NON-MAJOR ENGLISH STUDENTS' ORAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES: A CASE STUDY AT A UNIVERSITY IN HANOI

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Abstract: *To gain a better understanding of language learning processes, specifically oral strategies utilized in communicative activities, this research intends to investigate the spoken communication skills of University of Economics - Technology for Industries (UNETI) students who are not majoring in English. English non-majors oral communicative capability at UNETI is not what one would expect after completing a university degree. However, research on communication tactics is uncommon in Vietnam since most earlier research on the subject seems to concentrate primarily on methodological or linguistic aspects affecting Vietnamese students' communicative competencies. Therefore, this research presents a study that generalizes communication methods used by intermediate-level English-speaking UNETI non-majors in English. It was a quantitative and qualitative investigation in which a communication strategy taxonomy suggested by Malasit, Y. and Sarobol, N. (2013) was used to analyze and identify students' use of communication strategies in their recorded speaking performance. Data from students' interviews and informal recordings will be used to inform suggestions for teaching and learning English for communicative competence at UNETI.*

Keywords: *Students' English intermediate level, oral communication strategies, English non-majors.*

I. Introduction

English education is changing as a result of the importance of English as a worldwide language in Vietnam over the past few decades toward communicative-focused training. This has significantly altered language instruction and acquisition. However, the majority of Vietnamese employers acknowledge that their expectations for the labor force are very different from the oral communicative skills of non-English majors upon completion of their university education. Since most learners who have already invested a lot of time in learning the language consider communication their primary learning objective and still struggle with it, the effectiveness of communication in the target language remains the most significant concern for both English language learners and teachers. Moreover, the Ministry of Education and Training

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of Vietnam (MOET) issued strict guidelines defining the English proficiency requirements for undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate students. To better prepare Vietnam's youth labor force for global integration, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) is now implementing the National Foreign Languages 2020 Project at various colleges and universities nationwide. Though a lot of research has been done to improve Vietnamese students' communicative competence, most of it focusesfocuses on communicative activities for communicative competence and linguistic, methodological, or ICT factors influencing Vietnamese students' communicative competence. These studies need to address scenarios in which students find it difficult to communicate due to a lack of oral communication techniques, which is an essential component.

Meanwhile, language academics, educators, and practitioners worldwide have been interested in communication techniques for a number of decades. Numerous studies have been conducted on the nature of communication techniques, their application, their instruction, and the variables affecting their application. To a considerable extent, these researches have provided educators, teachers, and course designers with pedagogical implications to consider in enhancing English language learners' communicative competence. However, there is not much previous empirical research on communication tactics conducted in Vietnamese contexts, particularly with non-majors in English. As a result, investigating the various communication techniques employed by UNETI non-majored students through English communication practices, particularly of a specific set of learners, is considered extremely important for fostering highly valued communication skills in the Vietnamese labor market.

This research will offer recommendations for the English curriculum at the postsecondary level and for EFL learners regarding English teaching and learning.

Therefore, it is believed that examining the different communication strategies used by UNETI English non-majored students through tasks including communication—especially involving a specific set of learners—is crucial to developing oral English communication skills, which are highly sought after in the Vietnamese job market. The results of this study will provide suggestions for both the postsecondary English curriculum and the instruction of English to English as a foreign language (EFL):

1. How often do UNETI non-English majors with intermediate English use communication strategies?

2. What attitudes do UNETI students have about the application of communication strategies?

II. Literature review

2.1. Definitions of communication strategies

The exchange of information through strategic communications requires a specific method. Focusing on business objectives entails sending the best message to the right people at the right time through the appropriate channels and utilizing the process's feedback.

It's a way of consciously distributing thoughtful, well-planned material. Correct positioning regarding the company mission and well-thought-out tactical implementation are required. Public relations, advertising, marketing, and internal and external communications are all included in one integrated, multidisciplinary discipline.

The most effective message, whether internal or external, may be transmitted

thanks to this structured process, which also makes it possible to track feedback against precise organizational and communication-focused objectives. Consistent and pertinent information is disseminated both internally in a firm and externally to clients through strategic communication tactics.

Communication strategy definitions show that scholars studying communication strategies have yet to agree upon a standard definition (Canale, 1983, p. 10). The examples above suggest that there are variations in the definitions of communication tactics.

Despite these differences, using communication techniques usually involves the speakers' choice to communicate in order to achieve their communicative goal.

2.2. Communication strategy classifications

Analyzing categories and typologies of communication strategies is currently available. It reveals that different scholars' classification criteria and terminology have led to varied classifications of communication strategies. Their research into communication strategies may have led to their classification (e.g., Tarone, Cohen, and Dumas, 1976; and Somsai and Intaraprasert, 2011) or from evaluating and editing other studies (e.g., Bialystok, 1983 and Dörnyei and Scott, 1995).

The review of communication strategy classifications has provided a structure for the current investigation. The researchers used the following suggested communication strategies from the most recently established topologies, adapted from Tarone (1980), for the current investigation (Malasit et al.; N., 2013).

2.2.1. Strategies of avoidance

a. Avoidance of topics: To avoid discussing about a concept

b. Abandonment of messages: To stop speech midway

2.2.2. Compensation-based tactics

❖ Inside-actional strategies

c. Word origin: To invent a new, nonexistent word for communication

d. Code-changing: To change the language to L1 without attempting any translation

e. Foreignization: To adapt L1 morphologically and/or phonologically to L2

f. Using non-linguistic methods: To use nonverbal cues in place of words

g. Self-repair: To make one's own speech corrections

h. Mumbling: To speak incoherently while mumbling

i. Calculation: To substitute the object of equal importance to the L2 item

j. Circumlocution: To describe the object's characteristics as opposed to the specific object of interest

k. Literal interpretation: To convert a term from L1 to L2

l. Using hesitation devices and filters: To spend time thinking by using filler phrases

m. Repetition of self: To speak parts of one's own speech out loud

n. Other repetition: To obtain time by repeating what the other person said

o. Omission: To leave a space when unsure of a term or carry on as though it were clear

❖ Strategies of Interaction

a. Repetition requests: To request clarification if you are having trouble understanding

b. Help requests: To request the interlocutor for direct or indirect help

c. Requesting clarification: To ask for an additional explanation to resolve an understanding issue

d. Requesting affirmation: To ask for verification that a clarification has been correctly

e. understood

f. Check for comprehension: To make questions to check the comprehension of the interlocutor

g. Expressing incomprehensible messages in communication: To express personal incapacity to comprehend communications

III. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The study included forty non-majors in English with varying levels of English competence.

Between the ages of 20 and 22, the participants were second-year UNETI students with the individuals basis of their English skills, convenience, availability, and willingness.

3.2. Research methods

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect empirical data from several participant groups (intermediate English language non-major students) at UNETI.

Recording: The attendees were invited to participate in a light-hearted group conversation. In a communication environment where spontaneous speech production can be seen, learners' oral performance is reflected in the oral group discussion (Gradman & Hanania, 1991). Similar discussion topics were given to the students, who were not told that their oral conversations would be videotaped. Every group conversation lasted roughly fifteen minutes. After that, the transcription of the recording was used for data analysis. Tarone (1980) adapted a questionnaire to analyze and identify students' CSs. The researcher translated the questionnaire from the Vietnamese version into English before delivering it to the participants for data analysis.

Informal interview with UNETI students: The researcher conducted an informal interview with the students to obtain further details regarding their awareness of and perceptions of communication tactics.

3.3. Procedure

The researcher used a quantitative analysis involving the frequency count of communication strategies used by participants. Malasit, Y. and Sarobol, N. (2013) questionnaire on communication strategies was administered to the participants. However, the actual communication tactics they used in their recorded oral conversation and in their responses to the teacher's interview questions were used to manually examine the qualitative component.

IV. Results and discussion

The two research questions are taken into consideration when discussing the findings.

Research Question 1: What is the frequency of use of communication strategies by non-English majors whose English is at the intermediate level?

*Table 1a: The total use of CSs by*
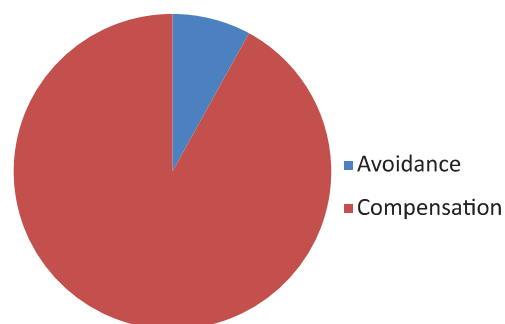
Mean scores and rankings were demonstrated to analyze the significant role of CSs in improving students' communication competence.

Table 1b: The total use of CSs by students

Strategies		Number of CSs	Percentage (%)
Avoidance		4	7%
Compensation	Inside-actional strategies	44	72%
Strategies	Strategies for interaction	14	21%
Total		62	100%

The general utilization of communication strategies by intermediate English language learners is shown in Table 1 below. In their spoken communication, the students clearly favored compensatory methods (92%) over avoidance tactics (8%), by a significant margin. This suggests that the students make an effort to maintain their interaction with their partners and the flow of the talk. Seventy percent of the ninety-two percent of compensating methods went toward intra-actional strategies, while only twenty-two percent went toward inter-actional strategies. According to several studies (Wannaruk, 2003; Lam, 2010; Aliakbari & Karimi Allvar, 2009), students with differing proficiency levels use distinct communication styles to varied degrees. Participants with complete access to language resources utilize compensating strategies less frequently than those.

Table 2a: Students' use of compensation strategies

- ■ Inside-actional strategies
- ■ Strategies for interaction
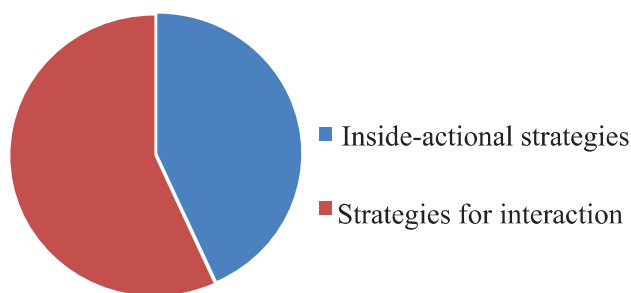
It is evident from the results that the pupils utilized only some strategies. Not one student turned to these communication techniques *in their speaking task, such as foreignization*, *approximation, circumlocution, repetition,* or *expression of incomprehensible messages*. The least frequently foreignizing can be explained by the fact that L2 (English) differs from L1 in that it was uncommon to modify L1 both phonologically and morphologically.

Table 2b below shows how frequently the students use each CS.

Communication Strategies			No	Per.
Avoidance strategies	Avoidance of topics		2	3.1%
	Abandonment of messages		3	4.6%
Compensatory strategies	Inside-actional strategies	Word origin	1	1.5%
		Code-changing	5	7.8%
		Foreignization	0	0%
		Using non-linguistic methods	3	4.6%
		Self-repair	8	12.5%
		Mumbling	0	0%
		Using all-purpose terms	1	1.5%
		Approximation	0	0%
		Circumlocution	0	0%
		Literal interpretation	3	4.6%
		Using hesitation devices and filters	15	23.4%
		Repetition of self	7	10%
		Other repetition	0	0%
		Omission	2	3.1%
	Strategies for interaction	Repetition requests	3	4.6%
		Help requests	2	3.1%
		Requesting clarification	4	6.2%
		Requesting affirmation	4	6.2%
		Checking for Comprehension	1	1.5%
		Expressing incomprehensible messages in communication	0	0%

The most commonly employed tactic out of the 22 techniques was the use of fitters and hesitation devices (23.4%). This is partially due to the fact that these students needed to stay in charge of the conversation and give themselves space to consider their next move. The results obtained are consistent with earlier research, such as that of Nakatani, Makki, and Bradley (2012). It was followed by *self-repair (12.5%), repetition of self (10%), and code-changing (7.8%),* respectively. Possibly, the students were used to speaking Vietnamese in daily conversations by using self-repair and self-repetition. Code-changing likely occurred most often when a student was unable to recall a word in English, at which point they would typically stop speaking in English and finish the sentence in Vietnamese. Requests for clarification and confirmation accounted for the same percentage (6.2%). It showed that they required more help since they were less aware of the lexical issues they would face. The communication tactics that ranked highest were *literal interpretation*, *using non-linguistic means*, the *message of abandonment*, and *repetition requests*, all of which had a 4.6% frequency. Just 3.1% of students employed *topic avoidance*, *omission*, and *help requests* in their communication. It is evident that the concepts of word origin, all-purpose terminology, and *checking for comprehension* were only once mentioned.

Research Question 2: What attitudes do UNETI students have about the application of communication strategies?

Important information for the research comes from casual interviews with the students. Most students readily admitted that they knew nothing about communication strategies other than a few filters that their teacher occasionally brought up during the lesson when the teacher asked them if they had any ideas about communication strategies or why they used certain types more frequently than others. More precisely, a few students stated that.

"*I constantly try to carry on a discussion by using short, everyday words or phrases. Rather than ending the conversation if the listener is unable to understand, I will shift the subject to something*" else.

"*In order for me to reflect the knowledge, I will ask them to repeat anything that I don't understand so that I can categorize it in a slower tone.*"

In short, participants placed negotiation for meaning, accuracy-oriented, and fluency-oriented as their top three communication strategies; message reduction and alteration, nonverbal tactics, and attempt to think in English, scored lowest. By trying to use oral communication techniques, it is possible that students enjoyed improving their conversational skills.

V. Conclusion and implication

Compared to earlier research (Rabab'ah & Bulut, 2007; Chen, 1990; Quyen et al., 2012; Hanh et al., 2013), while 40 learners in this study employed 62 communication methods, the frequency of these tactics was much lower among intermediate English learners. The statistics above, combined with the responses provided by the students during the interview, demonstrate that the students employ highly unconscious communication strategies in their jobs, which may be partially attributed to the prevalence of these methods in their mother lounge. As a result, it is advised that teachers incorporate formal education on communication methods into the curriculum and increase students' understanding of the strategies they employ

in oral communication. Students are able to gain more opportunities to experience the application of communication methods in classroom activities (e.g., Nakatani, 2005; Le, 2006; Kongsom, 2009) have confirmed that communication strategies training in the classroom could literally help students to communicate more effectively, raise students' awareness of communication strategies, and enhance students' confidence in speaking English. Besides, English teachers will benefit from formal training, formal discussion, and instruction in communication skills. The goal of the most recent study, which involved a small sample of students from a single university, was to generalize about the kinds and frequency of communication tactics used by intermediate English language learners. Therefore, future studies on communication strategies conducted in Vietnamese environments should consider communication methods related to other variables like motivation, anxiety, or the student's major.

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DẠY KỸ NĂNG NÓI BẰNG CÁC CHIẾN LƯỢC GIAO TIẾP CHO SINH VIÊN KHÔNG CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH: NGHIÊN CỨU TRƯỜNG HỢP TẠI MỘT TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC Ở HÀ NỘI

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Tóm tắt: Năng lực giao tiếp tiếng Anh hiện nay rất cần thiết để hội nhập thành công với thế giới. Tuy nhiên, hầu hết mọi người đều chấp nhận rằng năng lực giao tiếp nói của sinh viên không chuyên ngành tiếng Anh tại trường Đại học Kinh tế - Công nghiệp (UNETI) còn xa mới đạt được kỳ vọng khi hoàn thành chương trình giáo dục đại học. Trong khi đó, các nghiên cứu về chiến lược giao tiếp ở Việt Nam còn hiếm vì hầu hết các nghiên cứu liên quan đến giao tiếp trước đây trong bối cảnh Việt Nam dường như chủ yếu tập trung vào các yếu tố ngôn ngữ hoặc phương pháp luận ảnh hưởng đến năng lực giao tiếp của sinh viên Việt Nam. Vì vậy, bài viết này báo cáo một nghiên cứu khái quát hóa các chiến lược giao tiếp của những sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh tại UNETI nhưng có trình độ tiếng Anh trung cấp. Nghiên cứu này mang tính định lượng và định tính, trong đó phương pháp phân loại chiến lược giao tiếp do Malasit, Y. và Sarobol, N. (2013) đề xuất đã được sử dụng để phân tích và xác định việc sử dụng các chiến lược giao tiếp của sinh viên trong phần trình bày bài nói được ghi lại của họ. Dữ liệu từ các bản ghi âm và phỏng vấn không chính thức với sinh viên sẽ giúp cung cấp các kiến nghị cho việc dạy và học tiếng Anh về năng lực giao tiếp tại UNETI.

Từ khóa: chiến lược giao tiếp, tiếng Anh không chuyên, trình độ Tiếng Anh trung cấp.

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