Communication Strategies (CSs) in Oral and Written Discourse

By:
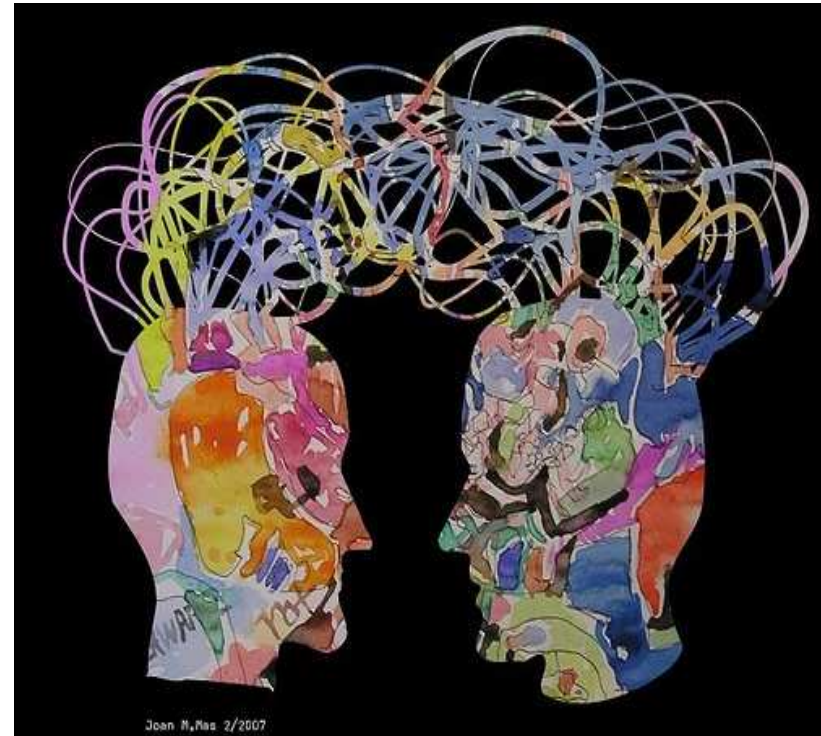
Ghaleb Rabab'ah

University of Jordan
Amman – Jordan
Email:
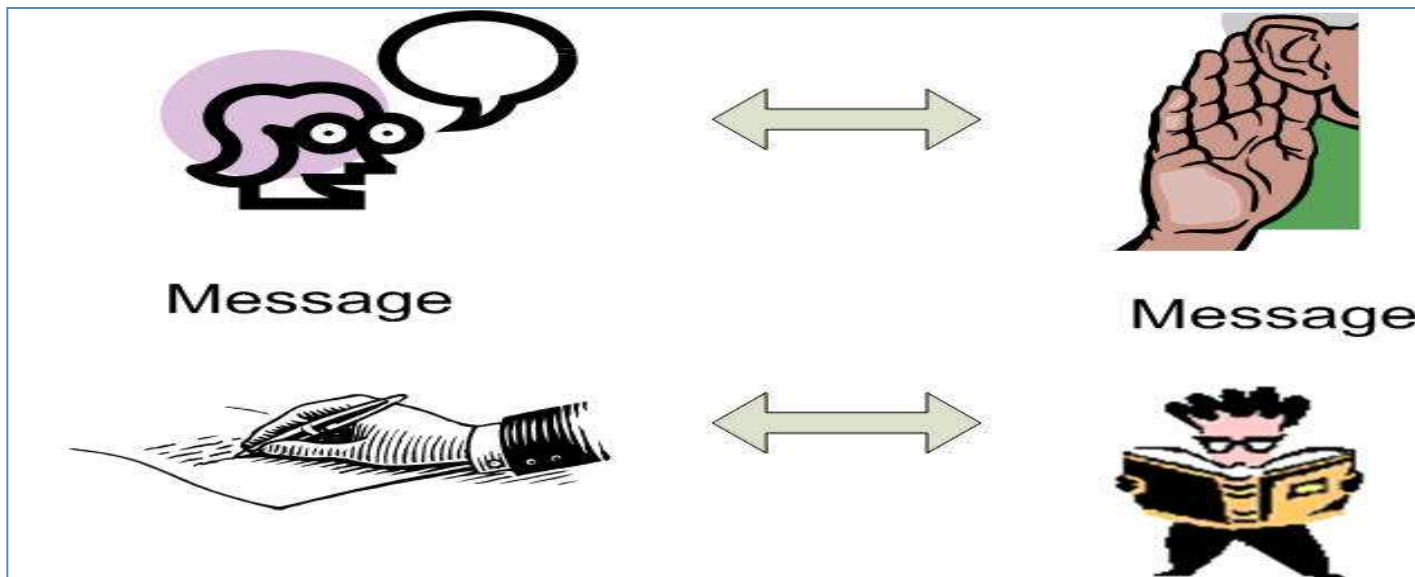ghalebrababah@gmail.com

For address at Chemnitz Technical University see the last page.

Joan M. Mas 2/2007

What is communication?

Communication is a two-way process.

Communication Breakdown

QUESTION: What do you think will happen if communication breaks down between you and another person who knows little about your language or you know little about his language?

Is it true?

"COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN"

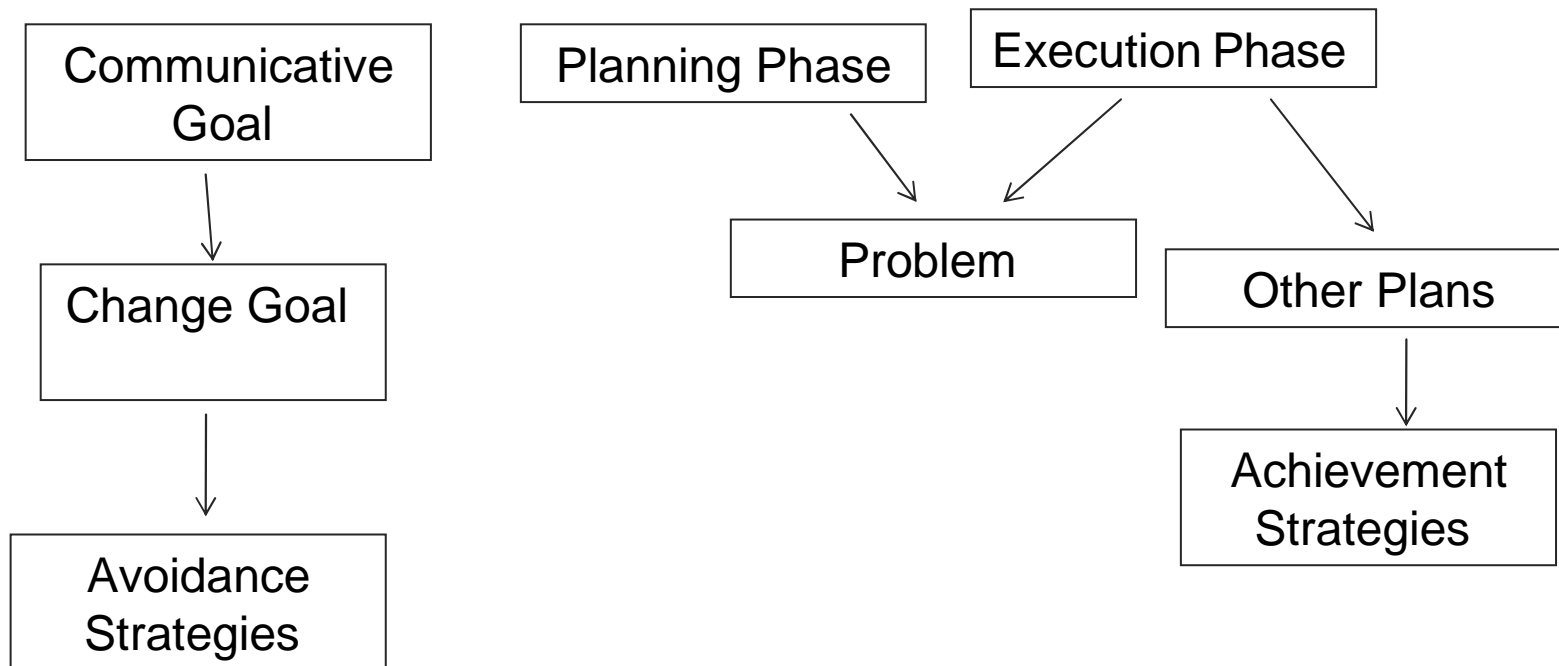IT MAY BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH

By Jacque Ater, MA

A personal guide to improve the healthcare experience...

STRATEGIC COMPETENCE

- As one of the components of communicative ability, strategic competence is defined as the ability to cope with unexpected problems, when no ready-made solutions are available. That is, the ability to use a set of communication strategies in order not for communication to break down.

- Communication strategies are techniques used by both native and non-native speakers of a language to solve problems encountered during the course of communication due to lack of knowledge. There is ample evidence that native speakers resort to communication strategies, but less that non-native speakers, and they vary in terms of their type.

Communication Model

Communicative Goal		Planning Phase		Execution Phase

Communicative Goal → Change Goal → Avoidance Strategies

Planning Phase → Problem ← Execution Phase → Other Plans → Achievement Strategies

Adapted from Faerch and Kasper (1983)

Why do people use CSs?

-They are keen on achieving their communicative goal.

- They lack the target language item/items.

- Anxiety usually causes CS use.

CSs

Communication strategies are of two types:

1- Avoidance Strategies
2- Achievement Strategies

Avoidance Strategies

Second Language Learners prefer to alter or reduce their communicative goal. They prefer to stay on the safe side. Therefore, they are called non-risk takers.

Two strategies have been observed:

• Topic Avoidance: Learners try not to talk abut the concepts which they find it difficult to express.
• Message Abandonment: It refers to leaving the message unfinished due to lack of a structural or linguistic item.

Achievement Strategies

During the planning or execution phase, some 2nd or foreign language learners may improvise or expand existing resources by borrowing from L1, using L2 paraphrase, word coinage or generalizing, appealing for help, using mime/gesture, or retrieval strategies to get their message across.

CSs Explained

Approximation: Using an alternative expression which may not express exactly what it means.
e.g. 'stool' for 'chair'; 'bird' for 'owl'; 'ship' for 'sail'.

Circumlocution/paraphrase: Describing or explaining the meaning, or the function of the target expression.
e.g. a type of vehicle, something we use to….., it has four legs,……

Word coinage: Creating an L2 word thinking that it might work.
e.g. 'fish zoo' for 'aquarium'

Foreignizing: Trying out an L1 word but adjusting it slightly phonologically or morphologically. In an Indonesian study, a learner does not know the word 'tap' in English, he uses the L1 word 'kran' but with L2 pronunciation, so he says 'kren'.

CSs Explained

Borrowing: Using a word from other languages. For example, when a German native speaker uses a word or an expression which is not part of his/her L1 or L2. while he/she is communication with a native English speaker. Let us say an Arabic word or French.

Appeal for help: It means asking the interlocutor fro help.
e.g. what does it mean in English? Was ist… auf Englisch?

Code switching: Refers to the use or the insertion of a language item other than the language used in the discourse.

Literal translation: It refers to word-for-word translation form the native language to the target language.
e.g. 'Electrical stairs' for 'escalator'.

CSs Explained

Use of fillers/hesitation devices: a learner may use filling words to fill a pause and to gain time to think.

e.g. well, as a matter of fact, actually, as you know, sort of, um, er, em, as you see, I think

All purpose words: words used to fill in the gap, These words are over used.
e.g. stuff, thing, make, do..

Non-verbal strategies: the use of non-linguistic resources such as mime, gestures, facial expressions, and sound imitation   to help the learner/speaker express the meaning.

e.g. moving hands to explain the meaning of flying.

Example cases in Context: Oral and Written discourse

- It is something we use to put the child in and push when we go shopping or out. (Paraphrase/Circumlocution)
- The car is unmove. (Word Coinage)
- Number telephone (Literal Translation from Arabic into English)
- Electrical stairs (Literal Translation from Arabic into English)
- Material used to put in the washing machine to make clothes clean. (Paraphrase/Circumlocution)
- The car was damaged. (Approximation)
- they are cleaning stuff or things (All Purpose words)
- Ascenseur (Borrowing)
- He just completed his road, …, er, … his way. (Self-correction)
- When I climb, er,…er…, when I was climbing the tree, I fell down. (Self-correction)

Example cases in context 2

- The boy, er the boy was riding his bicycle. (Repetition).
- The man who kicked the boy…. (Approximation)
- The boy was er, em,…, er, the man who did not stop to help the boy. (Message abandonment)

What about the following?

1. Technicians must travel to conduct business. Or to attend training sessions.
2. Most journeys last very long and it can make you feel tired. Journeys especially **foreign** ones expose us to danger of disease or **over** death.
3. Travelling is the most beautiful thing **in my vision** in the world.
4. Going on vacation **lets us recharge** our batteries by disconnecting us from our regular life.
5. Skim, scan, er…, **Nasi** (tr, I forgot). **Qias** (tr, measure) **temperature degree**.

Negotiation Strategies

1. Appeal for help: Trying to elicit help from your partner by asking an explicit question to fill the information gap.
Examples:
What do you call it?   What is it called?
How do you spell it?

2. Asking for repetition: Requesting repetition when not hearing or misunderstanding something properly.
Examples:
Pardon?   Beg your pardon?   What?
Can you say it again, please?

Negotiation Strategies

3. Asking for clarification: Requesting explanation of an unfamiliar meaning structure.

Examples:

What do you mean?

You saw what?

4. Asking for confirmation/Confirmation request: Requesting confirmation that one heard or understood something correctly. It might be by asking full questions.

Examples:

You mean….?   You said…?   Do you mean that…?

Negotiation Strategies

5. *Comprehension check*: Asking questions to check that the interlocutor or partner is following you.

Examples:

Are you following me?

You know what I mean?

Have you got my point?

6. *Guessing*: It involves real indecision and uncertainty.

Example:

Is it a sink?

Is it Newcastle club?

The question now is: Should we teach communication strategies? If yes, which strategies should be taught and which should not.

Can CSs be taught?

This has been a controversial issue. Some linguists are in favour of teaching CSs directly, while others are against. Proponents claimed: just expose your learners to the target language, and then language will take of itself.

Faucette (2001: 11) argues that:

Language instructors have a responsibility to help our learners improve their communicative ability *of which strategic competence and fluency are important components*. Since non-native speakers often find themselves lacking the very resources needed to communicate their intended goal, it seems natural that language teachers should foster strategic competence among our students and provide learning opportunities to develop communication strategies. (Italics are our

CS Teaching Model

CS Teaching Phases

Phase 1: Consciousness-raising

Phase 2: Provision of prefabricated patterns

Phase 3: Direct teaching of circumlocution strategy

Phase 4: Recording and Evaluation

Above all: **We need to encourage our learners to be risk takers. If you are not a risk-taker, your will not learn too much.**

Research conducted so far by Ghaleb Rabab'ah
Communication Strategies in Translation
Jouranl: Babel: International Journal of Translation - Vol. 54 (2) 2008

21

According to Nord's approach (1991) strategic competence is believed to be crucial in dealing with translation problems. It plays an important role as a regulating mechanism, compensating for deficiencies in the other sub-competencies and contributes towards solving the problems that arise. Nord also argues that there is a need for further research that can provide empirical data derived from the problems encountered by translators. The data can also be relevant to the mechanisms the translators use in solving problems.

Based on Nord's claim, this study has investigated the communication strategies used by a sample of thirty six Saudi majors at the College of Languages and Translation at King Saud University in Riyadh. First, the strategies employed by Saudi students to compensate for any difficulties they encountered during translation process were examined. The subjects involved were asked to translate a one- page text from their native language, Arabic, into English. It was found that approximation was the most frequently used communication strategy. The other strategies used in order of frequency were circumlocution, message abandonment/reduction, and literal translation. These strategies are elaborated along with recommendations to provide more insights into how to develop students' strategic competence in translation.

Compensatory Strategies in Arabic as a Second Language - *Rabab'ah G. & D. Bulut Journal: Poznan Studies in Contemporary Linguistics, Vol. 43 (2) 2007.*

22

This paper investigates the compensatory strategies (CpSs) used in the oral discourse of second year students studying Arabic as a foreign language (AFL) in the Arabic Language Institute at King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The study examined the various strategies used by a sample of 24 male learners who were all high school graduates from 8 different countries (Russia, Kosovo, Senegal, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Benin, Malaysia and Ethiopia), speaking 8 different languages (Russian, Albanian, Senegalese, Tajikistani, Urdu, French, Malay and Somali). To elicit the CpS use, the subjects were audio-recorded while performing two tasks: an interview and a role-play. The data were transcribed and analysed. The results showed that the subjects used a wide range of compensatory strategies in their oral production. Moreover, there were differences between the individual learners' strategies according to their native language. The findings of the study showed that AFL learners were risk-takers, and they expanded their limited linguistic resources to achieve their communicative goals. The findings of the present study establish that strategic competence embodied in the CpSs used by AFL learners should be integrated into the AFL curriculum.

Strategic Competence in an ELT Syllabus

23

Abstract :

Communication strategies (CSs) are important in helping learners to communicate successfully when they are faced with a production problem due to their lack of linguistic knowledge. This paper aims to support the importance of developing second language learners' strategic competence and making communication strategies part of an ELT syllabus. This paper first discusses the various definitions of strategic competence and communication strategies. Then it briefly presents various communication strategies used by second language learners to solve their communication problems. The major portion of this paper is devoted to strategy training and its advantages in language learning. Finally, the paper concludes with the importance of introducing tasks and activities on communication strategies in an EFL syllabus, and suggests ways of improving teaching methodology.

An investigation into the strategic competence of Arab learners of English at Jordanian Universities - By Ghaleb Rabab'ah
Supervisors: Prof. Paul Seedhouse & Dr. Jan Leeke – University of Newcastle Upon Tyne – UK

This thesis is a qualitative study of the strategic competence of Arab English majors at Yarmouk University in Jordan. Its aim is to fill the gap found in communication strategy (CS) research, which has at present little relevance to the Jordanian situation. Its main aim is to determine which communication strategies (CSs) are used by English majors while communicating in L1 Arabic and L2 English. Furthermore, since meaning is very important in language teaching, it aims to examine whether the messages transmitted by the learners are successful and comprehensible or not. This will increase our knowledge of how and by means of which strategies Arab English majors overcome their communication problems, and which strategies they use in communicating in their native language. The subjects of the study are 30 English majors at Yarmouk University, a typical Jordanian university, put into three proficiency levels according to an adapted TOEFL test. The sample represents a full range of English majors' ability at the English Department of the same university. Their ages range from 19-23.

The data collected are based on their performance in three communicative tasks especially designed for the study. They represent typical CLT classroom tasks. The subjects' communication strategies were identified from features of their performance such as hesitation, pauses and repeats, and classified according to the adopted taxonomy which is based on previous CS taxonomies and the pilot study. For the sake of reliability, three independent judges were asked to check the researcher's taxonomy of CSs and his classification of the CSs used by the subjects into the different categories. The researcher and two English colleagues assessed message transmission success on the basis of whether the transmitted messages were comprehensible or not. Then the CSs found in the data were analysed and discussed.

The main finding of the research is that English majors make wide use of CSs. These strategies are mostly L2- English based strategies. Another finding is that in spite of their limited linguistic knowledge, English majors manage to communicate their intended meaning by making use of CSs. It is also found that the learners' use of CSs is related to their proficiency level, in that L1-Arabic based strategies decrease as proficiency improves. One of the most interesting additional findings is the effect of the mother tongue/Arabic which increases the variety of strategy use. For example, literal translation and word coinage are widely influenced by mother tongue interference. It is found that Arabic speakers use many communication strategies when compared with speakers of other languages in CS research. The subjects' use of CSs is also related to the type of task they are performing. Finally, Arab learners use CSs in their native language, but when compared to the CSs used in their target language, these are fewer in terms of frequency and vary in terms of type.

For further information:
Contact:
ghalebrababah@gmail.com
Chemnitz Technical University

Department of Language and Linguistics
Office 018 – 1st Floor