

THE EFFECT OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGY TRAINING ON LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY LEARNERS' STRATEGIC COMPETENCE

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Strategic competence is the ability to use communication strategies for oral interaction within the limits of linguistic competency. This paper looked into a communication strategy training that spanned over 13 sessions, with each session focusing on a different communication strategy. Data were collected through recordings of technical presentations and dialogues, later transcribed into 29,492 words. The analysis of the transcripts showed a reduction in the frequency of communication strategies used from 65.13 ptw to 51.43 ptw from the beginning to the end of the training. The findings of this study suggested that the communication strategy training had enabled the participants to maximise the use of their existing linguistic resources and develop their strategic competence independently. The reduction of the frequency of communication strategy represents the higher production of actual language use as shown in the increase of number of number of utterance from 2134 TWS to 2528 TWS.

Keywords: Strategic competence, communication strategy, limited English proficiency learners, oral interactions

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, some university students who have been exposed to the English language from their early years are still displaying errors in their language structures (Muhammad et al., 2013; Surina & Kamaruzaman, 2009; Ting, Mahadhir & Lee, 2010; Wee, Sim & Kamaruzaman, 2010). Strategic competence is the ability to use communication strategies for interaction within the limits of his or her linguistic competency. Communication strategies are techniques used by both proficient and less proficient speakers (Ellis, 1997) where the former utilise strategies based on their first language especially language switch (Ting & Phan, 2008) while the latter prefer avoiding and giving up on conveying their message (Nakatani, 2006).

Based on developments in research on communication strategies, the theoretical framework for this study is constructed on the interactional view by Tarone (1977), the psycholinguistic view by Færch and Kasper (1980), and the discourse perspective by Clennell in 1994. The effective use of communication strategies in communication constitutes strategic competence, and this is an aspect of language learning. The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of communication strategy training on the fluency of Limited English Proficiency learners in an English for Occupational Purpose programme. The objectives of the study were:

- 1) to assess the frequency of communication strategies used in technical presentations in a communication strategy training; and
- 2) to measure the fluency of speech in the preliminary and concluding technical dialogues in a communication strategy training.

This study carries a significance of benefiting students at lower level of proficiency as strategic competence can enhance the speaker's rhetorical effectiveness (Canale, 1983a, 1983b). Consecutively, the affordance of L1 transfer is prevalent as problem solving strategies (Dörnyei, 1995) while explicit training of achievement based communication strategies raises the learners' awareness (Nakatani, 2005). These need to be combined with discourse strategies as conducted in the communication strategy training in this study.

2. Research Design