Thai EFL Interlingual and Intralingual Communication Strategies

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Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate interlingual and intralingual communication strategies employed by Thai EFL learners. In addition, learners’ perceptions toward factors related to the use and effectiveness of each type of communication strategy were also examined. The participants were 38 university learners. Data were collected by multiple tasks: (1) an oral interview; (2) a picture description task; and (3) a story telling task.

The retrospective interview was also employed in this study to gain an insight into learners’ difficulties in oral English communication. Results showed that the most used strategies were interlingual
strategies: 'literal translation,' followed by 'code switching,' and intralingual strategies: 'self-repair,' 'circumlocution,' 'approximation' and 'appeal for assistance.' The least-used strategy was 'use of all-purpose word,' with 'word coinage' being the least used of all the strategies. The strategy that the participants found effective the most was 'circumlocution.' The findings also revealed that, in order to be fluent in oral English communication, Thai EFL learners need more vocabulary and sentence structure knowledge. However, communication strategies help them overcome difficulties in communication. By enhancing students’ strategic competence, their communicative competence could be improved.

Key Words: Communication Strategies / Interlingual and Intralingual Strategies / Thai EFL learners / Strategic Competence

1. Introduction

To be successful in language communication, one needs to have what is called communicative competence which includes: (1) knowledge and ability regarding vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical structures and word forms; (2) sociocultural rules for using language appropriately; (3) discourse rules for linking parts of a language text coherently and cohesively; and (4) verbal and non-verbal strategies which can compensate for communication breakdowns due to a lack of linguistic resources (Canale and Swain, 1980). Similar to Canale and Swain, Færch et al. (1984) proposed a model of communicative competence in which the most important component is pragmatic competence, i.e., the ability to carry out a broad range of speech acts. This competence includes linguistic competence, covering pronunciation, syntax and lexis. Whenever a learner experiences a problem because of restricted linguistic resources, he/she may use his/her strategic competence. When a speech act is automatized, it is delivered with a certain degree of fluency.

However, in carrying out communication, there seems to be no perfect language repertoire for an individual speaker. To make communication smooth, a speaker must find some effective ways to communicate their thoughts. Both non-native and native speakers, as Faucette (2001) mentioned, sometimes struggle to communicate their thoughts by trying to find appropriate expressions or grammatical constructions to convey their intended meaning. This is probably because of a lack of linguistic, sociolinguistic or strategic competence in a language. The ways in which an individual speaker manages to compensate for the gaps (Bialystok, 1990) between what he/she wishes to communicate and his/her competence in the target language are known as “communication strategies.”

The term “communication strategies” has been defined in different ways. Some researchers
(e.g., Tarone, 1980; Tarone and Yule, 1989) consider communication strategies to include all attempts at meaning-negotiation, whereas other researchers (e.g., Cook, 1993; Færch and Kasper, 1984) restrict their definitions to cases in which a speaker attempts to overcome difficulties due to a lack of linguistic resources. Even though researchers are still not in complete agreement about the definition of communication strategies, one widely accepted definition is “communication strategies are potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal” (Færch and Kasper, 1984, p. 47). This definition is influential in the field of communication strategy studies because it provides an adequate coverage for relevant phenomena in an individual’s communication (Bialystok, 1990; Dörnyei, 1995). The present study, therefore, aimed to examine communication strategies based on this definition.

Although the use of communication strategies occurs naturally in the first language, second language (L2) learners do not necessarily transfer these strategies to L2 communication. This is because of linguistic and affective constraints (Chen, 1990). With a deficiency in the target language, L2 learners find L2 communication problematic (Dörnyei, 1995). Communication strategies are, therefore, used as devices to deal with difficulties and breakdowns in communication. These verbal and non-verbal strategies include, for example, using simple explanations, paraphrases, cognates from their first language, gestures, and mime. Sometimes, learners solve communication difficulties by asking for interlocutors’ help or by avoiding topics if they cannot find any way to cope with these difficulties (Tarone, 1977).

A study of L2 learners’ use of communication strategies provides enormous practical implications for understanding problem-management in L2 communication and trends in L2 learners’ communication phenomena. These phenomena reveal facts about L2 learners’ ability to use their restricted interlanguage (Selinker, 1972) in such a way as to transcend its limitations. Importantly, an investigation of L2 learners’ communication strategies seems to be useful for L2 teaching and learning in terms of helping refine models of L2 learning and use (Chen, 1990; Dörnyei and Scott, 1997). Some studies have been carried out on the communication strategies of L2 learners (e.g., Ellis, 1984; Bongaerts and Poulisse, 1989; Ton, 1989; Chen, 1990; Poulisse 1990; and Wongsawang, 2001); however, there are still gaps in those previous studies. That is because most studies have just examined some types of communication strategies using one single method. The instruments which have been used are concrete picture description tasks (Bialystok, 1983; Tarone and Yule, 1989; and Poulisse, 1990), concept-identification tasks (Paribakht, 1985; Chen, 1990), story-telling tasks (Poulisse, 1990) or direction-giving tasks (Lloyd, 1997).
To gain a more complex insight into how L2 learners deal with L2 communication, this study employed multiple tasks: (1) an oral interview; (2) a picture description task; and (3) a story telling task; to investigate the use of communication strategies (adapted from Færch and Kasper, 1984; Tarone, 1977; and Willems, 1987) by Thai university learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Moreover, the retrospective interview was also employed in this study to gain more understanding into learners’ difficulties in oral English communication.

2. Objectives

Thai EFL learners have studied English for approximately eight years, from Grade 5, in general. However, the emphasis of those English courses provided for them is mostly on grammar and vocabulary. Undoubtedly, without much practice in using English for communication, Thai learners have little exposure to authentic English usage. The National Institute for Educational Research (1994), for example, revealed the fact that most high school teachers in Thailand control all activities in the classroom and there is not much teacher-student interaction other than that of the traditional question-and-answer activity. This type of traditional classroom may not produce skillful English-language learners like those having more opportunity to practice and use English. With less practice and use, Thai learners, even at the university level, have difficulties in oral English communication (Sakda, 2000). An investigation of Thai learners’ use of oral English communication strategies, therefore, could reveal the difficulties they have in communication and would help teachers find some effective ways to help them overcome those difficulties.

In Thailand, there have been many studies on learner strategies (e.g., Chumpavan, 2000; Dhanarattignanon, 1990; Lappayawichit, 1998; and Sroysamut, 2005). However, most studies mainly used questionnaires and interviews to collect data. Although the results give an overview of strategy use, they do not show exactly how those strategies are used. To investigate how Thai EFL learners actually use communication strategies to solve problems in oral English communication, this study used an oral interview, a picture description task, and a story telling task to elicit learners’ spontaneous speech data. Furthermore, the data gathered from the retrospective interview helped the researcher figure out factors related to the use of oral communication strategies by Thai EFL learners. The data obtained from this study provide a direction to develop learners’ strategic competence in communication.

3. Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study were 38 Thai EFL learners. By the time of the study, all of them just finished their first year in Mahidol University. This group of non-English major students was purposively selected for the current
study because they had taken and passed compulsory English courses covering all four skills; especially speaking, in the first year while other groups had studied focus-on-form English courses. Because they were studying speaking, it was assumed that they would be able to use their existing knowledge to communicate orally to some extent. Furthermore, due to the relatively low level of their English proficiency, it was expected that this group of students would have few linguistic resources in communicating orally in English and would need to compensate for their restricted knowledge. In other words, this group might have difficulties in oral English communication and employ communication strategies. (Ellis, 1984). Thus, this group of students was of particular interest.

**Research Instruments**

**Oral Interview**

As Gradman and Reed (1997) suggested, an oral interview offers a natural situation in which spontaneous speech production can be observed. In the present study, the oral interview was conducted by the researcher in English with each individual participant. The interview includes both general and specific topic. The general topic comprises 10 questions involving students’ general background, such as, his/her hometown, family, hobbies, opinions toward university English and self perceptions regarding his/her English skills. Another set of questions was developed to explore how the participants coped with a specific topic in oral English communication. It is composed of 10 questions concerning general facts and opinions about the tsunami in southern Thailand. This topic was chosen because it was assumed to be a well-known topic which every participant had heard about.

**Picture Description**

In addition to the questions involving facts and opinions about the tsunami, that set of questions also included two specific questions. The first one required the participants to describe pictures of the tsunami that were arranged in chronological order.

**Story Telling**

Another question required them to tell a brief story about the tsunami by referring to those pictures or by using their own knowledge. The participants were expected to give responses to all questions by producing spontaneous oral discourse. In particular, if they had insufficient linguistic ability to easily respond to a particular question, they were expected to employ a range of communication strategies. The interview was structured and conducted in a systematic order as mentioned above. Predetermined questions were used to ensure similarity of format, to cover approximately the same time period and to allow each participant to receive the same information. However, some follow-up questions were added depending on
each participant’s responses. Each participant was required to respond to the questions within approximately 30 to 45 minutes. All responses were both audio- and videotaped and then transcribed verbatim for data analysis.

Retrospective Interview
According to Cohen (1996), a retrospective interview helps researchers gain understanding on the nature of strategies. In this study, a retrospective interview was conducted immediately after the completion of the three speaking tasks. To do so, each participant was asked to indicate the factors related to their use of communication strategies as well as their effectiveness. The retrospective interview was conducted in the learners’ native language (Thai) so that the participants were able to fully express their ideas. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim, and translated into English for the analysis.

Data Analysis
Communication strategies employed by the participants were categorized by the researcher based on a taxonomy drawn from Tarone (1977), Færch and Kasper (1983), and Willems (1987). According to the taxonomy, there are two main types of communication strategies to be examined in the current study. Those are (1) interlingual strategies and (2) intralingual strategies (see Appendix A). Interlingual strategies comprise of (1) literal translation and (2) code switching. Intralingual strategies are composed of (1) approximation, (2) word coinage, (3) circumlocution, (4) use of all-purpose words, (5) self-repair, and (6) appeal for assistance. The number of times each type of communication strategies used by each participant in each question set was counted and calculated. The transcripts of the retrospective interview were analyzed by systematically organizing the answer into categories. These interview results were used as a supplementary explanation for interpreting the results of the study.

4. Thai EFL Interlingual and Intralingual Communication Strategies and Factors Related to Their Use
The use of interlingual and intralingual communication strategies employed by Thai EFL university learners is presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interlingual Strategies</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Literal Translation</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Code Switching</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intralingual Strategies</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Self-repair</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Circumlucution</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Approximation</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Appeal for Assistance</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Use of All-Purpose Word</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Word Coinage</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,188</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: The Use of Interlingual and Intralingual Communication Strategies Employed by First-Year Medical Students in the Oral Interview (Ranked in Order)

Table 1 shows that two types of communication strategies highly employed by the participants were interlingual strategies. For intralingual strategies, self-repair was found to be most frequently employed, followed by circumlocution, approximation, and appeal for assistance. Use of all-purpose word and word coinage were less frequently used.

Findings of Thai EFL interlingual and intralingual communication strategies and factors related to their use are presented and discussed as follows:

Interlingual Strategies

Literal Translation

Literal translation was employed when the participants translated literally a lexical item, an idiom, a compound word or structure from Thai to English. In the current study, literal translation was employed 255 times ($M = 6.71$), which is at a high level of use. This type of communication strategy was employed by the students translating word by word from Thai into English.

Examples of Literal Translation:

**Researcher:** Suppose you were a doctor in the area hit by a Tsunami, what would you do?

**Participant:** I do if if I have a knowledge equal equal the Doc Doctor Porntip, I will I will do the same her. But if I don't have the the knowledge means her, I will help the injure but in injure people. It is the equal equal the my my skill of doctor uh I have.

This example shows that the first sentence of his answer was translated word by word from Thai following the word order used in Thai.

**Researcher:** Which subject do you like most?

**Participant:** Um I like English very much.

**Researcher:** Why?

**Participant:** I think English is is fun is um thinking, speaking, reading, and writing.

**Researcher:** Why?

**Participant:** Uh use use thinking, use personality, use um actions.

In Example 2, the participant talked about the reasons that she likes English. She employed the word ‘use’ in her English sentence because she translated that word from Thai.

The occurrence of literal translation found in the present study confirms the findings of Tarone (1977), Bialystok (1983), Færch and Kasper (1983), Willems (1987), and Dörnyei and Scott (1997). Literal translation was employed by translating literally a lexical item, an idiom, a compound word or structure from the native language. In the present study, literal translation
was the most-employed communication strategy. This is because, as the participants claimed in the retrospective interviews, they had difficulties using English sentence structure to form a sentence. Thai structure, then, was used to compensate for their restricted knowledge of English. The participants also underscored that literal translation is the most readily available strategy to help them compensate correctly in English. However, the use of literal translation might be related to L2 interference. As the students related in the retrospective interview that they had few opportunities to use English in their everyday life, language interference, therefore, occurred unconsciously in their oral response. The high level of literal translation use found in the present study matches Namaungruk’s (1999) findings. That is, in her study, literal translation was most employed by high school students in oral interview. Also, the description of literal translation used in Namaungruk’s study is similar to that of the present study. That is, when the students employed literal translation by translating what they thought in Thai into English, they tended to simplify some grammatical structure. Færch and Kasper (1983) term this phenomenon as “simplification,” which is considered to be another strategy used to compensate in communication. In the present study, the most frequently found simplification of a grammatical rule is the omission of verb to be. This is because this word does not exist in Thai. Therefore, when they use literal translation, Thai structure interferes with their knowledge of English grammatical rules. The results for the use of literal translation in the present study, however, do not concur with those of Ton (1989). In her study, literal translation was found to be used infrequently by university learners of English. This might be because the participants in Ton’s study were second-year science students who had learned university English for two years. Therefore, their proficiency in English has been better than that of the first-year students in the present study and they may have spoken English more fluently than this group of students did. However, the participants found this strategy effective sometimes. This is probably because they are aware that this strategy may fail if the interlocutor does not have any knowledge about Thai structure. As they stated in the retrospective interview, the use of literal translation may lead to misunderstanding by an interlocutor who is a native speaker of English.

**Code Switching**

Code switching is the use of Thai word or phrase with Thai pronunciation. It was employed in two distinct patterns in the present study.

1. The participants used Thai words unconsciously because of language interference.
2. The participants used Thai words consciously because they didn’t know the target words.

**Example of Code Switching Pattern 1:**

*Researcher:* How do you feel toward the person you live with?
Participant: Yes, they are very very good friend. When we have when I have a trouble, we can can talk with them and they and they will help me.

In this example, the participant began talking about how she felt about her roommates. Code switching occurred to express the meaning of the word ‘give moral support.’

Example of Code Switching Pattern 2:
Researcher: What are the impacts of a Tsunami?
Participant: Impact hhm we lost uh many people and some some people lost their family or people who love they love and we lost. Uh ชายฝั่ง (coast), the sea, ประกาศั (coral), แหล่งท่องเที่ยว (tourist attraction) [laughter], house, travel about travel แหล่งท่องเที่ยว แหล่งท่องเที่ยว (tourist attraction) in Thai language.

In the example above, this participant wanted to use the words ‘coast,’ ‘coral,’ and ‘tourist attraction’ as she indicated by using code switching. As she could not think of the English words to express her meaning, she used code switching to help her communicate her ideas.

Code switching was employed 217 times, which is at a high level of use. It was employed when learners used Thai words, phrases, or sentences with a Thai pronunciation in their English speech. This is because, as the participants revealed in the retrospective interview, they did not have English vocabulary for their intended meaning. The occurrence of code switching in the present study confirms Tarone’s (1977), Færch and Kasper’s (1983), Bialystok’s (1983), Willems’s (1987) and Dörnyei and Scott’s (1995) findings. That is, code switching occurs when the learner includes first-language (L1) words in L2 speech and it may range from single words to whole chunks and even complete turns.

As the interlocutor was an L1 speaker, some participants tended to employ code switching as soon as they had difficulties in L2. Sometimes, this strategy was accompanied by an appeal for help. That is, when the students were unable to come up with an L2 word, they used both code switching and asking the interlocutor for that word. The reason that code switching was employed at a high level of use in the present study might be because this study employed many questions to collect data. In doing so, the participants needed a wide range of vocabulary to communicate their ideas. As a result, code switching was used to substitute for the vocabulary they did not know. In addition, the present study also employed specific questions about the Thailand tsunami; therefore, the participants had more difficulties in finding specific vocabulary to talk about this specific topic. Then they needed to employ code switching.

Another reason may be because the interviewer is a native speaker of Thai. Therefore, the participants might have felt free to use code
switching when they had difficulties in using English to convey their meanings. Even though the use of code switching was at a high level use, the participants found code switching seldom effective for them. That is because, as they underscored, if the interlocutor was not an L1 speaker, he/she might not understand their code switching. This means the students are concerned about success in communication and they may use code switching less often if the interlocutor does not understand Thai.

**Intralingual Strategies**

**Self-Repair**

Self-Repair is the set up of a new speech plan when the original one fails. This strategy occurred 189 times in response to all 20 questions.

**Examples of Self-Repair:**

*Researcher:* Can you tell me something about your hometown and your family?

*Participant:* Ah Ranong. In the in the south of Thailand. Yeah, my hometown is next next in the north. The the town that next next to my to my hometown in the north is is Chumporn. And in the south is Pang-Nga.

In this example, when the participant was talking about his hometown, he began a sentence but failed to continue. Therefore, he repaired by restructuring the sentence in order to complete the message.

The present study found that self-repair was employed not only when the original speech plan failed, as Tarone (1977), Færch and Kasper (1983) stated, but also due to students’ awareness of making mistakes and students’ willingness to communicate with appropriate words or structures. However, the participants found this communication strategy only sometimes effective for them. That is because as they claimed in the retrospective interview, they had difficulties with English sentence structure, so they felt unsure about whether their self-repair was successful or not. In this case, then, they needed to observe the interlocutor’s response.

**Circumlocution**

Circumlocution occurred when the learner described or exemplified the object or action instead of using the appropriate target language item or structure. This strategy occurred 179 times in response to all 20 questions. In the present study, circumlocution was used in four distinct patterns.

1. The participants did not know the appropriate word to convey their target meaning.
2. The participants described the words or actions when they felt unsure of the word they wanted to use.
3. The participants described the words or actions when the first attempt failed.
4. The participants described the words or action after using code-switching.

**Example of Circumlocution Pattern 1:**

**Researcher:** Do you know Doctor Porntip? Who is she? What make her be a well-known doctor?

**Participant:** I don’t know about medical words of this apartment. But it is about test or has an experiment about the body to know the clue to know take the clue give uh learn about the clue to ah to conclude about the the course that make he or her die. Uh-huh.

In the above example, “a forensic doctor” was the target word that the participant had to explain. As he did not know this word, he employed circumlocution to provide the interlocutor with the details about that word.

**Example of Circumlocution Pattern 2:**

**Researcher:** Can you describe your apartment?

**Participant:** My apartment uh hasn’t life el elevator um lift.

**Researcher:** No elevator?

**Participant:** No no no no no. It’s mean uh in this apartment doesn’t have uh transporter from the first floor into the top floor because my my place my room place my room is on the top floor of this apartment.

This example shows that the participant employed circumlocution to help explain the target word, ‘lift’ or ‘elevator’ in this case, which he felt unsure.

**Example of Circumlocution Pattern 3:**

**Researcher:** What is your opinion toward Doctor Porntip’s work in the Thailand tsunami situation?

**Participant:** I think when when I when I go to the doctor, I want to like her, but I don’t want to check death people but I don’t want to check death people but I don’t want to do with my heart. I don’t want to. I think very happy that hmm uh some people is do his job with don’t have don’t want to don’t want money. Don’t want um don’t want anything.

In this example, after the first attempt failed, the participant tried circumlocution to clarify his meaning on the characteristics of the job he thought he would do in the future.
Example of Circumlocution Pattern 4:

*Researcher:* How do you feel toward the place that you live?

*Participant:* Um uh it’s um it’s very freedom and it’s it’s make I สบาย (comfortable คือ)
The place I live don’t in city don’t in Bangkok because this in
Bangkok have traffic.

This example shows the participant’s need to use circumlocution to communicate the intended ideas. This is because he did not know the word ‘comfortable,’ which he expressed by using his code switching. Then, he used the context to refer to the meaning of the target word.

The students employed circumlocution when they faced difficulties in finding the exact word to express their intended meaning. Therefore, they had to explain by using context or examples to provide an understanding for the interlocutor. The participants found this strategy often effective for them. This might be because, as the students confirmed, they felt that they were capable of beating around the bush. Also, they had a positive attitude towards this strategy and believed that the interlocutor was able to understand what they wanted to say from their explanation or description of the target word. As observed in the tasks, it is also found that most participants had a willingness to communicate, so circumlocution is one of the communication strategies they frequently use. This is because this strategy helps them succeed in communication within their restricted knowledge of English. However, some participants tended to avoid using this strategy because of their inability to form a sentence to explain their meaning.

Approximation

Approximation is a use of an English word which shares semantic features with the desired lexical item. In the current study, approximation was employed 134 times, which is at a medium level of use.

Examples of Approximation:

*Researcher:* Where do you live now?

*Participant:* I live in Salaya.

*Researcher:* Where?

*Participant:* อีก I live in um in ตะวันตก in โอ๊ม
[laughter] in in flat in in university.

The example shows that this participant could not think of the word ‘dormitory,’ which is the exact word to refer to the place where she lived.

*Researcher:* Can you tell me something about your province?

*Participant:* Um Nakorn Si Thammarat. I In in my idea, this province is is little travel for for tourist. Yes, I ask uh my friend about Nakorn Si Thammarat. I say me I say to me
“Oh I don’t I don’t I don’t have to to go this province because uh the province don’t have uh don’t have uh เรียกว่าอะไรนะ hmm don’t have station for travel. Yes.

In this example, the participant tried to explain why he thought his province is not an interesting place to go. Instead of using the word ‘tourist attraction,’ which has an exact meaning to what he wanted to say, this student used the words ‘station for travel,’ which share semantic features with the target word.

The results in the present study show that the participants tended to take risks in communication. That is, even though they had insufficient English lexical knowledge and were not skillful in word usage, they tried to communicate with the words they had. As indicated in the retrospective interview, the participants claimed that they lack vocabulary knowledge. They also stated that they tended to use approximation because they think it may not have much effect on communication. Even though they adjust the message, it may still be understandable. Moreover, they claimed that it is easier for them to use a word that they are familiar with. Therefore, it can be assumed that, as Poulisse (1990) suggested, this group of students perceived themselves as holistic learners who tended to use a holistic approach to compensate in oral English communication.

Appeal for Assistance

Appeal for assistance was used 60 times, which is at a low level of use. This strategy was used when the participants turned to the interlocutor for help. In the present study, appeal for assistance was used for asking for clarification, asking for repetition, and asking for unknown words.

Example of Asking for Clarification:
Researcher: What is the impact of the Tsunami?
Participant: Impact. What do you mean about impact?
Researcher: Effect.
Participant: อีก It make to the wave into the. Have a flood to the land near the earthquake.

In this example, an appeal for assistance occurred when the participant did not know a word in the question. In order to respond to the question, he asked the interlocutor to help him by clarifying the meaning of the word ‘impact.’

Example of Asking for Repetition:
Researcher: I’m sure that you have heard about the disaster that just happened in Thailand. Can you tell me what it is?
Participant: Again?
Researcher: The disaster that just happened in Thailand. Can you tell me what it is?
Participant: [laughter] Again please?
Researcher: The disaster that just happened in Thailand.

Participant: What is the disaster mean?

In this example, when the participant was asked to tell the name of the disaster, that is, the Tsunami, he needed to ask the interlocutor to repeat the question. Then, after the interlocutor repeated the question twice and the participant caught the keyword ‘disaster,’ he asked the interlocutor to help him by expressing the meaning of the word again.

Example of Asking for the Target Word:

Researcher: Where do you live now?
Participant: I?
Researcher: Yes.
Participant: I live in uh Salaya.
Researcher: Where?
Participant: In seven. What does ‘หน้า’ in English mean?
Researcher: Dormitory.
Participant: Uh-huh. In seven dormitory.

In this example, the participant used an appeal for assistance due to his lack of vocabulary knowledge. The appeal for help, in this case, occurred accompanied with code switching.

In the present study, the use of appeal for assistance supports Willem’s (1987) idea. As he suggested, appeal for assistance can be used in different ways. The present study found that there were three types of appeals employed by the participants. Those are: asking for clarification, asking for repetition and asking for the target word. The results for use of two types of appeal for assistance match Namuangruk’s (1999) results. In her study of communication strategies employed by high school students in oral interview, she found that appeal for assistance was employed for asking for repetition and asking for clarification. The results of the present study show that the participants in this study succeed in using appeal for assistance to help them keep the communication going on. However, appeal for the target word would be a successful communication strategy only when the interlocutor understands Thai. That is because, when the participants asked for a target word, they used a Thai word to refer to their target meaning. Therefore, if the interlocutor was a native speaker of English who does not understand Thai, this communication strategy would fail.

Use of All-Purpose Word

The participant employed all-purpose words 56 times, which is at a low level of use. It was used when the students used a general or empty lexical item to fill gaps in vocabulary command. As Tarone (1977), Færch and Kasper (1983), and Bialystok (1990) suggested, those all-purpose words are ‘thing,’ ‘make,’ and ‘do,’ for example.
Examples of Use of All Purpose Word:

Researcher: How do you feel toward the place that you live?

Participant: It’s the doctor or hmm I don’t know word about ex specific about doctor. About this about neuro orthopedic. I don’t but he but they must be ah make ah data about each each people that die. The data to computer and to the internet.

In this example, the students used the general word ‘thing’ to refer to specific words.

Picture of the staff is using computers to manage the data

Participant: It’s the doctor or hmm I don’t know word about ex specific about doctor. About this about neuro orthopedic. I don’t but he but they must be ah make ah data about each each people that die. The data to computer and to the internet.

In these cases, the general word ‘make’ was used to describe the process that the staff is using with the data.

The present study found that the word “make” was the most frequently employed by the participants. This may be because they had their own supposed rule that “make” could be used to substitute for almost every word concerning actions or causes. The factors related to the use, as they stated in the retrospective interview, were word selection and vocabulary knowledge. That is, they claimed that they tended to use an easy word, as they defined it, in communication more than a specific word that they could not find due to the time constraints on conversation and their lack of vocabulary knowledge.

Word-Coinage

Word coinage was employed only 22 times, which is at a very low level of use. Word coinage was employed by the students making up a nonexistent English word based on their own supposed rule.

Examples of Word-Coinage:

Researcher: What do you think about the English courses?

Participant: It’s uh English is um English for me is hard because I um I um I afear to speaking.

In this example, the word ‘afear’ was made up from the words ‘afraid’ and ‘fear’ which share similar sounds and meanings with the word that he made up.

Researcher: Can you tell me a brief story about the Thailand tsunami?

Participant: Hmm um the Tsunami um is occur in South East Asia. Hmm it’s make ah it’s destroy the build ah the build and uh economy. Uh-huh. Ah and ah and make people is saddy.
Word-coinage, in this example, occurred when the participant added a suffix to the word ‘sad’ with her own supposed rule. Word coinage, in the present study, was employed by the participants overelaborating real words. This might be because they may have their supposed rule that English words should be filled with some prefixes or suffixes. The retrospective interview revealed that they use this type of strategy due to their restricted knowledge of English. That is, if they did not find any words to express their intended meaning, they had to make up a word. However, as they perceived that this strategy was never effective for them, they used it at a low level in the oral interview. This is probably because they are not confident of the words they selected to use and were aware that it may sometimes cause misunderstanding for the interlocutor.

Conclusions

Findings of the present study revealed that Thai EFL university learners employed both interlingual and intralingual communication strategies. The results showed that the communication strategies that were most employed were interlingual strategies. Those were literal translation, followed by code switching and intralingual strategies: self-repair, circumlocution and approximation. Use of all purpose word, appeal for assistance were less frequently used, with word coinage being the least frequent of all. The factors related to the use of communication strategies were knowledge of English vocabulary and structure, willingness to communicate, and awareness of success in communication. Finally, this study found that the most effective communication strategy as perceived by the participants was circumlocution, followed by self-repair, approximation, use of all-purpose word, appeal for help, topic avoidance, and message abandonment. The strategy that was found least effective was word coinage. This study also reflects that Thai EFL university learners tends to take risks and have willingness to communication. Therefore, they seem to be ready of developing their oral communication skills. To help them communicate more fluently, they need strategic competence along with the knowledge of English sentence structure and vocabulary.

As the present study was conducted only with the non-English major students, further studies could be conducted with other students, such as students in other fields and at other levels of study. Another possibility would be a comparative study of students in different fields. A further study might be conducted through using other taxonomies of communication strategies. A comparative study of communication strategies used prior to and after training is also valuable for seeing whether training in communication strategies affects students’ communicative competence or not.

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References


APPENDIX A
CLASSIFICATION OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Classification of communication strategies (adapted from Færch and Kasper, 1984; Tarone, 1977; and Willems, 1987).

Interlingual Strategies
1. Literal Translation: the learner translates literally a lexical item, an idiom, a compound word or structure from a native language to a target language.
2. Code Switching: the learner uses a native language word or phrase with a native language pronunciation.

Intralingual Strategies
1. Approximation: the learner uses a target language word which shares enough semantic features in common with the desired lexical item (e.g. ship for sailboat).
2. Word Coinage: the learner makes up a nonexistent target language word on the basis of a supposed rule (e.g. vegetarianist for vegetarian).
3. Circumlocution: the learner describes or exemplifies the object or action instead of using the appropriate target language item or structure (e.g. the thing you open bottles with for corkscrew).
4. Use of All-Purpose Words or Smurfing: the learner uses a general or empty lexical item to fill gaps.
5. Self-Repair or Restructuring: the learner sets up a new speech-plan when the original one fails.
6. Appeals for Assistance: the learners turn to the interlocutor for help (e.g. What do you call …?, Can you speak more slowly?, Do you understand?).