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The Relationship between Shyness, Communication Strategies and Elicitation

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Dedicated to:

My dear family

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Abstract

The present study aims at delving into the relationship between shyness and communication strategies as reliably documented aspects of communication used by EFL learners. The subjects were 208 female Iranian high school students in Tehran; the subjects took a Nelson test of language proficiency, 102 out of 208 subjects taking the Nelson test were known to be homogenous and qualified to take part in the communication activities. They were also given the Stanford shyness questionnaire to fill out. Their sample communications which were in English were tape- recorded at their school and brought for later analysis. Finally, the students received a treatment which was supposed to help them to be able to use communication strategies more successfully. For the treatment the researcher consulted a few psychologists to see how they dealt with shy people. Finally the students underwent another interview to see if the strategies which were used by shy students had changed or not. The strategies were again classified to diagnose the probable differences. It was shown that shyness affected the choice of communication strategies negatively. That is, non-shy students used more communication strategies than their shy counterparts. The study showed that we can train the subjects to use communication strategies while they are talking, so that their feeling of discomfort will not act as an inhibition in social or interpersonal situations.

Key Words: Shyness, Linguistic Strategy, Communication Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

For the last two decades, researchers have brought their attention to bear on the communicative process of the interlanguage. Part of this shift of attention has been due to Hymes' introduction of the concept of communicative competence into the field of second language acquisition. The concept is taken to mean as noted by Stern (1991) "… the intuitive mastery that the native speaker possesses to use and interpret language appropriately in the process of interaction and in relation to social context…" (p.56), or as Hymes (1972) puts it " [It is a competence] when to speak, when not and what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner" (p.69). The concept was a complement to Chomsky's theory of linguistic competence that was defined as internalized rules of syntax abstracted from the social context. It implied and took linguistic competence for granted, but it focused mainly on the intuitive grasp of social and cultural rules and implications that were carried over by an utterance. Its introduction into the field also suggested that language teaching should adopt a social, interpersonal and cultural dimension and lay the same amount of stress on it as it laid on the rule system. Another prominent corollary of its introduction into the field revealed the fact that the complexity of the entire rule system is such that it is almost impossible for anyone except the native speaker to acquire communicative competence impeccably, this being the case, the communicative competence of second language learner must be conceived of somewhat differently from that of a native speaker. It goes without saying that the grammatical and the sociolinguistic competence of a second language learner are restricted, and for that matter he desperately needs to possess a third element (Stern, 1991), mainly, an extra skill through which to be able to conduct himself as someone whose sociocultural and grammatical competences are limited, an skill which, in fact,

helps him to know how to be a foreigner. This extra skill has been dubbed strategic competence by Canale and Swain (Stern, 1991). They define strategic competence as the knowledge of communicative strategies that second language learners intend to make use of in order to get meaning over to their interlocutors in spite of their incomplete command of the language. Paraphrasing, avoidance of difficulties, simplification, coping techniques and ... are among these. Thus strategic competence, having so paramount a position in the whole construct of communicative competence, that should be further elucidated, expanded, and utilized. Indeed, communicative language teaching fails to materialize its goals, unless it takes into consideration the strategies and techniques that a speaker employs when he encounters a communicative hurdle.

The long- established and well- researched link between the area of individual differences and different components of language learning has always been appealing to both researchers and practitioners involved in teaching. This appeal has been due to the productivity and abundance of interesting results in this area. As Brown (1987) states," In the enormous task of learning of language, one which so deeply involves affective factors, a study of cognitive style brings very important variables to the forefront" (p.97). Along the same line, shyness, as an important dimension of individual differences has been observed in actual behavior and on a range of psychological data. The most important of which being measures of verbal communication, more specifically the timing and frequency of communication acts (Evans, 1997). This offers some pieces of evidence as to the link between shyness and oral communication.

Also, Bialystok (1990), in her description of the framework for language processing states that two components are involved in this framework analysis of

linguistic processing. Specific language uses (conversation, reading, translation, etc.) are said to demand specific levels of skills in each of these processing components. For that matter, different tasks, as specific language uses requiring varying degrees of mastery over those components may lead to differential performance on the part of the interlanguage users. Along the same line, Bachman (1995) states that these seems to be some types of test tasks which are, to a whole degree, susceptible to the effects of test takers' strategic competence. That is, they can simply complete the tasks by utilizing their strategic competence to make up for the defects that they may have in the other competencies. As an example of such a task, she mentions Palmerr's (1981) picture description task whereby the test taker was required to describe a picture so that the examinees would be able to distinguish the picture from among a number of similar pictures.

Bachman (1995) quotes Palmer (1972) as saying that some subjects with obviously small vocabulary repertoire could accomplish the task successfully, relying mostly on their strategic competence. For that matter, the subjects, Bachman assumes, might have used the strategy of ignoring the propositional content and communicating about the non verbal code (the shapes and lines) to represent them. In Bachman's (1995) view, performance in these tests is more affected by the strategic competence than by the language ability which is purported to be assessed through that test.

For that matter, the present study aims at delving into the relationship between shyness and communication strategies as reliably documented aspects of communication.

1.2 Research Questions

In order to grapple with the hypotheses put forward in a scientific way, the following research questions have been raised:

Q1. Is there any relationship between shyness and the number of communication strategies used by the subjects?

Q2. Is there any relationship between shyness and the type of communication strategies used by the subjects?

Q3. Does the training of specific communication strategies increase the frequency of the use of these strategies in oral communication of Shy Students?

1.3 Research Hypotheses

1. HO. There is no relationship between shyness and the number of communication strategies used by the subjects.

2. HO. There is no relationship between shyness and the type of communication strategies used by the subjects.

3. HO. The training of specific communication strategies does not increase the frequency of the use of these strategies in oral communication of Shy Students.

1.4 Significance of the Study

One of the persistent questions which has remained to be answered concerning communication strategies is related to the probable influence that personality traits may exert upon their choice and adoption on behalf the interlanguage user. Brown (1987) states "The way we learn things and particular attacks we make on problems seem to hinge upon a rather amorphous link between personality and cognition" (p.8).

Thus communicative strategies, as solutions adopted when the speaker encounters problems during the flow of communication, are expected to hinge upon

this link between personality and cognition. For that matter, the result of the present study set out to shed some light on the claim made by experts in the field that particular personality characteristics may be strongly associated with preferences for different types of communicative strategies (Bialystok, 1990; Corder ,1983; Tarone, 1971, etc.)

Furthermore, recent research has established that shyness is an important dimension of individual differences among both children and adults whether it is constructed as a category of temperament or as a personality trait (Crozier ,1997; Zimbardo, 1997). Differences between shy and non- shy students have been reported in observed behavior and on a range of psychological data, but the most pervasive differences have been identified on measures of verbal communication, more specifically the frequency and timing of speech acts (Evans, 1987). Thus communicative strategies, as "reliably documented aspect of verbal communication" (Bialystok, 1990), will, in all probability, be affected by shyness. To elucidate the nature of this link, studies of this kind are mandated. In addition, in order to establish that such a competency as strategic competence exists and for that matter to lay ground for the better utilization of the benefits that it offers to language teaching profession (Johnson and Johnson, 1990; Dornyei and Thurell, 1991), it needs to be determined how the selection of communicative strategies is governed by various factors such as personality traits or task nature.

1.5 Operational Definitions of the Terms Used in the Study

Shyness: It refers to the degree to which an individual cannot establish rapport with the other people, especially strangers. In this study, shyness refers to the nature of the subjects' performance on the Persian version of Stanford Inventory of Shyness (see appendix 1).

Linguistic Strategy: A strategy whereby the speaker manipulates his linguistic resources to enable himself to communicate his intent.

Communication Strategies: "Potentially conscious plans for solving what an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a communicative goal" (Faerch and Kasper, 1983, p.36)

1.6 Limitations of the Study

Limitations are integral part of every study and this study was no exception for one thing, some strategies like mime or gesture were not dealt with because of the nature of data gathering, i.e. tape-recording. Also, experts in the field state that in order to get genuine communicative strategies, it is advisable to have a native interlocutor, but in the present research the researcher herself and one of her colleagues were the interlocutors. Furthermore, the study should not be expected to have assessed shyness precisely, because personality traits cannot be assessed with precision and all the assessments of these traits contain some relativism; besides all of the subjects of this study were female Iranian high school students. The result may be different for other groups of subjects.

Review of Related Literature

2. Review of the Theory and Literature

To get the readers to acquire some knowledge of the issues dealt with in the study, I give a review of the theory behind the subject and an overview of the previous studies done in this respect.

2 . 1 Communication Strategies

2.1.1 Definition

As Faerch and Kasper (1983) maintain, the identification and classification of communication strategies depend mainly upon their definitions, it is first necessary to present a definition of communication strategies. However, definitions of communication strategies differ according to different theoretical perspectives. Every perspective takes to define communicative strategy based on its own principles and assumptions. Nonetheless, there is one broad consensus for the definition of communication strategy across different perspectives. That is, communication strategies should be distinguished from language learning strategies and language use strategies. Cohen (1998) differentiates language learning strategies and language use strategies and defines the former as learning processes which are consciously selected by the learner. The element of choice is quite important here because it is something which gives the strategy its special character (Bialystok, 1990).

Language use strategies can be distinguished from language learning strategies in that their principal purpose is not learning but solving some kind of problem. Of course, it is possible that learners promote learning in the wake of using communicative strategies, but the pedagogical implications of the use of communicative strategies is out of the scope of the present thesis. To still further clarify the notion of communicative strategies, one must compare it with a related concept called production strategy. A production strategy is a strategy of language use
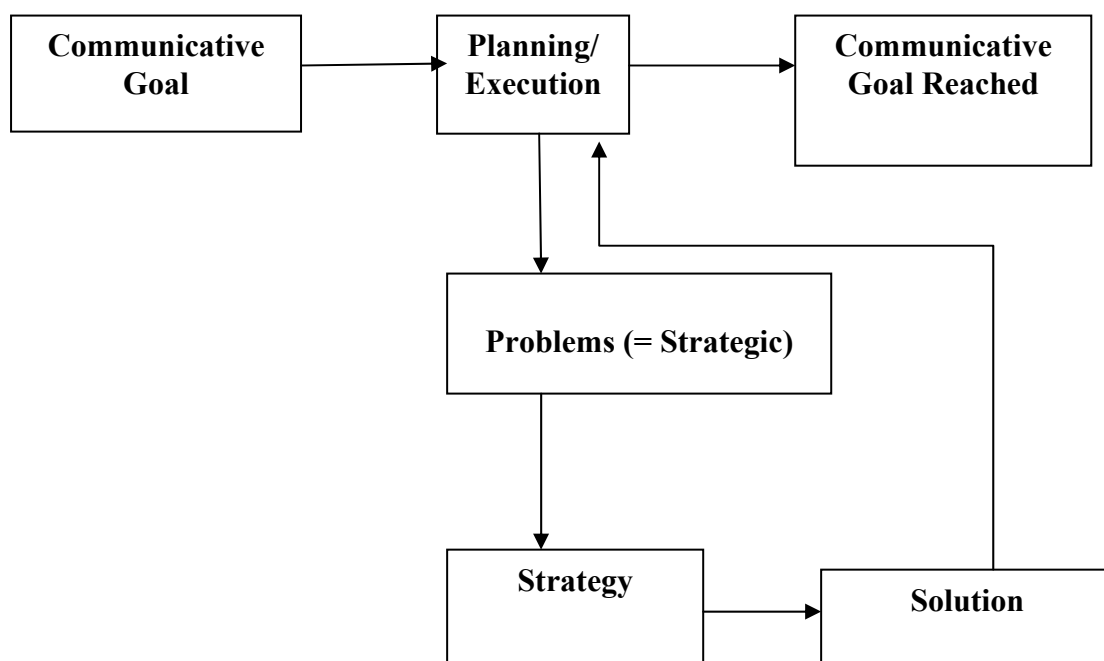
which is defined as an attempt to use one's linguistic system efficiently and fancily, with the least amount of effort. But unlike communication strategy, a production strategy lacks the interactional focus on the negotiation of meaning. Thus one can include discourse planning, rehearsal, and prefabricated patterns as production strategies because they facilitate the task of speaking in particular situations.

Once language use strategies are distinguished from language learning strategies, there are two potential options to see communicative strategies, the interactional view and the psychological perspective (Bialystok,1990). The interactive approach views communicative strategies as part of the general communication. It focuses on the pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of communication. The psycholinguistic perspective, on the other hand, views communicative strategies as representation of the cognitive mechanism of language processing. In a like vein, Kasper and Kellerman (1997) divide them into two perspectives: the interactional view and the psycholinguistic view. The researchers who take the interactional perspective assume the presence of the interlocutor and believe that communicative strategies occur when both the learner and the interlocutor try to fill an information gap. Tarone (1971), for instance, takes the interactional view and defines communicative strategy as:" [the] mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where the requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared… or attempts to bridge the gap between linguistic knowledge of the second language learner and the linguistic knowledge of the target language interlocutor in real communication situations" (p.65). Other definitions put forward so far are based on the above mentioned approaches one way or another. Other researchers, who have taken the psycholinguistic perspective, define communicative strategy in their own terms. Tarone, Cohen and Duma (1983), taking a psycholinguistic perspective this time,

define communicative strategies as " the systematic attempt by the learner to express or decode meaning in the target language, in situations where the appropriate systematic target language rules have not been formed" (p.55).

In a similar way, Faerch and Kasper (1983) psycholinguistically define communicative strategies as: "… potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal" (p. 36).

Understanding of this fact may be gained through a look at Faerch and Kasper's model of language production:

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┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
│ Communicative│─────▶│  Planning/   │─────▶│  Communicative   │
│     Goal     │      │  Execution   │      │  Goal Reached    │
└──────────────┘      └──────────────┘      └──────────────────┘
                             │    ▲
                             ▼    │
                      ┌──────────────────┐
                      │ Problems (= Strategic)│
                      └──────────────────┘
                             │
                             ▼
                      ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
                      │ Strategy │─────▶│  Solution    │
                      └──────────┘      └──────────────┘
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Adopted from Faerch and Kasper (1983, p.33)

The definition of the word 'problem' in this model is in keeping with the definition presented by Klaus and Buhr (1976, cited in Faerch and Kasper 1983) who define problem as " recognition by an individual … of the insufficiency of his …

existing knowledge to reach a goal and of the consequent need for expanding his knowledge" (1983, p. 30). In a like vein Bialystok (1990), presenting problematicity as one defining criterion for communicative strategies, states" … [problematicity] is the idea that strategies are used only when a speaker perceives that there is a problem which may interrupt communication"(p.3), but she also presents two implications for proposing problematicity as a criterion to define communicative strategy. First, the strategic use of language by the speaker must be kept distinct from the way the speaker uses language non – strategically, that is, for ordinary communication. The second implication is that this fact leaves uncertain the status of communicative language use that is not usually perceived to be problematic, but may at the same time be strategic. For instance, this is the case when a native speaker uses lengthy and prolix descriptions of a term to make sure that a listener has understood even though no communication hurdle might have been encountered. Consciousness as the second criterion for the definition of communicative strategies refers to the facts that speakers are aware of the use of strategies. As Faerch and Kasper (1983) state, strategies are plans about which the individuals are conscious. Intentionality is another defining criterion which Bialystok adds to the other criteria. By intentionality, Bialystok means the learners' control over a repertoire of strategies so that particular ones may be chosen out of a range options and deliberately applied to attain certain effects. This fact conveys the assumption that the speaker has some amount of control over the strategy and the choice is responsive to the perceived problem(p.78).

To further elucidate the notion of strategy, it is necessary to compare it with other concepts discussed in theories of speech production. In point of fact, a distinction between the strategic and the non- strategic use of language is in order. One comparison which can, in all probability, reflect this distinction is the demonstration

of the differences between strategy and process. In the literature related to communicative strategies, one mainly finds strategy being used interchangeably with process, meaning that both terms refer to the same phenomenon. For that matter, one might say that communicative strategy is a process by which a communication difficulty is obviated. Some other researchers treat communicative strategy as a subcategory of processes and for that matter establish an opposition between strategic and non- strategic language uses. The third camp of researchers treat them as relating to a super ordinate class of mental activities, but distinguished into different subclasses by some defining criteria (Faerch and Kasper, 1983). What we actually favor here, is the option of the third group which seems more tenable in the light of concrete evidence.

Process is generally taken to refer to all the mental steps which are used to carry out a mental activity. Processes can be unconscious and inaccessible to the individual such as the visual processes which help us to recognize faces. Other processes work at a higher level. Processes like the above mentioned ones control communication to a sizeable degree. Unconscious processes are, for instance, responsible for generating well-formed sentences according to the grammatical rules while more conscious processes are conventionally utilized in monitoring the speech and determining the intentional content of the utterances (Bialystok, 1990). Several criteria have been used to distinguish between strategies and processes.

Time constraints: Blum and Levenston (1978), in their article "Universals of Lexical Simplification" use the dimension of temporality to distinguish between strategy and process. They believe that strategies are the ways that a learner arrives at a certain usage, at a specific point in time. Thus, the learner may use the strategy of simplification to obviate a particular problem at one single point in time. However,