to improve their chances of being understood.

5.3.2 What are the types of communicative strategies used by postgraduate Middle Eastern students at University Malaya in oral communication with staff at service encounters at the Institute of Postgraduate Studies (IPS)?

In order to answer this question, qualitative analyses were carried out. The data used in the analysis were taken from the recordings of strategies used by 90 Middle Eastern post graduate students at service counters in IPS. Based on the transcriptions (APPENDIX A), the researcher identified the frequency use of communication strategies used by the participants. Modification strategies were most frequently used by participants, followed by interactional strategies, compensatory strategies, and avoidance strategies and non-verbal communication strategies.

Clennel's (1994) study indicates that compensatory strategies are the most commonly used by the L2 learners, while Kebir (1994), Chen(1990) and Whilliam et al.(1997) report that interactional strategies are the most popular among L2 learners.

The finding on the use of compensatory strategies among the participants revealed that when communication problems occurred, the students preferred to get their ideas across by themselves rather than ask for some help from their interlocutors or abandon the conversation. They usually tried to fill the conversation gaps by making an effort to convey the intended message meaningfully, so they took risks to explain, create or guess the problematic word(s).

The finding supports Wenden's (1991:41) statement that 'the good language learner is willing to take risks. These students are willing to take risks in order to communicate, using any meaning at their disposal to convey meaning. This often involves the use of circumlocution, paraphrases, gestures, and may sometimes involve the creation of new words by analogy with familiar forms.

In order to avoid interruption in the conversation and to achieve mutual understanding, interactional strategies were used by the participants to ensure that their interlocutors understood the intended messages completely. In conversations, communication problems might occur but the use of interactional strategies help the speakers expand their conversation through smooth turn-takings.

After compensatory strategies, avoidance strategies were the next most frequently used. When the participants could not transmit their intended message, they avoid those problematic messages. In order to avoid making mistakes and increase fluency in conversation, the participants occasionally used avoidance strategies, namely message avoidance. Topic avoidance was not found in this study.

Faerch&Kasper (1983) as cited in David (1999) explain the reason for using avoidance strategies:

In order to avoid producing non-fluent or incorrect utterances by using sufficiently automised or hypothetical rules/items, learners may decide to communicate by means of a reduced system focusing on stable rules and items which have become reasonably well-automised.

To some extent, Rose (1996) argues that avoidance strategies should not be introduced to the learner because the purpose of communication instruction is to help learners anticipate and deal with conversation problems, not to prevent or avoid communication problems. However, David (2003) proposes that elimination of certain formal elements of the target language do not always interfere with the transmission of meaning if the learners use them appropriately. In fact, the learners benefit from the use of avoidance strategies because they do not need to stop the conversation immediately, but try to remove the problematic word(s) or sentence(s) with a new one.

Non-verbal strategies were also used in the study to compensate the participants' lexical gap of the TL. Most of the use of these strategies aimed to replace their messages to make them clearer and more understandable

5.4 Limitations and Further Research

The result of this research is based on data collected mainly from 90 International Middle-Eastern postgraduate students. The results and analyses presented here can be considered a general overview of international postgraduate students' communicative

language features. Further studies with a larger population can be carried out in the same area and this might be useful for curriculum developers and the language policy makers

5.5 Pedagogical implications and conclusions

The findings have implications in the field of second language teaching. These include teaching of CSs, syllabus design and material design

5.5.1 Teaching CSs

There have been controversies in the past decade on whether second language learners should be taught CSs or not. Some researchers (Bialystok, 1990; Bialysto and Kellerman, 1987; Kellerman, 1991) believed that L2 learners have the ability to solve communication problems and thus there is no point in teaching L2 learners to solve these problems by using of CSs. It is also suggested that learners should practice real-life communication tasks as ways of fostering the use of their CSs repertoire. (Bialystok and Kellerman, 1987; Canale and Swain, 1980)

However, many studies show that strategies of communication in the teaching learning context can help learners improve their skills in real life language use. Savigon (1990),Taron (1984), Tarone and Yule (1989) believed that it is possible and desirable as strategic competence is part of the learner's communication competence. It involves the transferring of L1 skills, bridging the gap between classroom and real life

communication and contributing to the students' sense of security, self-confidence and motivation to communicate. The teaching of CSs may also involve raising learners' awareness about the nature and communicative potential of CSs and encourage students to be willing to take risks and use CSs (Dornyei 1995, p.80)

This study showed that the participants are able to employ some of the CSs. Unfortunately, they are not able to use all the types of CSs and thus they are unable to use them effectively and spontaneously. Hence, if EFL teachers can make learners more aware of the range of communication strategies, learners can utilize a wild range of CSs creatively and effectively.

The use of communicative strategies is very important. Therefore, the teaching of communication strategies in the classroom is important in the learning situation. Brodersen and Gibson (1992, cited in Kasper and Kellerman, 1997 p.17–30) suggest that improvement in effective CS use can result from teaching (Yule and Tarone, 1997, p.29). In a study, Chen (1990) demonstrates that effective CS use depends on proficiency. She concludes that learners' strategic, and accordingly, communicative competence might be increased through recommended CS training. Dörnyei (1995) in an empirical study showed that a focused CS instruction could contribute to L2 development. By this, he supports a direct approach to teach CS, and includes awareness-raising in this approach. Rabab'ah (2005) argues that there are three reasons for raising consciousness of some CS. First, communication strategies can lead to learning by eliciting unknown language items from the interlocutor, especially

the appeal for assistance strategy. Second, CS helps the conversation continue. Third, the use of CS can help learners solve their communication problems and achieve their communicative goals (p.194).

Recent studies in many cross-cultural situations eg. Dadour and Robbins (1996) in Egypt and Japan, in Taiwan (Yang, 1996) and in Spanish (Flaitz and Feyten, 1996) and French language contexts found that there was a positive effect of the use of strategies in communication. This kind of strategy training through consciousness rising for communicative language use may help raise cultural awareness in recognising the strategies and their possibilities for communicative language practice.

5.5.2 Curriculum and Course Design

In situations where language curriculum and course contents are to be designed for the non-native speaking background learners, strategies of communication can be taught for effective use in real life. This will improve learners' confidence in selecting and implementing appropriate strategies in communication (Dornyei and Thurrell, 1994); Dornyei, 1995; Corder, 1983; Bialystok, 1981).

Since strategic competence is one of the important components of communicative competence, it should be included in the goals of teaching English language course. David (1999) argued the possibility of consciousness-raising of communication

strategies as a tool to improve language proficiency of L2 leaners. Therefore, a course should be designed to create situations which will promote the development of learners' strategic competence, and the ability to use communication strategies to deal with different communication problems they might encounter. Most English courses do not focus on the teaching of CSs. Therefore, there is a need for course designers to look at incorporating communication strategies into present courses so as to develop learners' strategic competence which will help learners to achieve communication competence (Canale & swain, 1983).

5.5.3 Material design and teaching

Williams (2006) suggested that teachers should make students aware of communication strategies and teach students to use communication strategies in the classroom. Teaching material should be chosen and developed to provide learners opportunities to identify potential communication breakdown and ways to overcome them. Teachers can devise exercises and activities whenever possible for learners to practise and use the CSs. The use of video recordings will be useful in helping learners become more aware of their communication performance. Playback will allow learners an avenue for analyzing, discussing and getting feedback regarding their oral communication. Playback is also important for learners to understand the non-verbal

signals such as gestures, eye contact, and body movement also play a role in oral communication.

5.6 Recommendation for Further Research

Further research could be carried out on CS employed in formal and informal language learning situations. The present study could be expanded by doing a research involving larger number of participants to gain a better insight for the use of communication strategies and to enable researchers to make generalization. A study on staff's use of CS could be interesting to investigate. This could be done in different contexts such in the office, in the new students' registration, in informal interaction contexts and so on. Investigations on staff's use of CS could also be conducted in relation to communication with different groups of people such as students and the administrators. Teachers should also realize their own CS and investigate whether their choice of CS used affects their material and tasks for English language teaching.

5.7 Conclusion

Communication strategies play an important role in oral communication. It is also an important aspect for English language learners to learn towards achieving successful communication and competence. Ellis (1999, p.197)) argues that "Communication strategies are one of the main ways of keep going." They encourage language learners to find ways of avoiding communication breakdown with their interlocutors to achieve their communication goals.

This study shows that ESL learners are able to overcome their communication problems by using communication strategies during their interaction with the counter staff. There are limitations in this study.   However, the information and knowledge can contribute to the EFL learners particularly UM international students on how to communicate even when they lack   lexical items.