The Relationship between Communication Strategies and Language Proficiency among the English Department Students of IAIN Kudus

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Article Info	Abstract
	In foreign language classes, students very often intend to express their ideas to listeners, but they realize that their linguistic or semantic structure is not available, then they give a pause before continuing their utterances. It means that they used communication strategies to close the gap between linguistic competence and communicative competence. Furthermore, many aspects related to the students' communication strategies, one of that is language proficiency. This qualitative case study is set to investigate: (1) the use of communication strategies of students; (2) the language proficiency level of students; (3) the influence of communication strategies to the language proficiency. There are twelve students with high and low proficiency levels as the subject of this research which was taken purposively. They are the second-semester students of the English Education Department at IAIN Kudus in the academic year of 2019/2020. In this study, the researcher used observation, interview, and documentation as the sources of data. It is intended to address the research questions. The results revealed that (1) The students used stalling or time-gaining type and sub-types, namely fillers and self-repetition in which the most popular form of filler was "ehh, eee, and ehmm"; (2) High proficient students were infrequently to produce the error of grammar. While low proficient students often used non-verbal language. It means that students with high proficiency level can process words so that their utterances are more understandable; (3) Communication strategies influenced the language proficiency. It is because high proficient students are able to share their ideas and opinions freely than low proficient students who regularly produce errors of grammar. This study provides valuable contribution in introducing communication strategies and raising students' awareness to actually use English in real-life communication.

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INTRODUCTION

Foreign language learners often have difficulties communicating because they lack vocabulary. Based on Putri (2013) argues that EFL learners need to use communication strategies as a way to overcome their difficulties in communicating using foreign languages. Communication strategies are used to convey their messages and remain in a conversation until their communication goal is achieved.

For EFL students, college is an educational institution where they can practice the language. In fact, practicing English as a foreign language usually occurs inside the classroom. Rohani (2013) states that when students are outside the classroom, they sometimes practice the language since they did not have partners to practice their English. Therefore, EFL teachers have to give chance to learners to exercise the language in the classroom because it will increase their learning and improve their ability in communication.

Communication strategy is involved in the concept of communicative competence as the sub-competencies of strategic competence (Zhao and Intraprasert, 2013; Alyan, 2013; Masithoh, Fauziati, Supriyadi, 2018). Employment of communication strategy is considered one of the strategies in learning and developing oral communication skills.

According to Spromberg (2015), to increase students' communication skills, educators usually make the students become active in class because speaking has a close relationship with communication and interaction. One of the functions of language is to communicate. However, it is indicated that students are not able to express their ideas because they do not speak fluently and they are not able to pronounce the word clearly. This problem may be caused by the fact that the students and the teacher do not interact frequently and effectively in the classroom.

Students communicate with each other during the learning process by touching their limb, body language, and words (Masithoh, Fauziati, and Supriyadi, 2018). However, there are always some deficiencies; gaps exist between what the speakers have in mind and their linguistic performances. Widiarini (2016) states that the willingness to communicate, speakers try to find ways for solving problems. It means that communication strategies are employed not only to repair oral communication problems but also to improve the effectiveness of communication.

As the preliminary research at IAIN Kudus in the English Education Department especially in the speaking class, the researcher found a phenomenon in which the students used communication strategies to compensate the inadequacy so that they can survive in their communication by using a foreign language. Even, they do not realize that they applied certain communication strategies in their conversation.

Based on the preliminary research, the students want to express their ideas to the listener but the students realize that their linguistic is not available. Then the students try to provide an alternative way by using non-linguistic for helping by looking at the interlocutor to find the speaker's intended meaning. All those strategies which learners used to smooth the conversation are communication strategies.

Khotimah (2014) in her study shows that communication strategies more frequently used by the high proficiency level than low proficiency level. Kongsom (2016); Rastegar and Gohari (2016) who were interested in learners' use of kinds of communication strategies in their communication, explains that as learners' proficiency level increases, they move from using linguistic clues and guesses to using L2-based resources in order to compensate for their linguistic deficiencies. Nevertheless, no statistically significant relationship between language proficiency and the use of communication strategies (Kaivanpanah et.al., 2012). With respect to oral proficiency, there are still rooms for more investigation due to some inconsistencies in the findings of different studies.

Lots of studies have been conducted to investigate communication strategies considering different variables. However, the existing literature shows that there is still room for researcher to investigate the relation between

communication strategies and language proficiency. To analyze the data excerpts, the researcher adopts the clear and easy-to-understand taxonomy of communication strategies related to language proficiency. This study focused on the cause-effects of the language proficiency level to the students' communication strategies.

METHODS

This study includes an ethnographic research design because the researcher observing, interviewing, and analyzing to understand students' behaviors in using communication strategies. It is implemented because this research has objectives to analyze the relationship between communication strategies, oral proficiency, and gender differences in the Speaking for Academic Purposes class. The researcher observed speaking activities that focused on the students' utterances in the classroom without giving any intervention. According to Creswell (2007), he states that ethnographic design is qualitative research procedures for describing, analyzing, and interpreting a culture-sharing group's shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language that develop time.

The subject of this study was the twelve of second-semester students of the English Education Department at IAIN Kudus in the academic year of 2019/2020. Those students have different language proficiency, six students have high language proficiency and the rest have low language proficiency. There were two objects of this current research, namely communication strategies and language proficiency which used checklist tables field notes proposed by Ary (2010) as the research instruments.

The researcher began this study from observing the second-semester students in speaking for academic purposes class. She recorded the students' oral production in every meeting. After that, the researcher transcript the recording to see the high and low proficiency level. The data analyzed to the communication strategies' type of stalling or time-gaining strategies proposed by Celce-Murcia (1995) and

language proficiency level offered by Haris (1969).

After the researcher gathers all of the data, she identified referring to the research questions. The researcher conducted five steps to analyze all data, namely transcribing, identifying and classifying, interpreting, investigating, and drawing references.

Then, she analyzes the use of communication strategies of students, language proficiency level, and the influence of language proficiency level to the communication strategies in the speaking for academic purposes class. In the last section, the researcher arranged the results of data that appropriate with those questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section provides an explanation of the findings dealing with the relation between communication strategies and language proficiency among the English Department Students of IAIN Kudus. The data of this study mainly obtained through the observation of teaching speaking for academic purposes class. The observation was done by employing the classroom observation, recording of the teaching-learning process in the classroom, and interviews. The observation was involved six students who were selected for the high proficiency level and low proficiency level.

A number of classroom observation was conducted as the main data to analyze the use of communication strategies and oral proficiency level and the influence of oral proficiency level to the communication strategies.

The Use of Communication Strategies in the Speaking for Academic Purposes Class

Based on the data analysis, there were some types of stalling or time gaining found in students' oral production of English department students of IAIN Kudus on the speaking for academic purposes class. Stalling or time gaining is used when the speaker realizes that he/she encounters a communication problem with interlocutors. The following examples are fillers

used by the students when they need more time to think. It is identified when the speaker begins to talk about a concept but cannot continue and stop in the mid utterance (Masithoh, Fauziati, Supriyadi, 2018). It consists of two sub-types, namely fillers/hesitation/gambits and self and other repetition.

1) Fillers / Hesitation / Gambits

Using fillers or hesitation devices aims to fill pauses and to gain time to think in order to keep the communication channel open and maintain discourse at a time of difficulty, such as well, now, let's see, Uhm, ee, uhh, etc (Dornyei, 1995; Celce-Murcia, 1995; Brown, 2000). The following examples are fillers used by the students when they need more time to think about what they should utter to keep the channel open. In this research, the researcher found most of the students used fillers on several times.

To see a clear description of the strategy, here is the example:

F5: In this occasion, ee… I would like to open hmm…. agenda of English Education department. Thank you for all of the guest who coming to this opening. I hope you enjoy the agenda. Hmm… that's all from me. (Obs.F5/D.1/Feb.5)

F2: I will judge for the first performance. Overall I think is good enough even you do not prepare it well, for the next session you can… ehmm… just enjoy. And don't remember all of the text. Because it makes you confuse on the forward. (Obs.F2/D.2/Feb.12)

For example, the F5 used fillers strategy three times employing the different kinds of fillers, namely "ee, hmm". She uttered the strategy to gain time to think for getting the target words. In this case, she tried to give a speech related to a theme in the opening ceremony session.

Then, the F2 employed a filler once time, namely "*ehmm*". It was utilized by F2 because she needs more time before continuing to execute her idea. She also employed fillers in order to find the target words. It was indicated that fillers can be used as a strategy to keep the conversation run well.

From these examples elaborated above, it can be concluded that fillers/hesitation devices employed by the students several times. Therefore, the practice of fillers recitation devices was recommended to allow students to gain time to think and employ these strategies appropriately at times of differently. In this regard, the most popular form of filler used by the students is "ee". Although the researcher also found other pause fillers, such as "ehm", "uh", and "uhh".

2) Self-repetition

Self-repetition is employed by repeating a word or a string word immediately after they were said (Widiarini, 2016; Masithoh, Fauziati, Supriyadi, 2018). It has a similar function to the use of fillers. Students often repeat words or phrases in filling pauses when communicating compared to non-lexicalized fillers. In this case, the students employed self-repetition by repeating their previous words/phrases frequently while gaining time to think for appropriate words/phrases to continue their communication to the target language.

The following is the example of self-repetition committed by the students:

F6: *She is like* apa ya… *she is like* blank with her preparation. (Obs.F6/D.1/Feb.5)

F3: And I also congratulate to the winner, I hope you can develop…develop your skill. Thank you for making the competition more colorful. (Obs.F3/D.3/Feb.19)

In those examples above, the F6 employed the strategy of self-repetition by repeating the phrase **"She is like"** before continuing her speech. Instead of utilizing the incorrect utterances, she chose to repeat the previous phrase in order to find out the target word in communicating her ideas. Self-repetition was also used to fill the long silence in the speech.

The F3 practiced being a master of ceremony. She found a problem in delivering the agenda. She lost the words **"your"** to communicate her idea, and then she repeated the word **"develop"** as the strategy to find the target word, namely **"your skill"**. To anticipate the lack of linguistic research, she employed self-repetition to gain time to think for the appropriate

second language forms or to remember the forgotten words to continue the next utterances.

The self-repetition strategy employed by the students by repeating the previous words/phrases while waiting to find the appropriate words/phrases to continue delivering ideas. It was also used as the evidence that the students were no longer dependent highly on fillers/hesitation devices to gain time to think what to say next.

Based on the results of fillers and self-repetition, this current research is related to Moattarian and Tahririan's work (2016). It has similarities with the current research in the forms of communication context and the taxonomy to classify communication strategies. The findings showed that the context of communication plays a significant role in the use of communication strategies. The next researcher on the field of communication strategies reported by Koksal and Ulum (2019). They found five types and twelve sub-types of communication strategies employed by the students.

Moreover, participants and data analysis may affect the findings of the research. They could be factors that caused the differences of the findings with the current research findings. The participants in the Masithoh, Fauziati, and Supriyadi's (2018) research were the second year students consisted of 12 students. The objects of this research were data excerpts taken from students' recorded a speaking task, namely interview. On the contrary, the data of the current research taken from the students' activity in the speaking for academic purposes class, such as speech, panel discussion, etc.

Based on those explanations above, it can be concluded that this research was different with those previous studies. It causes the participants of this research only produce stalling or time-gaining strategies in speaking. Most of the participants used fillers and self-repetition strategies as the sub-types of communication strategies.

The Use of Language Proficiency Level of Students in the Speaking for Academic Purposes Class

This section dealt with presenting the students' language proficiency level which focuses on oral proficiency in speaking for academic purposes class. Thus, this section divided into two parts. The first is students' oral production by the high proficient students and the second part is intended to analyze the students' oral production by the low proficient students. The following are the discussion of students' oral production by the two different proficiency levels.

1) Students' Oral Production by the High Proficient Students

After analyzing all the oral production by the high proficient students, the researcher discovered four elements of speaking namely pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency. Speaking involves some elements such as accuracy, appropriateness, fluency and vocabulary building (Farista, et.al., 2018: 131). Those elements used by the researcher to analyze students' oral production, it is appropriate with the description of score 4/5.

To see a clear description of the high proficient students, here the example of the analysis:

F2: I will judge for the first performance. Overall I think is good enough even you do not prepare it well, for the next session you can... ehmm... just enjoy. And don't remember all of the text. Because it makes you confuse on the forward. (Obs.F2/D.2/Feb.12)

In the example above, F2 tented to judge her friend's performance. Actually her opinion is grammatical, the pronunciation also makes the audience understood what she means. The oral productions are appropriate with the description of score 4 for the elements of speaking.

Referring to the explanation above, students' oral production employed by the high proficient students through rarely producing ungrammatical words although sometimes used inappropriate terms. The high proficient students occasionally produce error words but comprehend by the audience. Moreover, from six high proficient students, there were two students

who did not use stalling or time-gaining in communicating. It was caused by their ability in speaking.

 2) Students' Oral Production by the Low Proficient Students

After analyzing all the oral production by the low proficient students, the researcher exposed four elements of speaking namely pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency. The elements are examined to see the students' proficiency (Haris, 1969: 84). Those elements used by the researcher to analyze students' oral production, it is appropriate with the description of score 1/2/3.

To see a clear description of the low proficient students, here the example of the analysis:

M5: I will give critics for my friend. Ehh…. Actually he is good. *Artikulasi* is good. *Ketika di tekan ya ditekan…* so is good. So because he master, I am not complaint. (Obs.M5/D.3/Feb.19)

In the example above, M5 used code-switching in giving a statement to his friend's performance. From the utterance, it can be seen that he ordered grammar, and word error makes the audience difficult to understand. Based on the observation, he also hesitant, often forced into silence by language limitation. It states to the low score of elements of the speaking test.

Regarding the example above, students' oral production employed by the low proficient students who frequently produced error words and obscure the meaning. The low proficient students often ordered code-switching because of the limitation of vocabulary. It makes the audience very hard to understand what they mean. Then, all of the subjects of low proficient students used stalling or-time gaining strategies in communicating. They are frequently used fillers to gain time.

The major findings of the current research on using language proficiency level on the communication strategies complied with previous findings reported by Renandya and Hamied (2018). They stated that low proficient students appeared to use stalling or time-gaining strategies more than low proficient students did.

It was also supported by Zarei and Zarei (2015), they argued that the more advanced the language learner is, the better communication strategy users they will be.

Similar to the previous study, Nakhalah (2016) revealed that low proficient students distributed relatively fewer mid-pauses as their strategy when performing a tighty structured narrative. They would distribute more fillers when performing the Journey task than high proficient students.

Yet, contradictory findings written by Dev and Qiqieh (2016), they stated that both low and high proficient students are used communication strategies frequently. Both of them are often used communication strategies in communicating. For the differences, the researcher assumed that age affected the use of communication strategies.

In conclusion, students' proficiency levels had differences in producing communication strategies. It caused by some factors, such as their vocabulary, fluency, grammar, and other speaking skill. The low proficient students are less in vocabulary that makes them regularly memorizing some English vocabulary in communicating. At the time, they more often to use filler or self-repetition to gain time. They were frequently to use stalling or time-gaining to fill the pause.

The Influence of Communication Strategies on the Language Proficiency in the Speaking for Academic Purposes Class

This section dealt with the influence of communication strategies on the students' language proficiency in the speaking for academic purposes class. It aims at investigating the influence of communication strategies on the oral proficiency; both to the high proficient students and the low proficient students.

The following table is the discussion of the influence of communication strategies on the language proficiency used in the speaking for academic purposes class. The result represented the students' oral proficiency level.

Table 1. The influence of communication strategies on the language proficiency

Elements of Speaking	High Proficient Students	Low Proficient Students
Pronunciation	Sometimes producing word stress misplacements.	Hard to understand because of the pronunciation problem.
Grammar	The listener understood with her speech. Seldom producing grammatical errors when speaking.	Make frequent errors of grammar and word order.
Vocabulary	Never respond with inappropriate words	Limited vocabulary makes comprehend difficultly.

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that communication strategies influence the students' oral proficiency either high and low proficienct. The high proficient students are often producing suitable terms in speaking. Because the high proficient students were more intelligible in producing words than the low proficient students. Where the high proficient students were easy in listening to what is conveyed and intended. They are also rare to use stalling or time gaining in communicating. So, communication occurs with mutual and good response.

On the other hand, the low proficient students frequently produced a grammatical error that makes the interlocutor need more concentration to comprehend the meaning. Moreover, because their vocabulary is limited, frequently their fluency is affected by language problems. It adds their oral productions are hard to understand by the listener.

Based on those explanations, communication strategies influenced the students' oral proficiency. The high proficient students are more capable to share their ideas and opinions in communicating. They are infrequently ordered errors of words and lead misunderstanding to the listener. Furthermore, the low proficient students are incapability producing errors of grammar that make the listener comprehend difficultly. Instead, they also frequently used fillers in speaking, so they could not convey the meaning well. They are also difficult in speaking due to a lack of English vocabulary.

In coincidence with the findings, the language proficiency level influenced the communication strategies. The high proficient students are more capable to share their ideas and opinions in communicating. They are infrequently ordered error of words and lead misunderstanding to the listener. But, the low proficient students are incapability producing errors of grammar that makes the listener comprehend difficulty. Instead, they also frequently used fillers in speaking, so they could not convey the meaning well. They are also difficult in speaking due to a lack of English vocabulary.

Previous research on the influence of communication strategies on the language proficiency reported by Setiadi and Piyakun (2015) in their research proposed that communication strategies produced by high proficiency level more use more than low proficiency level. They concluded that high proficiency level relies more actively on communicating, whereas low proficient students frequently mixed their communication with body language in communicating.

In conclusion, communication strategies influenced the language proficiency in the speaking for academic purposes class. The low proficient students tended to report using a greater range of stalling or time-gaining, especially on producing fillers than those whose high proficiency level did. Moreover, the high proficient students inclined to report using a better variety of appropriate words than those whose low proficiency level did.

Based on the explanation above, the research was different with other study. Previous studies stated high proficient students used more variative words and they were able in language proficiency than low proficient students. On the

other side, this research revealed that low proficient students more frequently used fillers strategies in speaking than high proficient students.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research data interpretation and discussion, the conclusion could be drawn that there were two kinds of sub-types of stalling or time-gaining of communication strategies used by the second-semester students of the English Education Department at IAIN Kudus in the academic year of 2019/2020. The two sub-types namely, fillers and self-repetition. Based on the results, the most popular form of filler used by the students was "ehh, eee, and ehmm". Although there were also found other pause fillers, such as "uh and you know".

Furthermore, there were two types of students' proficiency namely, high proficient students and low proficient students. The high proficient students rarely produced errors of words. Additionally, the listener easily to understand their pronunciation. In contrast, the low proficient students often ordered non-verbal language because of the limitation of vocabulary. Then, the utterances also hard comprehend by the listener.

Stating to the findings of communication strategies, it influenced the language proficiency in the speaking for academic purposes class. The high proficient students were abler to share their ideas and opinions in communication. They are infrequently ordered errors of words and lead misunderstanding to the listener. But, the low proficient students are incapability producing error of grammar that makes the listener comprehend difficultly. Instead, they also frequently used fillers in speaking, so they could not convey the meaning well. They are also difficult in speaking due to a lack of English vocabulary

Hopefully, this research gives a positive effect on the English teaching-learning process. This research is not perfect because dealing with the subjects of the research there are 12 college students involved in this study. The findings of the current research may be more applicable to Indonesian college students who have a similar background to the subjects in the current research. For future research, it is interesting to conduct research in the field of communication strategies by comparing students' level or students' age, such as the use of communication strategies among junior high school students, senior high school students, and any college students.

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