

Communication Strategies of Turkish Speakers of English

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ABSTRACT

Bu çalışmada, ana dili Türkçe olan ve İngilizce öğrenen yetişkinlerin bir resmi tarif ederken kullandığı iletişim stratejileri incelenmektedir. Çalışmada Kellerman'ın (1990) modelinin Türk öğrencilerinin stratejilerine uygulanıp uygulanamayacağı ve öğrencilerin İngilizce'yi kullanma becerileri ile strateji seçimleri arasında bir bağlantı olup olmadığı araştırılmıştır. Analiz sonuçları Kellerman'ın modelinin Türk öğrencilerin kullandığı stratejilere uygulanabilir olduğu ve İngilizce becerileri daha iyi olan öğrencilerin daha karmaşık strateji çeşitlerini tercih etmeye meyilli oldukları bulunmuştur.

INTRODUCTION

This study is about communication strategies that Turkish learners adopt while performing a task. During the last decades, taxonomies of communication strategies of ESL speakers have given a detailed analysis of learners' performance. Among them are Faerch and Kasper (1983), Bialystok (1990) and Kellerman (1990). This study investigates whether or not Kellerman's model is applicable to the communication strategies employed by Turkish learners of English. Secondly, it looks at whether there is a relationship between the proficiency level of learners and the type of communication strategy they prefer. A task of picture description was used to elicit communication strategies of five Turkish ESL speaker students who were studying at Liverpool University at the time of data collection. The results of the analysis show that Kellerman's model can be applied to the data and that more proficient learners seem to be able to use more complicated strategies.

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I) DEFINING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES:

Whether we are NS (native speakers) or NNS (non-native speakers) we all use communication strategies. However, NNS use them as 'first aid kits' as Kellerman (1990) says. Characteristics of NNS communication strategies are defined with a practical view as follows:

Communication strategies are psycholinguistic plans which exist as part of the language user's communication competence. They are potentially conscious as serve as substitutes for production plans which the learner is unable to implement (Ellis 1985:182).

Communication strategies seem to be conscious since they are described as psycholinguistics plans. Thus, learners are usually aware of problematic situations and the limitations of their linguistic resources. To compensate for the shortcomings of their linguistic researchers, learners tend to have substitute plans.

II) KELLERMAN'S MODEL FOR COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES:

Kellerman (1990) focuses on lexical compensatory strategies which are dealt with as one of the subtypes of a main category strategy in other studies (Faerch and Kasper 1983a & 1983b). According to Kellerman (1990), compensatory strategies "... are used to maintain the integrity of the learner's original communicative goal" (p. 143). Thus, they are employed by learners as communicative means to reach a goal. He claims that his model makes an attempt to analyse and classify the cognitive and linguistic processes underlying strategy behaviour. In this sense, his approach is process oriented. In his model, strategies which learners may adopt during performance can be described in terms of two processes: **conceptual** and **code**.

The cognitive aspect of the model includes **conceptual strategies** whereby learners manipulate the concept in their minds to express it by means of their linguistic resources. When doing this, the learner may adopt two types of approach: *holistic* and *analytic*. In the holistic approach, the learner names a substitute referent with which the target referent shares some properties such as using the word 'bird' for the word SPAROW. Here these two words are hierarchically related to each other in terms of animal taxonomies. Learners tend to use a linguistic hedge preceding the use of the strategy such as 'It looks like an X', 'It is a sort of ...'. In the analytic approach, learners tend to choose some properties of the referent as in the following example: 'This use for a baby so it can't make his clothes dirty',¹

¹ Subjects' utterances have been indicated here verbatim.

for a BIB. The properties that are included in the *analytic strategy* depend on the nature of the referent, the purpose of the communicative act and the nature of the communicative setting. These two approaches are usually combined as in the example: 'it is a sort of a large chicken you eat at Thanksgiving' for TURKEY.

Code strategy is based on making use of existing linguistic resources both in L1 (i.e. mother tongue) and L2 (i.e. target language). There are two ways of doing this: to resort to another language which can be L1 or creating new words by generalising grammatical rules in L2 and to resort to non-verbal means such as pointing at the object. Kellerman also points out that both *conceptual* and *code strategies* can be used simultaneously. For example, a learner wanted to say that she played the 'flute'. Since she did not know the names of types of the flute in English, she said 'I play the flute, not this one' (making gesture of playing instrument in front of her mouth) 'but this one' (making gesture of playing instrument to the side of her mouth). Here, the learner not only selected the properties but also used gestures. In this case, a code strategy is embedded within a *conceptual strategy*. However, a code strategy can be brought into operation independently.

III) THE STUDY

a-Subjects and Interlocutors

Five Turkish postgraduate students contributed to this case study. They received their master's degree in Turkey. Two of them studied in English medium universities, while the other three graduated from Turkish medium universities. These three students attended language courses in different places in Britain before they started to study for the PhD.

This study hypothesises that there is a relationship between the type of communication strategies that a speaker of a foreign language uses and his/her proficiency level. In order to verify this hypothesis, the English level of each subject were placed on a continuum. This decision was based on the author's personal observations. One of the subjects was a postgraduate English literature student whose English appeared to be better than that of many other Turkish postgraduate students studying at Liverpool University, while the other subject was known to have quite a lot of language problems in both his academic life and daily life. These two subjects were the extremes of the language proficiency continuum in this study and the other subjects' proficiency levels were expected to be placed somewhere between these two in the continuum. The competency level of each subject was determined according to a 15-minute interview and information collected in a questionnaire. Information about the learning history of each subject was also taken into account. However, their performance during the interview

was essential for determining their levels. The subject were asked to choose a non-Turkish speaker friend as an interlocutor to create a need to speak in English. Like the subjects, the interlocutors were all postgraduate students at Liverpool University. Two of them were British, the others were Malaysian, Mexican and French. These NNS interlocutors were quite articulate in English. The topic for the interview was deliberately chosen to cover the subjects' perception of life in Britain, and their attitude towards British language and culture. The interviewers were given a set of questions relating to the subject's life in Britain and Turkey. However, they were left free to manipulate and change the questions as long as these remained similar to the original ones. In order to prevent possible stress caused by performing the task in an unfamiliar environment, data collection took place in the subjects' private rooms.

b- Task:

The task was designed to establish a lexically-focused topic of communication which subjects do not normally deal with. It was assumed that the subjects would use their language skills strategically to overcome the unfamiliarity. The task was piloted on five NS and a Turkish NNS to see whether the picture, which was taken from a children's book, was suitable for the purposes of the study. Firstly, two British postgraduate students were asked to write down the names of each part of a car in the picture. In addition, two Turkish mechanical engineers were asked to supply the Turkish names of each part in the pictures. This information was used as a base-line data to check whether subjects transferred any labels from Turkish.

c-Retrospection:

Following the completion of the task, the subjects were asked to comment on their performance in retrospect. They were asked to remember the reason for their choice of lexical items. Some of the questions that the subjects were asked were:

Were you conscious of trying to avoid unknown words, for example by ignoring one part of the diagram?

Did you use any Turkish words thinking or hoping that they were the same in English without being sure?

Retrospection was carried out in Turkish so that the subjects could express themselves better.

d-Data Analysis:

In the process of identification of communication strategies, the deviation of lexical choices from those in the NS base-line data was taken as the main criterion to identify the instances of communication strategies. Deviations were identified by referring to the base-line data which was

collected in the pilot study. The numbers of strategies that were employed by each subject are presented in the appendix.

It can be quite difficult to decide whether a successful performance is a result of a successful communication strategy use or rich vocabulary knowledge. For example, during the retrospection one of the subjects said that she had known that the word ‘radyator’ in Turkish was actually borrowed from French and thus had hypothesised that the English word might be similar. She managed to pronounce the word correctly in English by applying her knowledge of the English phonetic system successfully. After she had realised that the hypothesis was validated, she tried the Turkish equivalents ‘aku’ for ‘battery’ and ‘flash’ for ‘headlights’ unsuccessfully.

A-Conceptual Strategy

The subjects either used an English word, hoping that it shared enough domain with the exact word itself, which indicated the use of a *holistic strategy*, or they created new words in English by using the linguistic knowledge at their disposal which indicated the use of an *analytic strategy*.

i-Holistic Strategy

Example 1 target form: glove compartment

Turkish form: torpido (gözü)

subject’s production: “case”

The word “case” that the subject B produced can be taken as a small place to put things in, a kind of container like a glove compartment. In this sense, “case” becomes a cover term for a container like a glove compartment.

Example 2 target form: steering wheel

Turkish form: direksiyon

subject’s production: “wheel”

Here, the subject L appears to have been inspired by the shape of the steering wheel.

ii-Analytic Strategy

Two types of this strategy have been found in the corpus. These are *word creation* and *paraphrasing*. The examples of strategies that draw on word creation are

Example 1 target form: windscreen wipers

Turkish form: cam silecekleri

literal translation: window wipers

subject’s production: cleaners

Perhaps the subject N linked the concept of cleaning with the function of windscreen wipers and thus created this word.

Example 2 target form: boot

Turkish form: bagaj

literal translation: baggage

subject's production: "This definitely is not the bonnet we have the bonnet here what about this one where you this must be the part you put your luggage things like that"

The subject I first distinguished the boot from the bonnet, and then she paraphrased its function.

There are also examples where both *word creation* and *paraphrasing strategies* were used successfully.

Example 3 target form: rear view mirror

Turkish form: dikiz aynası

literal translation: peeping mirror

subject's production: it has different names I think I don't remember now back mirror or something because you can see the behind to check your behind.

The subject N combined the location of the referent with its function and created 'back mirror' and explained its function in succession.

B- Code Strategies

Code strategies are based on the subjects' L1, namely Turkish. However, the subjects were careful enough not to transfer everything from Turkish. Retrospective data also supports this observation. They seem to have had a relative degree of awareness and only applied this strategy to words that they knew to be loan words. Therefore, underlying this strategy is an evaluation of how likely the word is to appear in English. The subjects happened to choose an appropriate lexical item domain but had problems with pronunciation. Each word below is presented with its Turkish equivalent.

Example 1 target form: aerial

Turkish form: anten

subject's production: "anten"

The subject K appears to have hypothesised that 'anten' was used in English since it is a borrowed word from French.

Example 2 target form: steering wheel

Turkish form: direksiyon

subject's production: "direktion"

The subject B appears to have hypothesised that ‘direksiyon’ was used in English. He also appears to have assumed that its pronunciation must be different in English.

C- Multi-Strategy

Instances of *multi-strategy* use were observed in two categories: *simultaneous multi-strategy* and *successive multi-strategy*. An example for the first one is ‘side mirror’. On the surface level, it seems to be a holistic conceptual strategy since it is a creative use of her English knowledge. However, when the concept ‘side’ (‘yan’ in Turkish) is taken into account, it can be concluded that she might have employed a code strategy. In this case, two strategies might have been used simultaneously. An example for the second type of *multi-strategy* use can be when both code strategy and holistic strategy are used in succession. The subject first said he did not know the name of a particular part (independent suspension) in English and he uttered its Turkish equivalent (‘amortisor’), which indicates the use of a *code strategy*. He repeated this three times. Then, he appears to have made an assumption which is based on the referent’s shape: ‘spiral or perhaps spring’, which indicates the use of a *holistic strategy*.

In addition to the categories in Kellerman’s model, the data analysis has also revealed another strategy type which is called monitoring strategy. Below are the details of this new strategy.

D- Monitoring Strategy

This type is related to the subjects’ monitoring of their language performance. When the subjects had knowledge gap or retrieval problems, they overcame the problem by monitoring their speech. Monitoring can be done externally and internally. The internal monitoring, thinking silently, is obviously inaccessible to us. The subjects did external monitoring by vocalising their assumptions. For example, saying the word aloud and saying ‘no’; repeating the lexical item and appealing for assistance by asking questions directly and/or by using rising intonation; or talking about the referent without settling on a particular way of expressing it (thinking aloud). These signs indicate monitoring strategy use.

This study hypothesises that monitoring strategy is a second-order strategy. That is, the subjects attempted to express themselves by using code or conceptual strategies when there was a lexical gap in their lexicon, during which they used monitoring strategy as illustrated in the figure below.

As seen in the figure, the subjects used monitoring strategy during their performance and applied correction when necessary, which appears to introduce a cyclical element into the performance.

Communication need⇒	Lexical Problem⇒	Code/Conceptual strategies⇔	⇔Monitoring⇔	Output
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Figure I

IV- DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

The analysis shows that the most proficient subject 'I' did not use any transfer strategies (see the appendix). This may indicate that more proficient NNS can have the tendency to use more conceptual strategies as they have relatively better linguistic sources, such as richer vocabulary to describe things instead of transferring from Turkish. This particular subject was able to explain functions of the parts of a car in a more interactive way. In Young's (1989) terms she had control over the interaction which seemed to help her interlocutor give up her compulsory leading role and feel equal. This leads to another question: to what extent the naturalness of interaction affects the subject's strategy choice? This point seems to be another topic for further research.

The relatively low total number of strategies that the two proficient subjects used can also indicate that more proficient NNS may not need to use as many strategies as the less proficient subjects. However, these findings seem to be insufficient to substantiate the second hypothesis which was about the possible relationship between the strategy type that the subjects choose to use and their proficiency level.

The analysis has also revealed that monitoring strategy seems to have an important role in the use of communication strategies. This aspect needs to be investigated in detail as it can support the research with valuable information about the cognitive processes in language production. It also seems to support the idea that NNS language performance varies as monitoring can re-adjust learners' assumptions about the rules of a particular language aspect.

Results have shown that task design has had an effect on the subjects' use of language. Firstly, the type of task might have led the subjects to use more code strategies as the vocabulary of parts of the car in Turkish happens to be borrowed mainly from French. As explained before, this appears to have encouraged the subjects to make incorrect assumptions. The results indicate that the effects of task design have obviously important implications in data collection. It may be due to the fact that the two subjects who adopted code strategies were the ones who were knowledgeable about technical issues. They might have been pre-occupied with providing their interlocutor with accurate information. Bygate (1998) points out that.

A pre-occupation with accuracy is likely to lead learners to select language that they are confident of. A focus on complexity would lead learners to explore new combinations of language features, with the risk of making mistakes (p.93).

They appeared not to want a shortage of vocabulary in English to prevent them from supplying the most accurate information possible. However, this appears to have led them to make incorrect assumptions about the English names of car parts.

In addition, this type of task design can cause variation in the learner's language (cf. Tarone 1987). As Young pointed out

...all the empirical work which has been carried out to date on interlanguage variation has shown it to be subject to influence of many different factors, including situational context, stage of interlanguage development, linguistic environment, and also possibly the learner's first language (p.86).

That there are so many factors which can cause variation in the learner's language makes studies investigating ESL production even more complicated. This also appears to be an important aspect for further research.

Although task design can have a significant effect on the learner's strategy choice, it can still be possible to conclude that Kellerman's model appears to be task, L1 and learner independent.

V- PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS:

Pedagogical implications of this study can be presented in three main groups, the first two of which are about raising learners' language awareness, and the last of which is related to testing.

Results appear to indicate that awareness of EFL learners needs to be raised about the use of communicative strategies. They can be trained how to use certain strategy types to assist themselves in interaction in order not to brake the flow of interaction.

In order to avoid negative transfer from Turkish, learners can be made aware about the amount of loan words which were borrowed from the French and the English language. In addition, they need to become aware that not all loan words were borrowed from the English language and cannot be used freely.

The last implication seems to be related to testing, and tasks which are used in testing. Since task design can cause variation in the learner's performance, designing tasks which would be used in testing should be done with care so that it should not lead learners to use a particular strategy type and/ or make similar types of mistakes.

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Appendix

QUANTITATIVE DATA

The number of strategies each subject used in the order as in the 5-level proficiency continuum (1 indicates the least proficient subject and 5 indicates the most proficient subject).

Number of strategy/ subject level	B/ level 1	E/ level 2	L/ level 3	N/ level 4	I/ level 5
Code	7	4	4	5	0
Conceptual	8	9	15	7	12
Multi	3	1	2	2	22
Monitoring	4	9	5	4	5
Total	22	23	26	18	19

Table I