

Advanced ESL learners' use of communication strategies during oral presentations

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Introduction

Communicative competence is what a speaker needs to know to communicate effectively in culturally significant setting (Hymes, 1974). To communicate effectively, available linguistic resources need to be used appropriately in the context to achieve the communicative purpose. Canale and Swain (1980) conceptualised communicative competence as comprising grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. Grammatical competence refers to the awareness of language rules whereas sociolinguistic competence involves the knowing the social rules of using language appropriately in society. Discourse competence refers to the knowledge of the way different texts are structured and the ability to participate in a continuous discourse. As for strategic competence, it is defined as the “verbal and non-verbal communication strategies [used] to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence [in the target language]” (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 17).

Language users with strategic competence could maximise the available linguistic resources to achieve intended meanings in communication through the use of communication strategies. There are three main perspectives on communication strategies. The first two perspectives, Faerch and Kasper (1984) and Tarone (1981), were prevalent in the 1980's and research along these two parallel lines of inquiry have modified the existing frameworks to account for more variables in the use of communication strategies. The third perspective of Clennell (1994) is one that introduces the discourse element into the categorisation of communication strategies.

The first perspective on communication strategy use is the psycholinguistic view (Faerch & Kasper, 1984). Communication strategies are seen as potentially conscious, problem solving strategies applied by L2 learners when they encounter gaps in knowledge of the language system during production of speech in L2 (Faerch & Kasper, 1980). In the psycholinguistic view, communication strategies is seen as part of the planning process that takes place when speakers face problems that impede performance of their initial plan (Ellis, 1994). The speakers can choose to either retain or abandon their original communication goal as a solution to the communication problem, or use communication strategies as an alternative plan in an attempt to maintain the original goal. The strategies used can be categorised into cooperative strategy where the interlocutor's assistance is sought in achieving the communication goal, or noncooperative strategy where the speaker formulates the intended meaning in another way (e.g. translation, restructuring, circumlocution). On the other hand, if the speakers choose to abandon the original communication goal, the strategies used are referred to as reduction strategies which can be subdivided into formal reduction strategies (e.g. avoiding language rules they are not certain of) and functional reduction strategies. (e.g. topic avoidance, message abandonment, meaning replacement). Communication strategies in the psycholinguistic view are centred on the notion that these strategies come into play in the planning process to compensate for problems in communication.

The second aspect is the interactive view of Tarone (1980) which sees use of communication strategies as the joint negotiation of shared meaning, when there is occurrence of different interpretations of certain terms. In Tarone's (1980) view, communication strategy is defined as “a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared” (p. 419). The reformulation of the message only comes to a halt when the intended message is mutually shared by the interlocutors. This is in contrast to the decision made by the speaker to avoid