

# EFL Learners' Communication Strategy on Speaking Performance of Interpersonal Conversation in Classroom Discussion Presentation

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## Abstract

Communication strategy which is performed by EFL students might be different one to another in accordance with their speaking proficiency. This research aims at analyzing the communication strategy on learners' speaking performance of interpersonal conversation differed by the oral proficiency level of the learners. The subject of the study is the English Department students as the representative of EFL learners. This study belongs to descriptive research with a qualitative approach to look at the natural things that happen in human being and the phenomena directly from the field. Data elicited from video recording of oral presentation and audio recording in stimulated recall interview to investigate communication strategies employed by the learners as well as learners' problem in communication. The finding shows that the participants resorted to thirteen types of communication strategies. The most frequently employed is pause fillers and hesitation devices and the least used strategy are comprehension check, non-linguistic strategy and literal translation. Further investigation indicates that language competency and communication apprehension influence the communication strategies used.

**Keywords:** *communication strategy, EFL learners, interpersonal*

## Introduction

Communication is a process of conveying ideas and feeling by a communicant to the interlocutors within society by using language as the flexible mean. Now, we can clearly see that communication is an important aspect of success. People who have appropriate levels of communication skills and high levels of speaking skills are more likely to reach their goal. Poor communication skill results in low speaking score in the classroom. Without good communication, one cannot build a healthy relationship in society. Problems in communication may occur in a certain situation might cause communication breakdown. Communication problem is defined as the difficulties that speaker may have in trying to talk to each other and to explain what they want and needs.

Speaking is one of the ways for people to do communication. Speaking can be defined as the people way to convey the message to others. The purpose of speaking is to make the receiver understand the topic being uttered. Daily communication cannot be separated from interpersonal conversation. Brown (2000: 273) states that interpersonal dialogue is designed for the purpose of maintaining a social relationship than for the transmission of fact and information. By mastering interpersonal communication students might improve their academic performance. For example, learners who are considered having high degrees of communication involvement in a classroom are more likely to increase their motivation in learning and satisfaction of the course. Interpersonal communication is partly or wholly having intention. People have different styles and ways to use language when they communicate with one another. Different strategies are available to the language learner when communicating in a foreign language. Such strategies are termed as communication strategies (Rastegar & Gohari, 2016).

Due to the fact that strategies of communication is not taught explicitly to the English Department students in speaking classes, it may be difficult for students to develop their communication skill because of the absence of explicit input related to the strategy in communication to overcome their communication difficulties that will affect the way they speak as well as their speaking score. As discussed previously, to overcome the barriers which emerge in communication, the speaker needs some strategies, so communication strategies are the prime determinants. Due to the importance of communication strategy, the researcher is interested to know what are communication strategies used by the English Department students and to what extent they use it.

Much research has been conducted on communication strategies which focus mostly on teacher and/or students' interaction in the classroom and listing the types of communication strategies that are used

(see Abdulrahmahn & Ismail, 2015; Amin, 2017; Ardianto, 2016; Asmah, 2010; Basori, 2012; and Cervantes and Rodriguez, 2012). Basori (2012) investigates the types of communication strategies performed by the teacher in acceleration class and find that repetition is mostly used by the teacher. Abdulrahmahn & Ismail (2015) investigates the communication strategy used by native speakers of Arabic that have been learn English for six years and found that achievement strategies mostly used by the students. Asmah (2010) found that the most dominant strategy used is an approximation. Cervantes and Rodriguez (2012) found that the language switch is mostly used in the conversation. Ardianto (2016) reveals communication strategies used by students of the English Education Department of a university in Indonesia in English conversations. Amin (2017) investigates and clarifies communication strategies that learners in different gender of English use. On the other hand, Mairi (2016) analyzes the speaking fluency of English Department students of UNP. This research did not check students' communication strategy.

This study examines the phenomena of communication by investigating the EFL learners' classroom interaction in speaking interpersonal communication during discussion session in the classroom differed by their speaking ability and their perceptions of their communication strategy. The investigated communication strategies are sixteen communication strategies as means of communication as proposed by Kongsom (2009); topic avoidance, message abandonment, circumlocution, approximation, word coinage, use of all-purpose words, appeal for help, literal translation, code switching, foreignizing, non-linguistic strategy, self-repair, confirmation check, comprehension check, clarification request, and pause fillers and hesitation devices.

This research focused on how learners perform communication strategies in interpersonal communication differed by their speaking ability because both students who have high speaking ability and students who have low speaking ability have their own way to use the language in doing communication. Table 1 shows classification of communication strategy by Kongsom (2009).

Table 1. Kongsom (2009) Communication Strategy

<b>Communication Strategy</b>	
<b>Avoidance or reduction strategies</b>	1. Topic Avoidance
	2. Message Abandonment
<b>Achievement or compensatory strategies</b>	3. Circumlocution
	4. Approximation
	5. Word Coinage
	6. Use of all-purpose words
	7. Appeal for help
	8. Literal Translation
	9. Code Switching
	10. Foreignizing
	11. Non-linguistic Strategy
	12. Self-repair
<b>Modified interaction strategies</b>	13. Confirmation check
	14. Comprehension check
	15. Clarification request
<b>Stalling or time gaining strategies</b>	16. Pause fillers and hesitation devices

## Method

This study belongs to descriptive research with a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach is chosen because the researcher wants to look at the natural things that happen in human being and the phenomena directly from the field. In this research, the researcher observed the natural phenomena of communication strategies that happen in the classroom. According to Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen & Razavieh (2010: 640) descriptive study is a study that questioning about the nature, incidence, or distribution of variables; it involves describing which is not manipulating variables. This is relevant to this study because this study investigates the occurrences of communication strategy in natural communication. However, the quantitative calculation will still be used in a small degree just to show the number of the percentage of occurrences of each characteristic to support and justify the result of the descriptive analysis. The researcher could give her interpretation to the highest and lowest frequency used by the EFL students. Hence, it could help the researcher to get to the conclusion of the data completely.

The participants for this research included twenty learners from two classes of fourth year undergraduate students from English Education Department. The participants are classified into two group of

learners based on their oral proficiency: 10 high oral proficiency learners and 10 low oral proficiency learners. They were all males and females aged 20-21. The data of this study be taken from the communication of English Department students' performance in the discussion session. The conversation will be the interaction between the students' talk and responses from the other students based on the topic during the discussion. It was a natural conversation during the speaking performance that will be observed and there will no interruption from the observer during the communication in a discussion session in order to get the natural data. The researcher as the primary instrument, as she was the only one who will collect and gather the data to analyze. Many experts have been interested in the exploration of the human being as a primary instrument of scientific inquiry (Glense & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). Peredaryenko & Krauss (2013) state that the human instrument is particularly well-tuned to spot a typical or idiosyncratic response and explore them in-depth. Thus, the researcher is the primary instrument of the current study. Meanwhile, the secondary instruments are observation sheet, video recorder, field note, and an audio recorder.

*Observation sheet* was carried out to write down the learners' talk in the classroom; it was used to investigate the kinds of communication strategies used by the learners and the way the students apply the communication strategy. *Video Recorder* was used to do the observation. During the observation, the researcher recorded the whole classroom interaction that happened in the classroom. Then, the result of the recording was transcribed as soon as the activities of recording is over. In this study, the researcher transcribed the data relevant to the research problems. The digital cameras play an important part in collecting the data. They were used to record the participants' voice and non-verbal communication strategy during the discussion. *Field note* was used to write the additional data such as mime, gesture, eye contact, and facial expression to confirm the situation, setting, and condition to avoid the possibilities of losing data because of recorder's problem. *Audio Recorder* was used in interviewing the learners in order to get the data about the possible problem they may have on applying communication strategy. The result of the recording was transcribed as soon as the interview is over.

In collecting data, the researcher directly come to the classroom activities to record the students' performance by using the digital camera. More to the point, observation sheet and field note are be used in order to gain additional data, such as the students' behavior during learning and teaching process, including their mimes, gestures, facial expression, eye contact, and body movement. There were two cameras that was set in a wide enough angle used in collecting the data since the purposes of the camera to catch the two different point of view, that are presenter focused and participants focused. As Erickson (2006) mentions that the video cameras were not moved while recording, as it was claimed that a fixed position of the cameras helps to minimize the influence of the observer's perspective with respect to what is and is not worth focusing on from moment to moment. The discussion was conducted without any interruption by the researcher.

The participants' perception toward their communication strategy will be collected through Stimulated Recall Interview (SRI) by providing the video recording of their communication strategy as the stimulus. According to Gass & Mackey (2000), stimulated recall has been promoted to seek in uncovering cognitive processes that are not evident through simple observation. Zainil (2017, 2019) found that it is a powerful agent for change in order to make people realize their language choices only after experiencing the stimulated recall interview. Stimulated recall interview is used where the learners watch the pre-selected video clips and comment on what was happening in the classroom, what he or she was doing at that time and why (Zong, 2010). SRI will be employed in order to know the reason of the learners using a particular communication strategy and the problem they may have.

## Results and Discussion

To investigate the communication strategies that the learners employed in classroom discussion, the communication strategy taxonomy proposed by Kongsom (2009) was used for analyzing the data. The taxonomy contained of sixteen classifications of communication strategies: (1) topic avoidance, (2) message abandonment, (3) circumlocution, (4) approximation, (5) word coinage, (6) use of all-purpose words, (7) appeal for help, (8) literal translation, (9) code switching, (10) foreignizing, (11) non-linguistic strategy, (12) self-repair, (13) confirmation check, (14) comprehension check, (15) clarification request, (16) pause fillers and hesitation devises.

The findings show that twelve types of sixteen communication strategies proposed by Kongsom (2009) were used in the oral discussions. This study also found that there is another strategy that was not suggested in the theory by Kongsom (2009) that was employed by the learners, which is self-repetition. Self-repetition means the learner repeats a word or a string of words immediately after they have been said (Dornyei & Scott, 1997; Rababah, 2001). Self-repetition strategy included into indirect strategies (Dornyei &

Scott, 1997), and L2-based strategies (Rababah, 2001). So that there were 13 communication strategies of 17 types found in this research: (1) topic avoidance, (2) message abandonment, (3) approximation, (4) word coinage, (5) appeal for help, (6) literal translation, (7) code switching, (8) non-linguistic strategy, (9) self-repair, (10) confirmation check, (11) comprehension check (12) pause fillers and hesitation devices, and (13) self-repetition. Table 2 shows the frequency of use of these communication strategies by English Department students.

Table 2. Finding of Communication Strategies used

No.	Communication Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Pause fillers and hesitation devices	353	59.52
2.	Self-Repetition	55	9.27
3.	Self-repair	40	6.74
4.	Code Switching	33	5.56
5.	Approximation	31	5.22
6.	Message Abandonment	25	4.21
7.	Confirmation Check	17	2.86
8.	Appeal for help	16	2.69
9.	Word Coinage	9	1.51
10.	Comprehension check	8	1.34
11.	Literal Translation	2	0.33
12.	Non-linguistic Strategy	2	0.33
13.	Topic Avoidance	2	0.33
Total		593	100

The results in table 2 show the communication strategies employed by EFL learners in the oral group discussion. According to the table, there are thirteen types of communication strategies employed in the oral group discussion and according to the frequency of communication strategies; the most frequently used was pause fillers and hesitation devices strategy which was used 353 times (59.52%), followed by self-repetition strategy 55 times (9.27%), and the least used communication strategies are literal translation, non-linguistic strategy and topic avoidance, at 2 times (0.33%). To facilitate discussion of communication strategies utilized by the speakers differed by their oral proficiency, data are presented separately in Figure 3 and 4. The findings on the communication performance of the low oral proficiency (LP) EFL learners are reported in Figure 1.

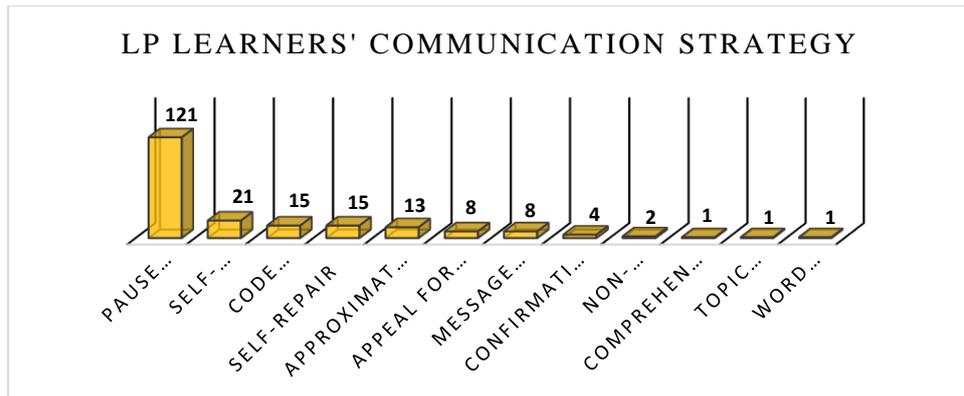


Figure 1. Communication strategies employed by LP EFL learners

Figure 1 shows that the mostly used of communication strategy by low oral proficiency learners (LP) in interpersonal conversation is allocated to pause fillers and hesitation devices by a frequency of 121 (57.61%) from the total frequency is 210, while the lowest level goes to comprehension check, topic avoidance and word coinage by a frequency of 1 (0.47%). In order to know if the students with different types of oral proficiency make different uses of communication strategies, the application of communication strategies by the HP EFL learners were viewed separately as given in Figure 2.

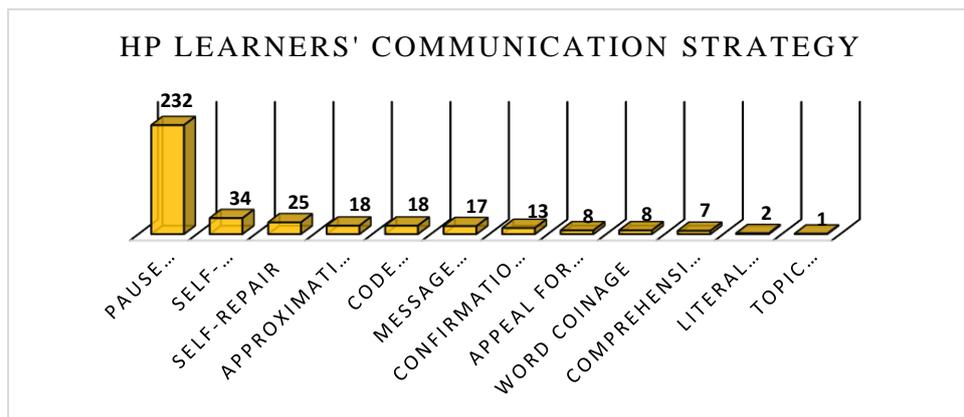


Figure 2. Communication strategies employed by HP EFL learners

Figure 2 shows that the mostly used of communication strategy by high oral proficiency learners (HP) in interpersonal conversation is allocated to pause fillers and hesitation devices by a frequency of 232 (60.57%), while the lowest level goes to topic avoidance, by a frequency of 1 (0.26%) from the total frequency is 383. The findings of this study indicated that fourth year EFL learners employed thirteen types of communication strategies among the seventeen types of communication strategies. These communication strategies are topic avoidance, message abandonment, code switching, literal translation, approximation, circumlocution, word coinage, use of all-purpose words, and appeal for assistance, self-repair and self-repetition.

It was also found that the oral proficiency level differences affect the learners' use of communication strategies from two aspects. First, in terms of frequency. The total number of communication strategies employed by the learners with a high level of oral proficiency greatly outnumbered the communication strategies employed by the learners with low levels of oral proficiency. A possible explanation is that the learner with high oral proficiency tended to participate more than the low oral proficiency learners in classroom discussion. LP learners revealed that they feel nervous and anxiety in communication. So that, they rarely participate in classroom discussion and in short utterances. Second, selection types of communication strategy. In the current study, it is found that both HP and LP learners employed twelve types of communication strategy. However, there is a difference in the types of communication strategy selection by the two groups of learners. It was found that only HP learners employed literal translation on their communication and did not use non-linguistic strategy. While LP learners employed non-linguistic strategy and did not use literal translation on their communication.

Several studies (Basori, 2012; Asmah, 2010; Cervantes and Rodriguez, 2012). Based on the result of the study, Basori (2012) found several types of communication strategies that were employed by English teachers; repetition, translation, mime, language switch, circumlocution, and appeal for assistance. Moreover, the researcher found other strategies that were not suggested in the theory, such as spelling the words and writing the words that cannot be understood by students on the white-board to prevent uncovered messages. Asmah (2010) found that the most dominant strategy used is an approximation. Then followed by language switch, translation from L1, word coinage, circumlocution, appeal, for instance, mime and avoidance. Cervantes and Rodriguez (2012) studied communication strategies employed by beginner EFL. The results show that the communication strategies highest frequency used in the conversation were language switch, clarification request, comprehension check, and asking for confirmation. The notable findings of this research are explained below.

**Pause fillers and hesitation devices**

The first notable finding is from this study is pause fillers and hesitation devices. It means that the learners use them to gain time to think. The participants employed pause fillers and hesitation devices in different ways, for example they use it in the initial and the middle of utterances, and they claimed different reasons for its use. They revealed that they use pause fillers and hesitation devices in the initial of utterances in order to think the concept of the full utterances that will be uttered. The learners who employed pause fillers and hesitation devices in the middle of the utterances mentioned that it was used to think the vocabulary they are missing.

“And then aaa... from Japan, Japan learners students they agree that... “

The use of pause fillers and hesitation devices help the learners gaining time to maintain the communication channel open when they encounter a problem. It is supported by Dornyei & Scott (1997) and Rababah (2001) that pause fillers and hesitation devices facilitate and provide situations for achieving mutual understanding: preventing breakdowns and keeping the communication channel open.

### **Self-Repetition Strategy**

This study also found that there is another strategy that was not suggested in the theory employed by the learners, which is self-repetition. Self-repetition means the speaker repeats a word or a string of words immediately after they have been said (Dornyei & Scott, 1997; Rababah, 2001). Self-repetition strategy included into indirect strategies (Dornyei & Scott, 1997), and L2-based strategies (Rabah, 2001).

“For example, she went for example she went to class even though she was sick.”

There are 55 cases of the total number strategy found in this research. This strategy was registered when learners repeated what they had already said in order to bridge the gap in communication, and to gain time to produce a target language lexical or structural item. It was used to show that they were still focused on the task and were continuing with their turn. Self-repetition was thus a clear indication of the fact that the learners encountered a problem and was planning the next utterance or idea. Based on the example, this was an indication that she had a problem and that she was thinking of the appropriate word that should come next.

Based on the finding in this present study, two key implications can be drawn. The first implication is for EFL classrooms and English-speaking instruction at university level. The second one is for research in communication strategies. The findings of this study provide implications and applications for EFL classroom and English-speaking instruction in Indonesia, especially in the areas of curriculum development, syllabus design and material development. As discussed in earlier, communication strategy instruction might have a positive impact on learners’ perception and actual use of communication strategy. That is, the teaching and awareness-raising of communication strategies will help the learners to gain more confidence in their spoken English and show more attempts to solve their communication problems. These results imply that it is possible to implement explicit teaching of communication strategy in EFL classrooms and in particular in English speaking classes. Thus, it is beneficial to incorporate strategy training in a communicative syllabus, especially English-speaking course. Accordingly, in situations where language curriculum and syllabus are to be designed for the foreign language learners, communication strategy can be taught and developed for effective use in real-life communication.

Practitioners may use the outcome of this study as a basis to design and develop lessons that can enhance learners’ communication skills. In term of material, this study aims to examine whether it is possible to teach communication strategies to Indonesian learners of English. The outcome of this study suggests that the learners can learn English speaking and practice using communication strategy through the training materials of communication strategy. These results lend support to the value of the communication strategy instruction, in particular in EFL contexts where learners rarely have an opportunity to develop their strategic competence naturally outside the classroom. When training materials will be designed, it is expected to encourage the learners to use communication strategy.

### **Awareness of Communication Strategy**

Learners claimed that watching video in the stimulated recall interview generate a significant learning impact. It can be seen from their responses toward their communication video recording in the classroom. They commented and mentioned how surprised they were when looked at how they employ communication strategies in classroom discussion several times during the interview. Further investigation indicated that language competency and communication apprehension influence the use of communication strategies. Learners revealed that language competency’s problem they faced in communication dealing with the lack of vocabulary, pronunciation, and inadequate understanding of grammar. According to the result, participants agreed that low level of oral communication skill is one of the main factors contributing to

problems in communication. Another main communication problem is communication apprehension. People who have high communication apprehension are those who are fearful in communicating with people. They will feel nervous and unable to communicate effectively. It is found that nervous, low-level of self-esteem, lack of proper practice, shyness, stress and communication anxiety leads to ineffective communication.

## Conclusions

The findings of the current study lead to the implication in the field of foreign language teaching for higher education. Raising awareness of EFL learners of the problem in communication problems might come across and of the advantages for applying different communication strategies to overcome the communication barriers in different situations can be included as part of the teaching agenda. The ability to choose more appropriate communication strategies and to use them in a more creative and efficient way are useful skills that these students can acquire. Overall, the actual experience of watching their own performance in communication was found as a powerful agent of change to specify an experience of learning in the classroom that revealed the element to consider the points that had not previously considered. The complex concept of communication strategies in this research needs to be better understood in order to improve language learning development program.

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