

THE EFFECT OF TEACHING ORAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ON INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILL

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Abstract: This study reports on applying the teaching of oral communication strategies (OCSs) in the speaking class to improve students' speaking skill. It was designed in a quasi-experimental research. 53 undergraduate EFL students in the English Department of a private university in Kuningan were purposively chosen as the participant of the course. They were grouped into control and experimental class. The course material of OCSs was adapted from a study conducted by Nakatani (2005). The effects of teaching OCSs were assessed by two types of data collection: the participants' pre-test and posttest speaking scores, and the transcription from the tests. The first result showed that the most frequently used OCSs in the speaking class were filled pauses, interlanguage-based, false starts, providing active response, first-language-based, and approximation strategy. Then, second, the t result indicated that t_{obs} was greater than t_{crit} . Therefore, it can be concluded that the teaching of OCSs in the EFL speaking class had a significant effect in developing students' speaking skill. It indicates that such training activities are relatively applicable to use in the language classroom.

Keywords: *EFL teaching, oral communication strategies, speaking skill*

INTRODUCTION

The main goal of learning a Foreign Language (FL) is to be able to communicate using the target language. Communication itself means sending and receiving message effectively, and negotiating meaning in the communication with the interlocutor (Rubin & Thompson, 1994) as cited in (Ya-ni, 2007). Seeing this fact, speaking skill seems much more important than reading and writing. However, in the EFL classrooms, it is common to find learners who are struggling to communicate their meaning using English.

The phenomenon is not surprising where there are limited practice opportunities for foreign language learners to communicate in the target language. There are also some other factors that influence learners' speaking skill. First, learners are afraid of making

mistakes when speaking in the target language. Second, Indonesian and English language have different rules of grammar. So, it is not easy for learners to sustain a conversation in English especially for low-proficiency level learners. Furthermore, based on the pre-survey, in high schools, learners used to practice speaking using scripted dialogue. So, they lack the skill of negotiation in the real-life communication using the target language. Third, the majority of learners have no idea about how to cope with the situation when they are confronted with some words they do not know. As the result, they tend to stop the conversation or leave the message unfinished. Then, MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clement, and Noels (1998) said that the factor that influences students' speaking

performance in the classroom is also because of their unwillingness to use L2 for communication.

Khan (2010) mentioned that communicating in a foreign language is a complex multi-faceted skill. Therefore, learners should create some efforts to make communication using English becomes easier. Then, it is acceptable for learners making mistakes or errors in the process of learning. As what Selinker (1972) believed that learner's errors were not seen as negative but positive efforts made by learners in an attempt to organize their interlanguage. He took the view that learners make efforts to control their learning, through the use of what he coined as communication strategies.

Communication strategies itself was firstly introduced by Selinker in his seminal paper in 1972 (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). But then, the former researcher who firstly proposed the taxonomy of communication strategies was Tarone in 1978. According to Dörnyei and Scott (1997), the notion of second language (L2) communication strategies was raised with the recognition that the mismatch between L2 speakers' linguistic resources and communicative intentions often leads to difficulties or breakdowns in the communication. Therefore, communication strategies are potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal (Færch & Kasper, 1983a) as cited in (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). The other experts define communication strategies as a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his/her meaning when faced with some difficulties in communicating in imperfectly known second language to enhance the effectiveness of communication (Canale, 1983; Coder, 1981; Stern, 1975).

It is believed that communication strategies play an important role in the development of strategic competence. Thus, communication strategies and strategic competence are interrelated. Canale and Swain (1980) stated that strategic competence is the major component of communicative competence, defining it as "verbal and nonverbal strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence" (p.30). Scattergood (2003) as cited in Maleki (2010) thinks that strategic competence is cultivated if teachers create a language classroom in which communication strategies are taught and practiced.

Nevertheless, teaching communication strategies to language learners has been the source of some controversy in the past decades. Many researchers have argued about teaching and teachability of communication strategies. Most of experts who would agree that strategic competence develop in the speakers' L1 is freely transferable to target language use (see Bagaerts & Paulisse, 1989; Bagaerts, Kellerman, & Bentlage, 1987; Kellerman, Ammerlaan, Bagaerts, & Paulisse, 1990; Paribakht, 1985, as cited in Dörnyei, 1995). This means that most adult language learners already have sufficient competence to communicate regardless of their L2/foreign language proficiency levels. Kellerman (1991) concludes that "there is no justification for providing training in compensatory strategies in the classroom...teach the learner more language and let the strategies look after themselves" (p. 158).

In spite of many contradictory views about teaching communication strategies in the classroom, there are a number of researchers who strongly supported and conducted some research about it. Dörnyei (1995) argues that

“most arguments concerning the teachability issue are based on indirect or inconclusive evidence, but it must be noted that some of these data actually appear to confirm the validity of strategy training” (p. 61). So, communication strategies training is actually not aimed to introduce the strategies to the learners because as what is previously mentioned that they have already have it in their first language system, but rather to make learners aware of the strategies.

A number of researches have been done in the area of specific training of some communication strategies, to seek its potential usefulness. Færch and Kasper (1986) and Tarone and Yule (1989) reported on four different classroom projects that successfully incorporated strategy training into foreign language instruction. Tarone (1981) reported on a study by Piranian investigating learners of Russian, in which learners who had had some extracurricular exposure to Russian were found to use strategies more often and more effectively than their peers whose Russian experience was limited to the classroom. Dörnyei (1995), a renowned expert on communication strategies, piloted a study to obtain empirical data on the educational potential of strategy training. He found out the possibility of developing the quality and quantity of learners’ use of at least some communication strategies through focused instruction.

Nonetheless, most of the above previous studies only focused on strategies for solving learners’ own performance problems, which did not require interaction with others. These studies excluded the aspect of negotiation behaviors used when learners facing some problems of exchanging messages in the conversation. It is showed in their pretest and posttest test items which did not include pair work conversation.

Some studies showed that interaction skill in the negotiation of meaning between interlocutors is a crucial component for learning the target language. One of them is a study conducted by Nakatani (2005) in Japan who investigated the effect of awareness-raising training on oral communication strategy (OCSs) use in Japanese English class. In his study, OCSs was used instead of communication strategies because it specifically focused on the oral interaction and interlocutors’ negotiation behavior for solving communication breakdowns. So, the strategies are used for an oral interaction not just a one-way communication. The result confirmed that the participants in the strategy training group significantly improved their oral proficiency test scores.

Based on the related research mentioned previously, OCSs could help learners to communicate effectively using foreign language and increase their negotiation skill in the conversation. It is said that the use of communication strategies could improve learners’ skills for interpersonal communication (Bejarano, Levine, Olshtain, & Steiner, 1997; Clennel, 1995). For language trainers (teacher/lecturer), they may teach these strategies to improve students’ speaking skills. Therefore, this study attempted to seek out the effect of teaching OCSs in the EFL speaking class. OCSs were explicitly taught in this class. As an experimental study, pre-test and posttest were held to assess the effect of teaching OCSs, and then the result from the experimental and control group were compared. The researcher concerns on how teaching OCSs affected some qualitative and quantitative aspects of strategy use as well as the improvement on students’ speaking skill.

METHOD

This study involved 53 first year students from the Department of English

Education in a private university in Kuningan. Since a quasi-experimental design was used in this study, the students were grouped into experimental group (EG) and control group (CG). Before the treatment, both groups were given pre-test and after the treatment, they were given posttest. OCSs proposed by Nakatani (2005) were taught to the experimental group during the treatment. The OCSs were also used as the framework to analyze the transcription of pre-test and posttest recording.

There were two kinds of data in this study; students' speaking tests recording and pre-test and posttest results. Students' speaking test recording was used to find out the kinds of oral communication strategies used by EFL students in the speaking class. The recordings were transcribed, categorized, calculated and analyzed based on the list of OCSs proposed by Nakatani (2005). The pre-test and posttest results were analyzed to see whether the teaching of OCSs was effective to improve students' speaking ability. Pre-test was conducted for both groups and the results were collected and analyzed as the preliminary data

about the students' initial speaking skill. Then, posttest also was conducted for both groups to get the final output of the treatment.

Students speaking performances were assessed using criteria proposed by Hughes (2003). She rates the speaking criteria by six-point scale for each of the following: accent, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension. The quantitative data obtained from pre-test and posttest then were computed using SPSS 18 program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Oral communication strategies used by the students in the speaking class

The analyzed data show some initial conclusions could be made: 1) not all of the OCSs available were used by the students in the tasks; 2) there were at least four dominant strategies used by the students in both pre-test and posttest (filled pauses, interlanguage-based, false starts, and providing active response); and 3) not all of the strategies were increasingly used after the OCSs training. Then, for further explanation, the next paragraphs elaborate the detail description of OCSs used in every tests and its comparison.

Table 1. *The recapitulation of OCS used by the students in the pre-test and posttest*

No.	Achievement or Compensatory strategies	Pre-test				Posttest				
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
1.	Help-seeking	▪ Appeal for help	0	0			0	0		
		▪ Asking for repetition	0	0			1	0.26		
2.	Modified interaction	▪ Confirmation checks	9	2.19			9	2.32		
		▪ Comprehension checks	0	0			3	0.77		
		▪ Clarification request	5	1.22			7	1.80		
3.	Modified output	1	0.24			2	0.52			
4.	Time-gaining	▪ Filled pauses	153	37.23	247	60.1	84	21.7	212	54.6
		▪ Use of fillers/hesitation devices	11	2.68			19	4.9		
5.	Maintenance	▪ Providing active response	36	8.76			62	15.9		
		▪ Shadowing	10	2.43			1	0.26		
6.	Self-solving	▪ Paraphrase or circumlocution	0	0			0	0		
		▪ Approximation	15	3.65			21	5.41		
		▪ Restructuring	7	1.70			3	0.77		

Reduction strategies							
7.	Message abandonment	12	2.92			8	2.06
8.	First-language-based	39	9.49	164	39.9	0	0
9.	Inter-language based	67	16.3			96	24.7
10.	False starts	46	11.19			72	18.6
Total		411	100	411	100	388	100
						388	100

f = frequency % = percentage

The table displayed that there were 4 strategies that were not used by the students in the pre-test like appeal for help, asking for repetition, comprehension checks, and paraphrase/circumlocution. While in the posttest, there were only 3 strategies that were not used by the students, such as appeal for help, paraphrase/circumlocution, and first-language-based. Nevertheless, when looking at the total amount of the strategies used in both tests, the total was slightly decreased from 411 occurrences in the pre-test to 388 occurrences in the posttest. The followings are the description of each strategy used by the students starting from the most frequently used strategy.

1. Filled pauses strategy

This strategy is part of time gaining strategy which purpose is to give the speaker time to think and to keep communication channel open when he/she has difficulties in expressing an idea (Nakatani, 2005). The example of filled pauses such as "oh...", "um...", "er...", etc. In the pre-test, this strategy was found 153 times used by the students and it drastically decreased into 84 times in the posttest. These filled pauses realizations in this study mostly consisted of utterances like "er...", "em...", "emh", "eh", "oh", "ya", and "oh ya".

2. Interlanguage-based strategy

According to Nakatani (2005), interlanguage-based strategy is used when a speaker faced with communication problems due to a lack of linguistic resources, he/she sometimes copes it by using his/her interlanguage system to reduce intended utterances

and avoids using certain language structures or specific topics. This strategy was found 67 times in the pre-test and 96 times in the posttest. So, there was an improvement of using this strategy. This finding might be an indication that the speaker were trying to speak English more in the posttest although they still did not have sufficient grammatical knowledge to form the utterances. The examples are as follows.

[2.a] S19 : *Where [pause] where she is stay?*

S14 : *She is near from my home...*

(Pre-test transcription - Student 19 & 14)

[2.b] S9 : *Yes, what is it?*

S26 : *So, I'm happy work in here, I'm enjoy work in here...*

(Posttest transcription - Student 9 & 26)

3. False starts strategy

False starts were found 46 times or 11.19% of the whole pre-test findings. In the posttest, there were 72 occurrences of this strategy or 18.56% of the whole posttest findings. There was an increasing number of this strategy used in the posttest. This probably indicated that the students still often thought about how to structure sentences in the communication or they were still struggling with the grammatical rule. False start itself referred to the occasions in the conversation when the speaker runs into difficulties in executing his/her utterance and repeat one or more of the preceding words (Nakatani, 2005). The example of false starts realizations in this study are as follows.

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[3.a] S28 : ...*what is your opinion about er... our you know po politic in our co in our country?*

S11 : *er... I think politic er... in our country is...middle.*

(Pre-test transcription – Student 28 & 11)

[3.b] S2 : *Sure I'll help you but... what can I do for you?*

S5 : *...I need...I need some money to go to Brebes.*

(Posttest transcription – Student 2 & 5)

4. Providing active response strategy

Providing active response means making positive comments or using others conversation gambits like “I know what you mean” and “sounds good” (Nakatani, 2005). In this study, this strategy was used 36 times in the pretest and improved into 62 times in the posttest. Mostly, the utterances of this strategy were “No.”, “Hi.”, “Bye.” and various kind of “Yes.” like “yes, I have”, “oh, ok. yes.”, “yes, I know”, “ok”, “yup”, “ehh”, and “yeah”. However, the increasing number in the posttest indicated that the students made some efforts to keep the conversation going. In the conversation, the examples are:

[4.a] S21 : *Yes.. yes.. we can save the trees.*
S3 : *Yes.*

(Pre-test transcription – Student 21 & 3)

[4.b] S4 : *Ok ok doctor. Ok thank you your advice er I hope my life be better*

S24 : *Yes, I hope too.*

(Posttest transcription – Student 4 & 24)

5. First-language-based strategy

First-language based strategy consists of interjections in the speaker's L1 for a lexical item when he/she experiences communication difficulties (Nakatani, 2005). In this case, the speaker intentionally or unintentionally used *bahasa Indonesia* to convey the message. It occurred 39 times in the pre-test, as the example:

[5.a] S2 : *[wishpering] berapa lama kenalnya?*

S6 : *em...[long pause] wait wait er... one one month one month.*

(Pre-test transcription – Student 2 & 6)

The above example showed how the students used this strategy in the conversation. Mostly because they did not know certain words in English and did not know how to ask for help in English. So, the realizations were the students directly mentioned the words in *bahasa* (like *RUU pilkada, pilkada langsung, hak, baik, masih banyak lagi, deket*, etc.), the students asked for help to their partner in *bahasa* (e.g. “*mengganti apa yah.. mengganti..*”, “*misalnya bahasa Inggrisnya?*”, etc.), or the students had no idea what to talk next (e.g. “*terus apalagi yah?*”, “*terus?*”, “*apa?*”, “*udah.*”, etc.). One of the pairs, in the pre-test, even used their local language (sundanese) like the followings.

[5.b] S17 : *...education in Indonesia same with er... Universitas Kuningan. [pause] you... [wishpering] atuh maneh atuh nu ngomong.*

S13 : *[wishpering] sok bae terus nanya lagi.*

(Pre-test transcription – Student 17 & 13)

On the contrary, first-language-based strategy was not found in any of posttest recording. This was a good indication that the students tried hard to speak English despite of their limitation in vocabularies and grammar.

6. Approximation strategy

This strategy were found 15 times in the pretest then increased into 21 times in the posttest. Approximation means the speakers use an alternative expression that has sematic features similar to those of the intended term (Nakatani, 2005). In the pre-test, this strategy was frequently used when the students discussed about friendship. Most of the students used the term

“friendship” as an exchange of “close friend” or “best friend” terms. This happened because probably they did not know the word “*sahabat*” in English, so they used the word friendship instead of close friend or best friend.

- [6.a] S4 : *Do you have friendship?*
S5 : *Yes, I have a friendship...*
(Pre-test transcription – Students 4 & 5)

Then, in the posttest, the students used various kinds of words to represent the messages they were intended to say. The following example shows how the student used the word ‘police office’ which meant ‘police station’.

- [6.b] S2 : *...can you prove that you are not lying to me?*
S5 : *...and you could prove it from... police office.*
(Pre-test transcription – Students 2 & 5)

Apart from the previous six strategies used by the students the strategy like use of fillers, message abandonment, shadowing, confirmation checks, clarification request, and restructuring strategy were not dominantly used by the students in the conversation. Even, appeal for help and paraphrase/circumlocution strategies were not used at all in both pre-test and posttest.

The effect of teaching oral communication strategies on the students’ speaking skill

The statistical calculation of the students speaking scores from both EG and CG was conducted in three steps: first, computing pre-test scores from both groups; second, computing posttest scores from both groups; and the last, computing pre-test and posttest scores from experimental group.

The first step was conducted to make sure that the initial ability of the two groups was not significantly

different or rejecting the null hypothesis (H_0). The mean of experimental group pre-test scores was 41.125 and the control group mean was 40.76. The df from the two groups was 51. The t_{crit} from df 51 was 2.021. Then, the independent t -test result was -0.101 (negative value was considered as positive value). Comparing the t_{obs} with the t_{crit} , it can be concluded the t_{obs} was lower than the t_{crit} . Thus, the H_0 was accepted. In sum, there was no significant difference of mean between EG and CG. In other words, both groups had the relatively same initial ability of speaking.

The second test was conducted to make sure two things: 1) the progress of the students’ speaking ability and students’ equality between the two groups; 2) the ability of the two groups was significant difference. It resulted that the mean of experimental group posttest scores was 59.0893, and the control group mean was 40.52. Furthermore, the independent t -test result was -6.221 and the df from the two groups was 51. The t_{crit} from df 51 was 2.021. Comparing the t_{obs} with the t_{crit} , it can be concluded that the t_{obs} was higher than the t_{crit} . Besides, there was a significant difference of mean between the experimental and control group posttest scores. Hence, the teaching of OCSs in the EFL speaking class could bring improvement to the students’ speaking ability.

The last step was done to determine whether there was evidence that the teaching of OCSs was effective in improving EFL students speaking skill. The mean score of the experimental group before the OCS treatment was 41.125 and after the treatment, the mean score became 59.0893. The result also showed that the t_{obs} value was -12.219. When df was 27, the t_{crit} value at the 0.05 level was 2.052. So, the t result also indicated that the difference was

significant because t_{obs} was greater than t_{crit} . Therefore, those facts become the evidence to support the claim that teaching OCSs could improve the EFL students speaking skill because the participants speaking scores were significantly improved after the treatment. In sum, the teaching of OCSs was effective to improve the students' speaking skill.

CONCLUSION

This study showed the necessary of teaching OCSs in the EFL speaking class especially when the students were low proficiency learners. Being aware of how to use OCSs in the conversation has helped the students to deal with their communication problems in English. Hence, the teacher/lecturer who has students with the same condition might apply this OCSs training to increase the students' speaking ability.

The findings and discussion in the previous sections proved that, most significantly, the students' speaking skill improved since the students learned to deal with communication problems using OCSs. The OCSs training has mostly improved their vocabulary mastery where none of them used L1 anymore in the speaking practices and they started to construct long sentences. It means that they felt encouraged to speak in English. Then, this training also has made learners gained their confidence in speaking English in front of their friends. They were not shy and reluctant to speak anymore. So, it practically solved several speaking problems mentioned earlier in the introduction. However, from the speaking performances transcriptions and the OCSs used by the students in the speaking tasks, the OCSs training still could not increase students' grammatical competence. Most of the students' utterances were poorly structured. These phenomena emerged probably because the lack of exposure to the English

expressions and the researcher could not choose the appropriate tasks for the students in the treatment.

Despite of the fact about students' grammatical competence, the students' scores in speaking improved. Its calculation supported the initial claim about the effect of OCSs to the students speaking ability. The paired samples t-test calculation of the students' speaking scores displayed significant difference where the t_{obs} was greater than the t_{crit} . It can be concluded that the teaching of OCSs in the EFL speaking class positively affected to the increase of the students' speaking ability.

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Teacher

A teacher asks her class, "If there are 5 birds sitting on a fence and you shoot one of them, how many will be left?" She calls on little Johnny. He replies, "None, they all fly away with the first gun shot" The teacher replies, "The correct answer is 4, but I like your thinking." Then, Little Johnny says "I have a question for YOU. There are three women sitting on a bench having ice cream: One is delicately licking the sides of the triple scoop of ice cream. The second is gobbling down the top and sucking the cone. The third is biting off the top of the ice cream. Which one is married?" The teacher, blushing a great deal, replied "Well I suppose the one that's gobbled down the top and sucked the cone" To which Little Johnny replied, "The correct answer is the one with the wedding ring on, but I like your thinking."

(Source: <http://www.study-express.ru/humour/funny-stories.shtml>, picture: www.google.co.id)