COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND COLLABORATION OF MALAYSIAN ESL LEARNERS IN ORAL INTERACTION

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COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND COLLABORATION OF

MALAYSIAN ESL LEARNERS IN ORAL INTERACTION

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CS   Communication Strategy

ESL   English as a Second Language

EFL   English as a Foreign Language

L1   First Language

L2   Second Language

MUET   Malaysian University English Test

NL   Native Language

NS   Native Speaker

SLA   Second Language Acquisition

UiTM   Universiti Teknologi MARA

STRATEGI KOMUNIKASI DAN KOLABORASI DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR MALAYSIA BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA DALAM INTERAKSI LISAN

ABSTRAK

Laporan kajian di dalam tesis ini merupakan analisis penggunaan strategi komunikasi dan koloborasi dalam kalangan pelajar Malaysia Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua dalam interaksi lisan. Ia menyiasat bagaimana pelajar Malaysia Bahasa Inggeris dapat menyampaikan mesej mereka di dalam interaksi lisan bersemuka bahasa kedua apabila item leksikal atau struktur yang dikehendaki untuk menyampaikan maksud tidak kedapatan. Kajian ini khususnya bertujuan menganalisa bagaimana pelajar dan teman bicara mereka menyampaikan maksud melalui penggunaan strategi komunikasi apabila item leksikal atau struktur tidak diperolehi. Ia juga menganalisa bagaimana komunikasi dapat dicapai melalui usaha kolaboratif bersama dalam kalangan pelajar dan rakan bicara mereka serta sejauh mana penggunaan strategi komunikasi dan usaha kolaboratif menyediakan input item leksikal baru kepada pelajar. Kajian ini menggunakan kajian kualitatif yang berbentuk kajian kes deskriptif interpretatif. Pelajar yang terlibat di dalam kajian ini terdiri daripada 16 pasangan pelajar yang mengikuti pengajian Applied Language Studies di Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam dalam tugasan mencari perbezaan dalam cerita bergambar. Dalam kajian ini, penggunaan strategi komunikasi dan kolaborasi pasangan ini dianalisis semasa mereka berkomunikasi mengenai 32 set pra- pilihan referen yang sama. Satu wawancara rangsangan mengingati semula dijalankan di akhir tugasan melalui mainan ulangan data video rakaman. Ulasan terhadap masalah linguistik yang dialami dan strategi yang

digunakan mereka semasa tugasan tersebut dirakamkan. Analisis penemuan menunjukkan pelajar dan rakan bicara mereka menggunakan strategi komunikasi dalam bentuk tunggal atau dalam bentuk kombinasi. Strategi komunikasi lisan juga berlaku bersama strategi komunikasi tanpa lisan. Strategi komunikasi pencapaian telah lebih digunakan berbanding strategi komunikasi pengelakan apabila pelajar cuba menghasilkan cara pengucapan alternatif bagi menyampaikan makna yang dimaksudkan bagi menggantikan ketiadaan item leksikal atau struktur bahasa antara yang di ingini. Bagi sesuatu penyampaian makna berhasil, pelajar menggunakan strategi komunikasi bagi membentangkan kandungan yang ditambah kepada mereka dan rakan bicara mereka dalam perkongsian persamaan asas yang sedia ada. Pelajar-pelajar dan rakan-rakan bicara telah bekerja rapat mewujudkan satu kepercayaan saling di mana makna yang dinyatakan difahami melalui prosedur-prosedur asas. Melalui usaha kolaboratif dan tindakan bersama kedua-dua rakan bicara, pelajar Malaysia bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua berkolaborasi dalam mewujudkan kepercayaan saling dan persetujuan pada makna dalam komunikasi strategik. Penggunaan strategi komunikasi dan kolaborasi di kalangan pelajar-pelajar dilihat dapat mencungkil proses kognitif yang menggalakkan pembelajaran bahasa kedua.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND COLLABORATION OF MALAYSIAN ESL LEARNERS IN ORAL INTERACTION

ABSTRACT

The study reported in this thesis is an analysis of the use of communication strategies and collaboration of Malaysian ESL learners in oral interaction. It examined how Malaysian ESL learners manage to communicate their message in second language face-to-face oral interaction when the intended target language lexical items or structures to express meaning are unavailable. More specifically, the study aimed to analyse how learners and interlocutors convey meaning through the use of communication strategies when the desired lexical items or structures are unavailable. It also analysed how communication was achieved through joint and collaborative efforts of the learners and interlocutors and the extent to which communication strategy use and collaborative efforts provided new lexical input for the learners. The study utilized a qualitative research design of a descriptive interpretative case study. Participants were 16 dyads of university students majoring in Applied Language Studies at Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam working on a picture-story narration of spot-the–difference task. In this study, the dyads' usage of communication strategies and collaboration were analysed when they communicated the same set of pre-selected 32 referents. A stimulated recall interview was carried out at the end of the task through the replay of video recorded data. Comments made on the encountered linguistic difficulties and strategies they employed earlier in the task were audio recorded. The analysis of the data findings revealed that learners and interlocutors used communication strategies in singles or

in combinations. Oral communication strategies also co-occurred with nonverbal communication strategies. Achievement communication strategies were used more than avoidance communication strategies when learners attempt to develop other means of expression to communicate the desired meaning as to compensate for the gap of the intended interlanguage item or structure. For communication of meaning to be successful, learners used communication strategies to present the information to be added to their and their interlocutors' shared common ground. Learners and interlocutors worked together to establish a mutual belief that the meaning uttered was understood through grounding procedures. Through collaborative efforts and joint actions of both interlocutors, Malaysian ESL learners collaborate to establish mutual belief and agreement on the meaning in the strategic communication. The use of communication strategies and collaboration among learners was seen to elicit cognitive processes that promote second language learning.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0   Introduction

Oral communication has long been our core means for communicating with one another. It has been the ultimate goal of any language learning or teaching of the target language (Ellis, 1996; Hopson, 2001; Bradbury and Reason, 2006; Eadie, 2009). However, to speak in a language other than one's own mother tongue is never easy as it might seem (Gao 2001, Davies 2003). Second language learners do not only need to produce specific numbers of linguistic skills such as grammar, pronunciation or vocabulary, but they also need to understand just exactly when, why and in what ways to produce language (Hymes, 1972). At various times, there can be any amount of insufficient competence in any of these areas. The learners may find it necessary to use various kinds of verbal or nonverbal strategies to compensate for breakdowns in communication. These are all crucial for second language learners as communication involves all these skills. Nevertheless, oral mastery of the target language as a second language could not be acquired within a short time (Hakuta, Butler and Witt, 2000; Fortune and Tedick, 2003; Isarji Sarudin and Ainol Madziah Zubari, 2009) as speaking is deemed to be the most complicated and difficult skill to master (Murphy, 1991; Tarone, 2005).

According to Lam (2007) and Myles (2009), learners of English as a second language occasionally display some linguistic difficulty in oral interaction. At formulating utterances or in finding lexical items in speaking, they may have several hesitations, sound stretches, pauses and restarts (Makarova and Zhao, 2006). At times, they may even exhibit several repetitions and stutters while in some cases,

utterances are left incomplete and the complement in the utterance is not produced. However, when there is a response, choice of words and sentence structures are uttered inaccurately and frequently at the undesirable time (Levelt, 1989; Blackmer and Mitton, 1991). All these markers of hesitancy and inaccurate acts of expressions contribute to breaches of mutual understanding and communication may not be strategically achieved.

It is the intention of all language learners to have successful communication regardless of the inadequate command of linguistic resources they have (Palmberg, 1982). Despite the limited grasp of the target language, learners are generally able to manage second language communication (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991). In order to maintain the communication flow, learners sometimes obviate linguistic difficulties by altering or minmizing the content of their message. They avoid reference to certain concept or simplify their contributions in order to overcome the lack of the target language term or expression needed to convey their message as originally intended. More often however, they manage to keep their communicative intentions and develop an alternative means of expression to convey the content of these messages. They make use of synonyms, descriptions, native language transfers or even gestures to compensate the unavailable target form and allow for communication of the originally intended idea (Littlemore, 2003; Williams, 2006). All these different techniques language learners use to communicate in a second language despite of their shortcomings are known as *communication strategies* (CSs henceforth).

These "first aid" devices enable learners to stay active partners in communication when dealing with problems or breakdowns in communication (Cohen and Dornyei, 2002). Regardless of these deficiencies, language learners

involved in a conversation are in the pursuit of one common goal: successful communication of their messages. Attaining a successful communicative act in oral interaction requires its participants to coordinate with one another (Clark, 1985, 2004) as communication breakdowns occur in second or foreign language interaction are usually result from lack of coordination of the participants (Wilkes-Gibbs, 1997). Communication, defined by Clark (1996), is then to be a joint and collaborative activity while Clark and Brennan (1991: 128) defined it as "a collective activity".

[1]When a learner speaks to an interlocutor, he must do more than merely plan and issue utterances and she must do more than just listen and understand. They have to coordinate on content (Grice, 1975; 1978). They must reach a mutual belief of what is being referred to and coordinate on the process. Therefore, this particular study is an investigation into the use of CSs and collaborative efforts in face- to -face oral interaction. Essentially, it is a study of strategic communication of learners in achieving successful communication.

This introduction chapter goes on to describe the importance and the need to conduct a study on strategic communication. Given the background to the study and the postulated statement of the problem, the related research questions are stated. The scope and significance of the study are then presented.

1.1   English Language Development in Malaysia

The fact that English plays a special role in the Malaysian context is beyond dispute. The development of the English language in Malaysia can be traced back to its long historical presence in the country, formerly known as Malaya where it was

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[1] Throughout this thesis, the initiator of the oral interaction will be always referred to as 'the speaker' and treated to as a male and the partner as 'the addressee' is referred to as a female, independently of their actual sex (Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986).

spread through colonialism, trade and Christian missionary activities (Asmah Omar, 1992). During the colonial days, the early role of English was that of lingua franca in government administration and educational institution. After Malaya gained independence from British rule in 1957, Bahasa Melayu was made an official language. This was the instrument used by the government to forge its own national identity. With the phasing out of English to the second language, English is no longer the language of instruction in most Malaysian schools and tertiary levels. The medium of instruction in these institutions, with the exception of Chinese and Indian schools, had changed from English to Bahasa Melayu. Nevertheless, the conversion does not affect the status of the language being "the second most important language in the national education system" as it has been given a special status to help in nation building (Asmah Omar, 1992:65).

To date, constitutionally, English is still the official second language of the country, taught at primary, secondary and tertiary levels and widely used in business and technology. It is a compulsory subject (Ministry Of Education, 2003) as students in the entire primary and secondary schools will have to sit for the English paper in the following national exams: UPSR (Primary School Achievement Test), PMR (Lower Secondary Assessment) and SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education). English language is seen as nothing more than a school subject as it is not a mandatory subject to pass. Conversely, at tertiary levels, English language is a requisite for students to pass upon graduation. This policy has been exercised as the ministry realized that knowledge and competence in English would not only update Malaysians with the global scientific and technological developments, but would also get them to participate meaningfully in international and business trade (Government of Malaysia, 1976; Asiah Abu Samah, 1994; Gill, 2005). Thus, the need for effective

communication is becoming vital in securing success in today's globalized and interconnected world.

1.2   English Language Teaching in Malaysia

It was during the late 1970's and early 1980's when the Malaysian government adopted several English language programmes to improve the teaching of and learning in Malaysia. These include the TESL/TEFL (Teaching English as a Second Language/ Teaching English as a Foreign Language) programme at all levels of educational studies in Malaysia. These programmes went through a number of innovations, from a structural syllabus which emphasized on grammar to a communicational syllabus after KBSR (The Integrated Primary School Programme) in 1982 and KBSM (The Integrated Secondary School Programme) in 1988 (Gaudart, 1994).

Two years later, the nation saw a strong decline in the level of English proficiency among school leavers. The KBSM was revised and it explicitly stated the importance of English language. In contrast to the earlier KBSM English language syllabus which only highlighted on the four main skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), this new KBSM (Revised) English Language Curriculum places more emphasis on communication skills. The justification for including this new feature in the English language curriculum is to reflect the way English is actually used in Malaysian society in everyday life. Therefore, the Communicative Language Teaching approach has been implemented since then (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2003).

At tertiary institutions, students are expected to have attained a level of proficiency in the English language which enables them to cope with the demands of

academic life. Therefore, the primary concern of teaching English at the tertiary institution is not so much to enable students to speak or write effectively but rather to enable them to extract information from reference materials which are mostly in English. Normally a pass in the English subject in the SPM examinations is the minimum English requirement for a university entry. At the university, students are required to enroll in appropriate English proficiency courses for a minimum of three semesters with the aim of enabling them to cope with demands of academic life. It is the requirement of the university for students to pass all the English courses upon graduation.

1.3   Context of Study

In this section, the researcher will present a brief description of Universiti Teknologi MARA and the department where the fieldwork took place and this is then followed by a further explanation of the Applied Language Studies programme.

Universiti Teknologi MARA or formerly known as MARA Institute of Technology, is a leading government-funded higher institution in the nation. It was established in 1956 to cater to the needs of the bumiputra (Malay and other indigenous groups) population of Malaysia. Situated in Shah Alam, the university has expanded nationwide with 3 satellite campuses, 12 branch campuses, 6 city campuses and 25 franchise colleges. Its main objective is to produce competent and marketable graduates who are able to compete in the borderless global market of various academic disciplines. It comprises 25 faculties and 250 academic programmes spread over Science *and* Technology, Social Sciences *and* Humanities and Business *and* Management. The degrees offered range from a pre-diploma course to a doctoral (PhD.) course. Currently, the university has an enrolment of

nearly 100,000 students spread throughout the country registered in all the different modes of study and disciplines (http://www.apb.uitm.edu.my/)

To enter the university, applicants are required to have at least an SPM certificate (equivalent to GCE 'O' levels) with credits in Bahasa Melayu, Mathematics, a satisfactory knowledge of the English language and another subject relevant to the field of studies. For the sixth form, matriculation and diploma students, they are required to sit for the Malaysian English University Test (MUET), a language proficiency test, which is a pre-requisite to gain entry to a degree programme (David, Cavallaro and Coluzzi, 2009).

At Universiti Teknologi MARA, the learning of English is an integral part of its curriculum. This is to prepare students for opportunities in eventual careers in the commercial and public sectors where English language is widely used. For that matter, the Academy of Language Studies was established in 1972 for the purpose of coordinating the learning and teaching of English as a second language to all students of Universiti Teknologi MARA.

In July 2006, a new programme called Applied Language Studies with a focus on English for Professional Communication was developed to meet the growing demand for graduates with excellent language and communication skills who are able to perform in a competitive workplace (Koh, 2009). The programme combines core programme courses with a minor in Business Management. Its combination of four elements namely language, communication, business and technology emphasizes on areas of linguistics, critical thinking, cross-cultural interaction, management, entrepreneurship, computer literacy and organizational behaviour (http://www.apb.uitm.edu.my/). The programme extends over 6 semesters (3 years). Students are to complete 105 credit hours including 12 weeks of industrial

training, an academic project and 21 credit hours in Business Management courses upon graduation. Graduates of this programme eventually have great potential to venture into various career prospects from management to corporate services and journalism to public relations as they are fully trained in interpersonal and business communication.

1.4   Statement of the Problem

Oral communicative abilities have been acknowledged as the main goal of tertiary-level communication classes for English as a second language (ESL, hereafter) students since these students may need a certain level of oral proficiency in English for interpersonal, academic achievement (Kaur, 2003) and occupational reasons (Kaur and Clarke, 2009). However, communication difficulties have been one of the challenges facing ESL students at tertiary level (Grayson and Stowe, 2005; Hargie, 2006; Smith and Frymier, 2006; Zhao Na, 2007; Ting and Lau, 2008). When attempting to communicate meaning in the target language, learners occasionally struggle to find the appropriate expression or lexical items to prevent potential misunderstanding and breakdown of communication (Faucette, 2001; Dobao 2005). Inability to retrieve or to access the correct lexical item due to the limited command of the target language (Bialystok, 1990; Poulisse, 1990) is the common problem that learners encounter in oral interaction. This problem is compounded when learners are not aware of the existence of communication strategies.

In the local context, it has been reported that Malaysian learners of English at the tertiary level often encounter difficulties when communicating in face-to-face oral interaction (Lo, Lajuni and Chin, 2007). Preliminary interviews in July 2009

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with two English language lecturers teaching an Oral Interpersonal Communication course in Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam revealed that oral face-to-face communication among undergraduate students was frequently unsuccessful due to the learners' limited proficiency in English and knowledge of strategic communication. One of the lecturers interviewed stated that students experience a considerable number of difficulties using and retrieving appropriate lexical items in saying what they want and in understanding meaning. Their lexical limitations are bound for a halting, non-fluent advance and their inadequate English language proficiency frequently disrupts oral communication. Moreover, the students' tempo of utterances is to a certain extent slow and short. These lecturers recommended that for communication to flow smoothly, more dyad practice is required and students must be made aware of CSs to compensate for these shortcomings.

While CSs are widely discussed in the literature on second language acquisition (SLA, hereafter) there is a dearth of specific research in Malaysia on exactly what is necessary for strategic communication. Within the last two decades, a number of research studies embarked in the oral communication skills areas of undergraduate students. Among these were a few studies on CSs. However, they were mainly approached from the perspective of psycholinguistics where CSs were the product of learner-centred, cognitive processes (Choo, 1990; Gunasegaran Subramaniam, 1994 and Shamala Paramasivam, 1998). These studies have not been able to explicate how the messages are actually communicated in face-to- face interaction. In other words, some of these studies provided much evidence on the cognitive and linguistic aspects of CSs, but not on their interactional and communicative functions –that is, on how, through CS use, learners and their interlocutors manage to establish a mutual agreement on meaning and achieve the

successful communication of their messages despite their shared, or non-shared, interlanguage   shortcomings.

Attempts to describe strategic communication as an interactive activity involving the learner and interlocutor coordinating use of communication and negotiation strategies have been made by Khong (1996), Halizah Omar (2003) and Normah Abdullah (2002). However, these studies were limited in scope as they paid more attention to the use of CSs than to the negotiation of meaning strategies. Studies on the use of CSs and the collaboration of ESL learners in attaining strategic communication, however is still under researched in the Malaysian second language acquisition context. Hence, this study is an attempt to bridge the gap in the literature regarding this area of research in second language acquisition. The result of the findings may provide insights for students, teaching practitioners, curriculum designers and society as a whole.

1.5   Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how ESL learners manage to communicate their message and collaborate in second language interaction when the desired target language items or structures to convey meaning are unavailable.

The objectives of this study are to:

1.5.1   Analyse how learners and interlocutors communicate meaning through the use of communication strategies in face-to-face oral interaction when the desired lexical items or structures to convey these messages are unavailable.

1.5.1.1 Identify the types of communication strategies used by the learners and interlocutors when the target language lexical items desired to convey meanings are not available.

1.5.2 Analyse how communication is achieved through joint collaboration of the learners and their interlocutors.

1.5.2.1 Examine the collaboration displayed by the learners and interlocutors in communication of meaning.

1.5.3 Investigate the extent to which communication strategy use and collaborative efforts in ESL oral interaction provide new lexical input for the learners.

1.6 Research Questions

The study will seek to answer the following questions:

1.6.1 How do learners and interlocutors communicate meaning through the use of communication strategies in face-to-face oral interaction?

1.6.1.1 What are the types of communication strategies used by the learners and interlocutors when the target language lexical items desired to convey meaning are not available?

1.6.2. How is communication of meaning achieved through joint collaboration of the learners and the interlocutors?

1.6 2.1 What are the collaborative efforts displayed by the learners and interlocutors in communication of meaning?

1.6.3 To what extent do communication strategy use and collaborative efforts in ESL interaction provide new lexical input for the learners?

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study is believed to have a practical significance as the result of the findings may provide insights for students, researchers, teaching practitioners, curriculum designers and society as a whole.

For the students, the findings of this study may raise their awareness about the value of CSs and collaborative behaviour which might be useful in oral interaction. Communication of meaning as Wilkes- Gibbs (1997) and the researcher understand it, is always a joint and collaborative activity. Knowing that it involves at least two individuals in the success of the communication may give the students some confidence in speaking.

Additionally, the results of the study will help language practitioners improve their approach to teaching oral communication skills. CSs could be an additional or even an alternative language activity for the oral component of the English language syllabus. Knowledge on CSs and collaborative strategies may help ESL learners to generate interest in the learning of the language as less successful learners could be assisted when a positive environment is created for learners' cooperative behaviour to occur. This may contribute to the students' confidence and competence in speaking.

For the higher education institutions, this study will be an attempt to evaluate the oral communication component of the general English proficiency programme with regards to its effectiveness and relevance. It is hoped that the data obtained from this study will be useful in contributing towards their goal of moulding graduates who are not only highly skilled technically but also well-versed in the English language.

Whilst the study is based on the needs of students at Universiti Teknologi MARA, the outcome may assist other language institutions of English in improving their language teaching. The results of the study may contribute to the teaching and learning of spoken English and communication of Malaysian learners. Analyzing the use of CSs and collaborative efforts in the interactional context may constitute an opportunity for second language vocabulary learning as there could be instances or occasions of new lexical input on the learner. Thus, strategic competence and strategic communication will be highlighted and at the same time approaches and methods of teaching and learning in the curriculum would be revised. With the various pedagogical implications presented here, it is hoped that some of the issues on the oral competency of Malaysian learners will be minimized.

Finally, this study is significant because it provides a basis for future policy or action to be taken with regard to English language teaching. Not only will the study be able to provide a raw database of complex and unplanned interactional discourse of the undergraduate corpus, it may also provide some useful guidelines for the development of appropriate instructional materials and curriculum useful to English communication courses at higher education institutions of learning.

1.8   Scope of the Study

This qualitative study will focus on the undergraduate students' strategic communication, which incorporates the use of CSs and collaborative strategies when the target lexical items are not available. It does not mean that CSs need to be necessarily related to lexical difficulties. There was research done on CSs that deal with communicative problems resulting from phonological, syntactical or pragmatic deficits in the ESL learner's interlanguage system. However, among all these deficits, lexical errors are known to have the most influence in L2 communication (Gass, 1998, Ellis, 1994) as deficiency in lexical knowledge may hamper learners' ability to communicate effectively. For these reasons, the scope of this study is limited to lexical difficulties that both the speaker and interlocutor have and how they would collaborate to communicate meaning for strategic communication.

The present study adopts Tarone's (1981) definition of CSs, Dornyei and Kormos' (1998) framework of CSs taxonomy, Clark and Wilkes- Gibbs (1986) and Clark and Schaefer's Collaborative Model (1989) and Swain's Model of Collaborative Dialogue (2000).

To ensure the generalisability of the results, it is necessary to obtain language data from a representative number of participants. However, in this study "generalisation follows theoretical logic- with the generalisability of case to the theoretical proposition rather than to population" (Bryman 1988: 90). In order to carry out the qualitative analyses required to accomplish the specific objectives of the study, the sample or participants could not be too large.

On this basis, the researcher obtained the data from 32 participants, (irrespective of their English proficiency level, age and gender) comprising 16 dyads. Data collection was carried out from April 2010 to June 2010.

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Data were analyzed using native language baseline and retrospective interviews. The native language description of the story would reflect the intended meaning i.e. "what the speakers would have said if they had not been constrained by the imperfect command of target language" (Hyde, 1982:18-20). A comparison of the two versions of the task would give a preliminary idea of some of the problems encountered in ESL communication (Tarone, 1981; Hyde, 1982). Retrospective interviews would also help the researcher to interpret and analyze what is going on in the strategic interaction, providing evidence of certain processes and behaviors that could not always be identified or fully understood through examination of language data alone. Retrospective techniques have been incorporated into a considerable number of CS studies such as Poulisse et al. (1990), Suni (1996) and Wongsawang (2001) among others.

1.9   Definition of Terms

There are a few recurring terms used throughout the study. They are operationally defined and elaborated to enhance their meaning and to remove any ambiguities as they are frequently appeared in both the review of literature and other parts of the study.

Strategic communication: refers to an interactive activity, involving the learner's and interlocutor's coordinated use of communication and negotiation of meaning strategies (Yule and Tarone, 1991; 1997). It involves mutual attempts of two interlocutors to agree on meaning through CS use (Tarone, 1981).

Communication Strategies (CSs): refer to strategies employed when the speaker desires to communicate meaning x to a listener. The speaker believes the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure desired to communicate meaning is unavailable or is not shared with the listener; thus the speaker chooses to avoid –not attempt to communicate the meaning x –or attempt alternative means to communicate meaning x. The speaker stops trying alternatives when it seems clear to the speaker that there is a shared meaning (Tarone, 1983: 65).

Collaboration: refers to a type of joint activity in which participants coordinate the presentation and acceptance of their utterances to establish, maintain and confirm mutual understanding (Clark, 1996). It involves joint action and effort among learners and interlocutors to create meaning and language (Wilkes-Gibbs, 1997).

Interaction: refers to communication between individuals, particularly when they are negotiating meaning in order to prevent a breakdown in communication (Ellis, 1999).

Collaborative dialogue: refers to evidence of second language learning occurring in face-to-face oral interaction (Swain, 2003).

Interlanguage: refers to a separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from learners' attempted production of a target language form (Selinker, 1972).

Learner: refers to the ESL speaker. The person who initiates the oral interaction. At any time in an oral interaction, the learner may take the role of the interlocutor.

Interlocutor: refers to an individual who is engaged in a verbal interaction, the addressee. The person with whom one is speaking (Gass and Selinker, 2001). At any time in an oral interaction, the interlocutor may take the role of the learner.

Malaysian ESL learners: refer to learners of English as a second language of Applied Language Studies programme at the Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.

Communication strategy segment: refers to the interaction in the set of conditions as the learner desires to communicate an intended meaning of the target referent to the interlocutor. The learner (and his/her interlocutor) believes the lexical item desired to convey this meaning of the target referent is unavailable or is not shared with his/her interlocutor. The learner (and his/her interlocutor) chooses to avoid, that is, the learner does not attempt to communicate the intended meaning of the target referent, or try out an alternative means of expression to communicate the intended meaning of the target referent (Tarone, 1983).

1.10   Limitations of the Study

First, due to the restrictions of available time and resources, the homogeneous sample used in this study is limited to students enrolled in the Applied Language Studies programme at the Academy Language Studies of Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam. The generalization of the findings for this study is limited to the students who have similar background of those studying degree programmes and are mostly bumiputra. Therefore, generalization for this study should be made with caution.

Secondly, data collection is representative of an experimental situation and of referential form of communication where pairs of interlocutors have to make references to 32 items comprising objects, ideas, or actions. When a task based methodology is used for the collection of the data, an element of artificiality and unnaturalness may affect the data (O'Rourke and Pitt, 2007). However, the results that are obtained from the study would still illustrate strategic communication and collaborative behaviours in this specific task and under these particular experimental conditions. The same arguments may apply to the elicitation of data from the retrospective interview activity.

1.11   Summary

This introduction chapter has provided the background to the research, the postulated statement of the problem and the purpose of the study which was to analyze the strategic communication and collaborative efforts of the ESL learners. Accordingly, the related research questions were presented followed by the significance of the study. Subsequently, the definition of important terminology used throughout the study was elaborated. The chapter ended with limitations of the study and a summary of the chapter. In the next chapter the researcher reviews the theory and the relevant literature within which the study is situated.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.0   Introduction

This chapter presents three primary areas of knowledge: CSs research, L1 communication studies and interactionist perspectives on SLA in order to examine the use of communication strategies and collaboration of Malaysian ESL learners in oral interaction. In this study, the researcher intends to build on previous advances made in these three different but closely related fields to show that their theoretical frameworks can fit together and relates them to the analysis of CSs use and collaborative efforts in face-to –face interaction.

In the first part of the chapter, the researcher begins with strategic communication as the researcher believes that the use of CSs and the collaboration among ESL learners is a strategic process of interactive activity. Then, this will be followed by the reviews on CSs research comprehensively stating the definitions, taxonomies and studies on CSs. The third part discusses first language (L1, hereafter) communication research, namely the collaborative theory and the last part examines the interactionist perspectives on SLA.

2.1   Strategic Communication

Strategic communication was initially conceptualized by Tarone (1981: 288) as "a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared". It was Tarone (1981) who has always viewed CS use in relation to the aforementioned conceptualization, but

the specific role of the listener in this mutual endeavour was not described in a systematic way. Ten years later, Yule and Tarone (1991: 169) suggested combining CSs and negotiation of meaning framework in order to "look at both sides of the page". Strategic communication is regarded as the strategic attempts made by the speaker to communicate the initially intended message through an alternative means of expression (E.Tarone, personal communication, December 2, 2010). Thus, mutual comprehension is then achieved through the combination of the listener's use of CSs and negotiation of meaning strategy such as clarification requests and confirmation checks and the speaker's use of a CS.

Attempts to describe strategic communication as an interactive activity, involving the learner's and interlocutor's coordinated use of communication and negotiation of meaning strategies, as suggested by Yule and Tarone (1991), have been made by Suni (1996), Williams, Inscoe and Tasker (1997), Wagner and Firth (1997), Anderson (1998) and Dobao (2005). However, most of these researchers focus more on the comprehensibility problems and negotiation of meaning strategies than to CSs. Although the role of the interlocutor was highlighted in the analyses of strategic communication, they were considered to be passive receivers, except for Dobao (2005) who stressed the significant role played by the speaker and interlocutor.

Anderson (1998) and Dobao (2005) in support of Yule and Tarone's (1991) work have explained that communication of meaning through CS use as a collaborative activity involving the joint action and effort of both the speaker, and interlocutor. In this study, the researcher takes Yule and Tarone's (1991), Anderson's (1998) and Dobao's (2005) stand on strategic communication. It involves mutual attempts of the speaker and interlocutor to agree on a meaning. On this basis, the

researcher will analyze Malaysian ESL learners' use of CSs and their interlocutors' reactions in order to try to identify and describe the actions that all the conversational participants take together in the pursuit of one common goal: the successful communication of meaning their messages.

2.2   Brief History of Communication Strategies research

The concept of CSs and its study dates back to 1972 when Selinker concretely introduced the original notion of s*trategies of L2 communication* in his article "interlanguage". Then, Varadi (1973), Tarone, Cohen and Dumas (1976), Tarone, Frauenfelder and Selinker (1976) and Tarone (1977, 1979) elaborated Selinker's notions and coined the concept of CSs and developed taxonomies which were used in subsequent studies of SLA research. CS research in the 1970's basically was directed at defining the concept of CS and developing taxonomies that could be used to classify these strategies (Selinker, 1972; Varadi, 1973 and Tarone, 1979).

In some of the initial studies, researchers pointed out the possibility of certain factors such as proficiency level, L1 background or personality could affect the use of CSs but without attempting to study these issues in a systematic way (Tarone 1977, Corder 1978). Later, in the 1980's when the scope of CSs had been established, there appeared to be more empirical investigations which could help to understand CS use in foreign language and second language communication. Researchers did not only define the CSs but also focused on a series of techniques and skills in different CS taxonomies (Bialystok 1983; Haastrup and Phillipson 1983).

It was in the early 1980's when Canale and Swain (1980) included CSs in Hymes' (1972) term of *communicative competence*. CSs were regarded as the

primary constituents in strategic competence which was defined as one of the four communicative competences in their model of communicative competence. Shortly after Canale and Swain (1980) emphasized the significance of strategic competence as the other three dimensions of communicative competence namely grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence, Faerch and Kasper (1983a) published a volume called *Strategies in Interlanguage Communication.* This book incorporated the most important published papers and research on CSs. Subsequently, a considerable amount of literature on the nature and the use of CSs have accumulated in the field of SLA research.

2.2.1   Interlanguage Theory

As mentioned before, it was Selinker (1972), who introduced the term interlanguage that based on a theory that there is a latent psychological structure in the brain which is activated when one attempts to learn a second language. It was the first significant theory which tried to explain second language (L2, henceforth) acquisition (Tang and Johnson, 2002; Mei, 2009) through the errors made by language learners and general patterns of second language development. Selinker posits that in a given situation the learned language utterances produced by the learner are different from the one produced by the native speakers. Interlanguage develops as a system of rules and applications that can either bear the properties and rules of L1, properties and rules of both L1 and L2 or neither the two languages.

Selinker (1972) claims that there are five psycholinguistic central processes which are involved in second language learning (Selinker 1972:127):

1. Language transfer: some rules or items of the interlanguage may be as a result of native language.

2. Transfer of training: some items or elements of the interlanguage may result from training procedures.

3. Strategies of second language learning: some elements are as a result of an approach used by the learner to the material being learned.

4. Strategies of second language communication: some elements result from ways of communicating with native speakers of the target language.

5. Overgeneralization of target language linguistic material: some elements may be the product of overgeneralization of rules and semantic features of the target language.

All these five processes have been found could affect the construction of learners' interlanguages (Mei, 2010), as according to Selinker (1972:127) these processes control "to a very large extent the surface structures" of the speaker's utterances. In this study, the hypothesized process which concerns the strategies of second language communication will be dealt with in detail.   Interlanguage is referred to as "a separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from a learner's attempted production of a target language norm" (Selinker 1972: 214).

2.2.2. The Psycholinguistic View versus the Interactional View

The definition of the concept of communication strategies has become one of the most controversial issues in the area of SLA studies. Despite this issue, a great amount of work was conducted and questions were addressed, but as yet, scholars have not been able to reach a consensus on the conceptualization and description of the CSs. The reason for the lack of agreement among scholars is that the study of CSs has been approached from two different theoretical perspectives:

psycholinguistic and interactional. Not only do they differ in the variety of definitions, they also account for differences in the taxonomies proposed to classify CSs and the methodological design of the empirical investigations.

From the psycholinguistic perspective, CSs are viewed as "cognitive processes involved in the use of the L2 in reception and production" (Ellis 1994: 396). More specifically, CSs are conceived as "mental plans implemented by the L2 learner in response to an internal signal of an imminent problem, a form of self-help that did not have to engage the interlocutor's support for resolution" (Kasper and Kellerman, 1997: 2) and located within cognitive models of speech production. Drawing on cognitive models of speech production, CSs are considered as internal and individual mental plans in reaching a particular communicative goal. This approach has been taken by authors such as Faerch and Kasper (1980, 1983a, 1983b), Bialystok (1990), Poulisse et al. (1990), Poulisse (1993, 1997), and Kellerman and Bialystok (1997).

Interactionist scholars, however, following Varadi (1973), Tarone (1981) and Corder (1978) have treated CSs as elements of discourse and focused their attention on the linguistic realization of CSs. According to Ellis, CSs are viewed as "discourse strategies that are evident in interaction involving learners" (1994:396). They result from the "negotiation of an agreement on meaning" between two interlocutors" (Tarone, 1981: 288) and therefore, the discussion concerning CS use is considered to belong to the study of learner interaction. On this basis, interactionist researchers have focused their studies on the analysis of variability in linguistic performance. Researchers adopting an interactional perspective, such as Hyde (1982), Paribkaht (1985), Williams et al. (1997), Wagner and Firth (1997), Anderson (1998), and more recently Normah Abdullah (2001) and Fariza M. Nor (2008) have generally drawn