

# **CHAPTER5**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

### **5.0 Introduction**

The data obtained in this study show that communicative strategies of various kinds were used by the Chinese students with some strategies being more used than others.

In this study it appears that compensatory strategies were more used than avoidance strategies, but the strategy of prefabricated patterns and foreignising strategy were not employed. In the findings, it is noted that the Chinese students were more inclined on using a variety of communication strategies. The findings of this study seems to be similar to those of Bialystok (1983), Bialystok and Frohlich (1980), Paribakht(1985), Corrales and Emily (1989), Poulisse (1990) who commented that the use of the communication strategies were influenced by the context and type of communication problems which could be solved. It has also been identified that most researchers agree that various communication strategies should be used to bridge the gap which exists between the non-native speakers' linguistic competence in the target language and their communicative needs.

## **5.1 Summary**

The findings in chapter 4 is summarised to answer the research question in this study which are listed below:

### **1. What are the communication problems encountered by Chinese students from China studying in Malaysia?**

With regards to research question 1, the study brought to surface some of the problems faced by the students in the process of communicating in English. The more prominent problems faced by them are related to their limited vocabulary, the differences between Mandarin and English as well as to their lack of practice in oral communication as a result of the teaching methodology adopted in China. However these were derived based on the researcher's own experience as a teacher and a student in China as well as drawn from the interviews with the 10 participants. There are not official statistics to support this claim at the moment.

The section below provides a summary of the findings acquired from this study and it will highlight the use of the various communicative strategies discussed in chapter 4. It will also aim to display the frequency in usage in terms of the various communicative strategies identified but as stated in chapter 4, the statistics may not be generalised as they are confined to the context of this study only. To facilitate a clear understanding, the summary will be given under relevant sub topics.

## **2. What are the types of communicative strategies used by these students to cope with the problems faced?**

Chapter 4 has illustrated the various communicative strategies used by the participants and so the section below will briefly talk about them.

### **5.1.1 Avoidance strategies**

Avoidance strategy is an area which was uncovered only recently in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research publications and it provides a wide usage of theoretic literature and seems to be fundamentally centred on establishing its concept and trying to improve its classification. In view of this, an analytical study on the use of strategies is certainly required by China students. As Schachter (1974), Hakuta (1976), Kleinmann (1977) and Dagut and Laufer (1985) have agreed, there are differences in the syntactical structures between the language of the mother tongue and the second language. They conclude that L1 plays an important role in the learning of L2, and avoidance strategy is a valid index of learning difficulty that can be predicted through analysis.

In addition, the use of message abandonment, another communicative strategy identified by studies implies that it is used more by the participants than topic avoidance, a strategy linked to learners who prefer to abandon messages due to linguistic predicament. In this study, it appears that message abandonment was employed 3 times more often by the participants than the strategy of topic avoidance. This finding may indicate that the learners' dependence on strategies differ and it is probably due to their varied levels of

linguistic difficulties. As has been highlighted, the participants' main problems were their low level of mastery of English but clearly their problems may range and encompass lexical, semantic, grammatical and phonetic difficulties.

In this study, there were a total of 7 occurrences of topic avoidance which equals to 2.01%, and 24 occurrences of message abandonment which equals to 6.90%. Data gathered from the five pairs reveal that topic avoidance is directly employed to change the topics of discussion irrespective of whether they want to know or are just as curious to find out about something else. However some other researchers (Tarone, Cohen and Dumas, 1983 and Bialystok, 1990) have claimed that avoidance is taken as a strategy when speakers are confronted with learning difficulties. In the case of empirical study, it has been counted as (a) answers which do not use negation, (I have a cat, instead of I do not have a dog), (b) answers which are not connected to the question asked, (I like summer, instead of winter is not hot) and (c) not giving any answer. Examples (a) and (b) appeared most in this study, however there was no evidence of (c). This is probably because it is generally accepted that it is impolite if the person doesn't answer to a question posed to him.

### **5.1. 2 Compensatory strategies**

Dornyei outlines eleven types of compensatory strategies in a very comprehensive way , which include, prefabricated patterns, and stalling or time-gaining strategies, use of all purpose words, code-switching, appealing for help, approximation, literal translation, circumlocution, word coinage and non-linguistic signal, etc. (Dornyei, 1995 cited in Brown, 2000: 128). Some of these appear to be employed by the participants and seems to occur at

a high frequency rate while others seldom occurred. The findings of this study imply that compensatory strategy is used but it tends to be affected by various factors such as the task and the learners' background and this seems to concur with the outcome detected by Bialystok (1983), Bialystok and Frohlich (1980), Paribakht (1985), Corrales and Emily (1989), Poullisse (1990) all of whom have reported that the use of compensatory strategies is influenced by the context and type of communication problem to be solved. In this study, compensatory strategies were found to linger at the rate of 82% and this suggests that it is more commonly used.

The following is a summary of the individual compensatory strategies as detected from the data and its usage is depicted in terms of percentage as shown in Table 5.1 below.

**Table5.1: Summary of Individual compensatory strategies**

|                                     |        |
|-------------------------------------|--------|
| 1.Stalling or time gaining strategy | 58.05% |
| 2. Code switching strategy          | 13.50% |
| 3. Appeal for help                  | 5.46%  |
| 4. Approximation strategy           | 3.16%  |
| 5. Circumlocution strategy          | 1.15%  |
| 6. Literal translation strategy     | 0.86%  |
| 7.Non-linguistics signals           | 8.90%  |

### **Stalling or Time-gaining strategy**

From the table it is obvious that this strategy was the most used in this study and it

occupied 58.05% of all communication strategies. In general, these devices are introduced in order to help speakers to hold the floor and to have some time to think of what to say. From the background of the participants, it can be noticed that they were all in the low English proficiency level. They were used to communicating in Mandarin most of the times both in China and Malaysia. In fact, they needed time to think of what they wanted to say. Expressions from “such as”, “eh...”, “oh...”, were identified as the fillers used most of the time to gain time to think. In the case of pair 1, speaker Z and speaker H; and pair 3, speaker C and speaker D, time stalling strategy comprises about 30% and 50% respectively. Both speakers of pair 1 have been in Malaysia for just 3 months while the speakers in pair 3 have been here for about a year. This implies that their stay in Malaysia has no influence over their use of English.

The rationale for the use of hesitation is explicitly stated and this implies that most people need to hesitate every now and then during a conversation. Silence is not a good way to hesitate because more often than not, silence causes embarrassment and confusion. Silence may also let other people take over the conversation” (Canale, M., & Swain, M.,1980). Although many researchers do not accept time-stalling devices as communication strategies, they are sometimes included in textbooks apparently as a strategy to keep the conversation going.

### **Code – switching strategy**

This strategy was identified to have been employed about 13.5% in this research. It occurs when a learner, in attempting to communicate in the L2, used his L1 without adjusting the morphology or the phonology. Instances of code switching identified in this study were

only performed at the lexical level. Some of the words used in code switching were taken verbatim from the task sheet. However, there were also instances of code-switching used at random without any reference to the task sheet. It was also found that in some instances, code-switching was probably resorted to after some attempts were made to retrieve the L2 equivalent. The subjects' behaviour was found to be achievement-oriented behaviour as they hesitated before employing the strategy of code switching to gather confirmation and certainty in this study.

### **Appeal for help strategy**

From the analysis, it was not surprising that appeal for assistance is another common feature and communicative strategy found to favour by the participants and this strategy amounted to about 5.46%. This strategy is obviously useful for lower-proficiency second language learners because it allows them to immediately participate in a conversation even though they may not be well equipped with English. It was found that some of the more common words they used were "what", "pardon", "say again" or they would repeat the previous sentences. Definitely, this finding implies that the participants are hampered by their linguistic resources in terms of their ability to express their thoughts in words smoothly, as such, they would require time to construct sentences to converse smoothly.

### **Approximation strategy**

This strategy occurred 11 times in this study and was used about 3.16% of the times. Most of the times, it was found that the participants would just express the meanings they want in approximate ways because they did not have the exact word. Tarone (1977) explains that

this strategy is “the use of a single target language vocabulary item or structure, which the learner knows is not correct, but which shares enough semantic features...” (Cited in Bialystok, 1990: 40). Dornyei’s definition of the same term is “using an alternative term which expresses the meaning of the target lexical item as closely as possible” (Dornyei, 1995 cited in Brown, 2000: 128) because they think it is the correct expression as long as the grammar is right. Apparently, the students in this study did not employ it as much as others.

### **Circumlocution strategy**

This strategy was used 4 times out of the 348 communication strategies and it amounted to only 1.14% in this study. There were not many evidences of circumlocution activities found in this study. This strategy is commonly introduced with procedural vocabulary in sections on describing objects or gadgets, giving definitions, or as an academic vocabulary-learning skill.

### **Literal translation strategy**

This strategy of literal translation as defined in Chapter 4 consists of both lexical and semantic translation strategy. In the data collected and analysed in the current study, there was no evidence of students using lexical translation. However, there was evidence of semantic translation strategy being used. One observation made is that the students in the study employed this strategy in two ways. One way was where they speak in Chinese first and then translate the term from Chinese to English. The second way was where the speaker would speak in English first and then go on to translate what he/she utters in Mandarin. In terms of frequency, the use of this compensatory strategy amounts to 3 times only.



### **Non-linguistics signals**

This strategy has been examined and it was found to be quite commonly used and obviously was used at the rate of 8.9% out of 348 times of occurrences of strategies. In this study, it could probably be said that people consider verbal communication as an important aspect of conversation and although not much has been said of non-verbal communication strategies, it appears to be a significant strategy with the participants. Evidence of facial expression and body gesture in terms of smile and nodding were found in this study, especially among pair 2, speaker M and speaker C. Both of them were females and so it may imply that females tend to use more non-verbal strategy than males. However, the finding cannot be generalised.

Non- linguistics signal expression is something unitary, a separate domain independent of verbal communicating or classifiable under some single term like 'body language'. This is to drastically simplify the event from the actual practice. As pointed out by writers on language and social interaction, gestural and vocal actions are often integrated rather than autonomous, "and verbal and non-verbal communications are usually produced in a highly coordinated fashion: they are not distinct domains" (Sheldon1999:157, also Kendon 1994, McNeill 1992, 2000).

### **3. What are the communicative strategies which are preferred by these students?**

The discussion above clearly indicates that the communication strategy most preferred by

the Chinese students studying in Malaysia is stalling or time gaining strategy (58.05%) and the least preferred is literal translation strategy (0.86%). The reason for the high usage in the use of stalling or time gaining strategy is probably because it does not require any extra effort on the part of the students unlike the other strategies such as code-switching, appeal for help, approximation and circumlocution. Another reason could be attributed to the fact that compared to message abandonment and topic avoidance, this strategy enables the participants to proceed with their communication in order to convey their meanings or intentions. The result that shows the use of literal translation as a strategy implies that it is the least preferred by the students in this study. This is probably due to the fact that students were somehow unconsciously restraining themselves from falling back on their mother tongue. Immaterial of the types of communication strategies which the participants had employed, it is clear that they bridges to the gaps between their linguistic competence and their intentions to communicate.

## **5.2 Recommendations and Conclusion**

In conclusion, communication strategies remain an important source of element in Foreign Language Learning. Compensatory strategies, in particular, will greatly promote learners' communicative competence, especially when the students study in schools. Teachers too can play an important role in teaching communication strategies to students, thereby assisting them to practise the target language in spite of their lack of command of English. Oxford (1990: 1) holds that language learning strategies "are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence". As such, it is recommended that the teachers in China should learn to instruct students on how to use

communication strategies as extensively as possible so as to approach English language learning more meaningfully as it has the means to develop an interest to communicate. This can harness the growing desire to communicate effectively in English. Apart from that, teachers or those related to education need to put a greater effort in motivating learners to apply communication strategies in their attempt to communicate in their target language and that much of their confidence will be boosted when their meanings are presented clearly. When their confidence level increases, their desire to use the target language also increases and this can indirectly impact on their language acquisition skills.

In addition, an English-speaking environment needs to be created to a greater extent among Chinese learners of English in China because through continual exposure to natural conversations, students may learn through opportunities both to hear more of the target language and to produce new utterances to test their knowledge (Wenden & Rubin, 1987: 26). As a consequence, motivation must be given to students to enhance and manipulate their limited knowledge of the language with the use of communication strategies. As Graham (1997: 89) states, “key factors for communication strategies include the aim of decreasing anxiety and increasing participation”. Using English for conversation in the activity corner is one of the most effective ways to fulfil this learning goal. Although many schools do have this kind of activity, the frequency and the extent to be emphasized still needs further development.

Furthermore, local educational organizations should attach more importance to learners’ communicative competence in Foreign Language Learning. In an effort to improve the situation, communication strategies still do not feature in many L2 syllabuses in China.

From the results of this research, it is suggested that (1) local educational organizations in China should highlight children's communicative competence in English rather than their testing scores; (2) authentic English teaching materials including textbooks and other reading materials should be developed; (3) appropriate methodologies for English teaching should be applied and (4) new testing system should be created to accord with the requirements of fluent oral English.

To provide a provisional insight into the use of communication strategies for China students, greater detail is required in order to be able to make generalisations. A direction for future research would be the identification of the communication strategies employed in different learning situations. This would also take into consideration the relationship between learner variables and learner preference of strategies. It is advisable for students to determine the use of communication strategies according to the L2 in a formal learning situation with exposure to the L2 being given more. The use of limited expressions and lack of vocabulary in English can be overcome through exposure as they step into real life. Even in schools, teachers of English should always take the initiative to make English lessons interesting and they also need to introduce actual situations for communication in English to be conducted in the class instead of merely concentrating on learning grammar and hoping to elicit excellent result from students sitting for public exams. Instead, they should emphasise on improving their oral English. Another area of research to be considered, besides empirical and recorded data, is the use of introspection in order to identify the second language learner's intended meaning and their use of communication strategies.

On the whole, the research findings has provided several suggestions of importance which will facilitate improvement and development on the use of the wide range of

communication strategies such as using approximate words, code switching, coinage of new words, circumlocution expressions and simplified systems. These could be of great help to learners in the event they face communication break-downs. Even the low proficiency students will have the ability to use communication strategies despite their language limitations provided they practise oral speaking constantly. It has also been found that they lack exposure because they only talk occasionally in English among themselves apart from attending the English classes. To overcome their lack of social practice, they can be engaged to work in a foreign firm where they can practise speaking in English orally during work.

Apparently, some radical changes would help to facilitate communicative competence, where more English classes should be conducted with the help of qualified teachers who can organize more oral presentation and oral practices in debate. As far as possible, native speakers should be engaged in teaching institutions for short term basis, say six months or a year to conduct oral classes which will be of considerable help to students to improve their standard of English via frequent application of the variety of communication strategies. This can harness good spoken English as a result of exposure. Besides this, students can also interact and listen to or be exposed to debates which can indirectly enhance and improve their oral communicative abilities.

Books and educational magazines should be introduced as additional reading materials apart from their regular attendances in regular English classes. It is deemed that reading materials can provide them the list of vocabularies which can facilitate their oral usage in the future. Generally, students tend to neglect their oral practices of using English for

various reasons and the problem has been compounded by a lack of English reading materials that could be in various varieties and genres. Undoubtedly, this drawback is reckoned by many Chinese students in China as a great hindrance that has affected their English learning progress.

The above information given is in the form of suggestions and it trusts that the result of the findings from the data analysis may be of help to improve the level of English teaching in China besides enabling learner's to understand their communicative problems so that there are viable routes they can take to overcome some of these problems. By encouraging the frequent use of a variety of communicative strategies with a view to achieving greater proficiency in English, self esteem and confidence of learners will be further increased. Based on evidence from this study, it would seem that there a need for improvement to develop new skills in acquiring a high standard of performance in their daily communication is necessary. Thus, it calls for the incorporation of English language use early in schools. Naturally, the higher benefit of an early exposure to English education is that students can learn the correct pronunciation and this can help their oral skills tremendously. Students should be encouraged to interact and speak confidently as early as possible to reduce the fear of getting embarrassed when mistakes occur in the conversation.

More importantly, it is necessary to emphasise that for the sake of practising good English, learners like Chinese students in China must be willing to take the risk of making mistakes without fear of being demoralised and embarrassed bearing in mind that practice makes one perfect. Students who intend to go overseas for further studies or to go into the workforce with foreign firms should make it a point to acquire English proficiency so that more

opportunities to expand on one's career will be available. Lastly, in the event of being confronted with difficulties, students are advised to resort to the use of communication strategies which is the best way to ensure that their oral communication skills are effective to some point and also to develop new ways of making one's meaning known without fear or prejudice. This can provide for greater achievement both academically and socially.