Looking at Communication Strategies Used by Yemeni EFL Students

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Abstract: *During any interactive situation in foreign language learning, the students try to convey and share the information to each other. However, they found themselves facing a lot of problems while interacting. As a result, they use some communication strategies to solve their language problems such as: achievement strategies, reduction strategies, negotiation strategies, strategies for understanding the message, non-verbal strategies and repairing strategies. The use of these strategies varied from one student to another, some of the students use these strategies more than other students. In contrast, some of them use fewer strategies than other students. This paper highlights the communication strategies used by Yemeni EFL students while they are speaking in English. This paper also provides a discussion on the communication strategies used by the students in order to solve problems encountered during the communication process.*

Key Words: achievement strategies, reduction strategies, negotiation strategies, strategies for understanding the message, non-verbal strategies, repairing strategies

Introduction

Rogers (1995) defines communication as a process in which participants create and share information with one another to reach a mutual understanding. In other words, in order to have a successful communication both of the speaker and the listener should share their ideas. Otherwise, the communication will be blocked due to the lack of understanding. Communication strategies are used by some learners while speaking to help them to convey their ideas, thoughts and expressions by speech through which the other person receives it by hearing. When the speakers face any communication breakdown, they will try to use Communication strategies to facilitate the flow of the conversation.

Review of Literature

Communication strategies (CSs) research started to capture the interest of researchers in the 1970s and continue to gather the interest up to this date. Many researchers agree that CSs are

useful for EFL students in the language classroom (Dörnyei & Scotte, 1995; Ya-ni, 2007and Nakatani, 2010). CSs are mainly divided into two types: achievement (compensatory) strategies (Færch & Kasper, 1983; Williams, 1987 and Poulisse, 2000) and reduction (avoidance) strategies (Tarone, 1980; Dörnyei, 1995 and Færch & Kasper, 1983). Achievement strategies are used when the learners try to find an alternative plan to deal with their communication problems by employing some strategies such as word coinage, language switch, paraphrase, circumlocution and appeal for help. On the other hand, the learners may use avoidance strategies to reduce the intended message or to completely avoid the communication, this happens because their linguistic repertoires of the topic are limited.

Avoidance strategies used by the learners are such as: topic avoidance or message abandonment. It is important to highlight that there are other strategies used by the learners such as non verbal strategies (body language), negotiating strategies (Nakatani, 2006) and the use of the fillers (um, oh, well, so), self repairing (Dörnyei, 1995) strategies for conveying a message to the interlocutor, strategies for understanding the message (Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011) and meaning expression strategies, meaning negotiation strategies, conversation management strategies, par- and extra-linguistic strategies and (intercultural) interaction-monitoring strategies (Mariani, 2010).

Objectives

This paper aims to look at the CSs used by the Yemeni EFL students while they are interacting in English. In other words, it aims at answering: What are the CSs used by the students?

Research Design
This study used the mixed methods design by using both of qualitative and quantitative instruments. The qualitative instrument is the questionnaire and the quantitative instrument is the communicative tasks.

Participants
The participants of this study were 52 students of English major studying at English department at university of Aden- Yemen. All the participants are native speakers of Arabic and they have been learning English for six years. 18 of them were males and 34 of them were females.

Table 1 The Participants

Gender	No	Percentage
Male	18	34.6
Female	34	65.4

Instruments

A questionnaire and communicative tasks were adapted to answer the question of communication strategies used by the Yemeni EFL students. This questionnaire consists of six strategies were adapted from recent taxonomies of CSs by (Dörnyei, 1995; Nakatani, 2006; Mariani, 2010 and Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011), these six strategies are achievement strategies, reduction strategies, negotiation strategies, strategies for understanding the message, non-verbal strategies and repairing strategies. The data from the questionnaire and the frequency of the strategies used by the students were gathered by SPSS program. The communicative tasks used in this study were adapted from Friederike Klippel (1984) book, the tasks are as following: one way interaction such as object identification, picture storytelling, two way interaction such as pair topic of discussion, role play and group tasks of interaction such as group topic of discussion and story completion.

Findings

This section presents the results of data analysis of the quantitative instrument: the questionnaire, and the qualitative instrument: the communicative tasks. The results show the statistical analysis to examine all the CSs: achievement strategies, reduction strategies, negotiation strategies, non-verbal strategies, strategies for understanding the message and repair strategies used by the students, as well as, the most and the least frequent strategies used by the students. For the strategies used by the students, the results indicated that the students often used achievement strategies (mean=3.65, SD=1.33). Reduction strategies (mean=3.55, SD=1.28). Negotiation strategies (mean=3.36, SD=0.90). Strategies for understanding the message (mean=3.32, SD=0.81).Non-verbal strategies (mean=3.23, SD=0.76) and repairing strategies (mean=3.48, SD=0.96).

Table 2 The CSs Used by the Students

Communication Strategies	Mean	Standard Deviation
Achievement Strategies	3.65	1.33
Reduction Strategies	3.55	1.28
Repairing Strategies	3.48	0.96
Negotiation Strategies	3.36	0.90
Strategies for Understanding the Message	3.32	0.81
Non-Verbal Strategies	3.23	0.76

In terms of the communication strategies used by the students in the six communicative tasks (object identification, picture storytelling, pair topic of discussion, role play, group topic of discussion and story completion). It was noticed that achievement strategies used by the students was (f=57) (28.89%). The total of reduction strategies used by the students was (f=55) (22.78%). The total of negotiation strategies used by the students was (f=40) (14.66%). The total of strategies for understanding the message was (f=41) (21.12%). The total of non-verbal strategies used by the students was (f=25) (10.12%) and the total of repairing strategies used by the students was (f=48) (18.40%).

Table 3 The CSs used in the Six Communicative Tasks

	Story Completion	Picture Story Telling	Group Topic of Discussion	Pair Topic of Discussion	Object identification	Role Play	T	(%)
A	10	9	12	12	8	6	57	28.89
RE	12	14	10	12	4	3	55	22.78
N	3	10	12	5	2	8	25	10.66
UM	3	8	4	10	4	12	41	21.12
NV	2	4	6	8	1	4	40	14.12
R	8	14	10	4	6	6	48	18.40
Total	38	59	54	51	25	39	266	100.0
(%)	8.12	30.04	28.44	22.72	5.38	8.22	100.0	

Note: T= total, A= achievement, Re=reduction, N=negotiation, UN=understanding message, NV= nonverbal, R=repairing.

Discussion

It was found that the students frequently used of achievement strategies, especially, approximation and circumlocution strategies. In terms of reduction strategies, it was found that the students always used reduction strategy and the strategy of reducing the intended message. For repairing strategies the students used the strategy of correcting the incorrect phrasing, and using filters. In terms of negotiation strategies used it was found that among the strategies that the students used the strategy of repeating what they say until the listener understand what they want to say. Then the students identified that they used definition to describe meaning strategy. In terms of strategies for understanding the message used by the students, it was found that majority of the students used the strategy of expressing non-understanding to get more clarification. Then, they used strategy of asking for confirmation of the meaning. Lastly, for non-verbal strategies used by the students, it was found that majority of the students were used gesture strategy. Then, it was followed by using body movement and making eye-contact when talking.

The findings of the present study revealed that all CSs were employed by the students. Therefore, the findings of this study were similar to Al-Azzani study (2012) study which indicated that the students used CSs in order to help them to overcome language difficulties during communication these strategies were: strategies to understand the message such as: asking for clarifications, guessing, response, expressing non-understanding, response, appeal for help, negotiation strategies such as: asking for confirmation, making comprehension check, repeating responses few times. Furthermore, Ugla et al., study (2013) indicated that the students used repair strategies such as: self-repair, avoidance strategies such as message replacement and message abandonment, use of fillers, non-verbal strategies, achievement strategies such as: circumlocution, word-coinage, mime, approximation and literal translation. Rabab'ah (2001) finding explained that when the students found any difficulties they used all types of CSs to solve their lack of linguistic competence such as: circumlocution, approximation, asking for help, literal translation and word coinage, reduction strategies such as: topic avoidance, message abandonment and other strategies such as asking for help and gestures. Moreover, AbuNawas (2012) found that the students used a lot of achievement strategies such as approximation and circumlocution. He added that the other students used reduction strategies. Huang (2010) study

found that the students used nonverbal strategies while communicating with others and that was in line of Nakatani (2006) study which highlighted that the students used non-verbal strategies such as gestures to covey the meaning.

Conclusion

To sum up, communication strategies is considered as an important the communication process, it promotes learners' competence. The students tended to focus on using achievement and reduction strategies the most in both of questionnaire and the communicative tasks. Whereas, they used non-verbal strategies as less frequent strategies while they were communicating in English. This may be due to their language deficiency and lack of competence. In general, the use of CSs helped the students to manage their language difficulties and continue the conversation.

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