

The Oral Communicative Strategies of University Engineering Students in the South-Western Nigeria

Abdullateef Solihu^{1*}, Abdul Azim Mohamad Isa², Maizura Mohd Noor³

^{1, 2 & 3} Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA

¹ abdullateefsalih@gmail.com

² abdul_azim7911@uitm.edu.my

³ maizu567@uitm.edu.my

**Corresponding author*

Article history:

Received: 20 June 2024

Accepted: 12 February 2025

Published: 1 April 2025

Abstract

This study was an attempt to explore the oral communicative strategies employed by a group of South-Western Nigerian undergraduate engineering students to navigate communication breakdowns during English interactions. A survey adapted from Alahmed (2017) was administered to a sample of 316 respondents across five public universities in South-Western Nigeria. Using The descriptive analysis reveal that the participants use a variety of oral communicative strategies (ranging from avoidance, paraphrase, conscious transfer, appeal for assistance and mime, stalling mechanisms, self-repair devices and meaning negotiation strategies). Mime and negotiation for meaning were frequently used, while word coinage was least employed. Further research is recommended to generalize findings to a broader Nigerian ESL learner population. This study aims to inform pedagogical practices for university-level engineering students, language education policymakers, and language instructors on integrating communication strategies to enhance communicative competence.

Keywords: *Oral Communicative Strategies; South-Western Nigerian university engineering students; higher education*

Introduction

A review of the literature reveals that L2 spoken discourse frequently incorporates various communicative strategies, including accuracy-oriented strategies, fluency strategies, meaning negotiation strategies, hesitation devices/pause fillers, message abandonment, language switching, and foreignizing. Speakers utilize these strategies to address challenges arising during conversational exchanges or message delivery (Abdullateef Solihu et al., 2023; Namaziadost & Imani, 2020; Suwartono & Kerti, 2020).

Importantly, communication strategy use is influenced by several factors, most notably gender (Harare, 2019; Janan, 2022), language proficiency (Asma & Avan, 2022; Mansyera & Zainil, 2019), and exposure (e.g., Abdullateef Solihu et al., 2023; Benali and Lopez, 2021).

Regarding frequency, some studies suggest no significant gender differences in communication strategy use (e.g., Fadil & Ratmanida, 2022; Noor Rachmawaty et al., 2021). However, more recent research indicates gendered preferences for specific strategies. For example, Harare (2019) found that females tend to employ socio-cognitive strategies more than males, while Janan (2022) observed male preference for code-

switching and female preference for replacement strategies. Mael and Kitano (2023) discuss communication strategies employed by Japanese language learners at the basic level, noting their resourcefulness in overcoming linguistic limitations, and researchers such as Tarone (1981), Faerch and Kasper (1983), and Dornyei (1995) provide a theoretical framework for understanding strategic competence in communication, mentioning factors such as limited linguistic resources and the role of these strategies in maintaining smooth conversation.

Research has consistently reported that ESL/EFL learners with high English proficiency tend to use more communication strategies than their lower-proficiency counterparts (e.g. Asma & Avan, 2022; Mansyera & Zainil, 2019). On top of that, there have been numerous studies demonstrating that systematic strategy instruction enhances L2 learners' strategic awareness, leading to an improvement in learners' communication strategy use and overall communicative competence (e.g. Abdullateef Solihu et al., 2023; Benali and Lopez, 2021; Pinphet & Wasanasomsithi, 2022).

Alsadat Mir and Shirkhani (2020) investigated the oral communication tactics utilized by a cohort of Iranian intermediate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, alongside the correlation between these tactics, learners' self-efficacy beliefs, and anxiety levels. Data, gathered from 160 EFL learners, were elicited using three questionnaires: Nakatani's (2005) Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI), Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), and a general self-efficacy questionnaire developed by Nezami et al. (1996). The study revealed that accuracy-focused strategies were predominantly employed by learners, while message abandonment was identified as the least frequently used speaking strategy.

Likewise, Kaothong and Kongsom (2021) explored the kinds of oral communication strategies adopted by Thai working engineers in coping with foreigners at the workplace, and the different strategies they frequently use in dealing with different workplace communicative events. Using the Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI) from Dörnyei and Scott's (1997) taxonomy of communication strategies, data were obtained from a group of 108 engineers working at manufacturing factories. In terms of the communication strategies used to cope with foreigners, the findings revealed that the participants employed all the strategies in the OCSI, with direct strategies emerging as the most frequently used category, followed by interactional and indirect strategies respectively. Specifically, the participants were found using self-repair and approximation the most. Nevertheless, as for the types of communication strategies used to deal with different workplace communicative events, the results showed that participants used all the oral communication strategies included in the OCSI, with self-repair being the most frequently used strategy and foreignising being the least frequently used one.

At this juncture, it is worth to note that the reports on accuracy-oriented strategies being the most frequently used of all communicative strategies (e.g. Alsadat Mir & Shirkhani, 2020; Kaothong & Kongsom,

2021) are an indication that the users involved tend to give priority to correctness in terms of structures, grammar and pronunciation over fluency in speaking. This learners' obviously held standpoint may have had its source from the traditional approach which is still in practice today in several language teaching and learning environments, despite recent research which emphasise the necessity of transitioning from such a pedagogy to communicative language approaches which centres on developing learners' communicative competence (Nggawu & Thao, 2023). Therefore, improving ESL learners' awareness towards using more fluency-oriented strategies is necessary as that will actually boost their speaking fluency and thereby enhance their speaking performance.

Belaman et al. (2022) undertook a study to find out the communication strategies used by Malay ESL learners in oral presentations and the factors leading to fear of oral presentation. Using an adapted questionnaire from Endler (1980) and Yaman and Kavasoglu (2013), the researchers elicited perceptions in regard to the two variables from a group of 210 students who were taken from a Malaysian public university. The findings show that in their effort to compensate for communication breakdown during oral presentations, the respondents largely employ message reduction, orientation and non-verbal strategies the most, while they moderately used fluency and accuracy-oriented strategies, and meaning negotiation strategies. Nevertheless, they used social affective strategies the least. With reference to the second variable, internal factors (such as fear of audience, presentation room setup, fear of obtaining low marks) and internal factors (like trait apprehension, insufficient preparation, lack of presentation skills, being forgetful of the correct vocabulary, large audience and feeling of inferiority) were found as leading to the respondents' fear of oral presentation.

Although they are not generalizable on the whole Malaysian ESL learners, the findings of this research imply that the participants are English users of low proficiency, given their conspicuous preference for message reduction and non-verbal strategies and their obvious limited capability to use social affective strategies which entail the use of the target language to compensate for communication breakdown.

In the same Malaysian context, Zamani et al. (2022) carried out a study to explore the oral communication strategies employed by a cohort of Malay students in classroom context. Using a questionnaire that is based on both interactional and psycholinguistic approaches to communication strategies, the researchers collected data from 56 respondents who were purposively chosen from engineering and business studies faculties at a Malaysian university. The findings showed that respondents used a variety of oral communication strategies to compensate for communication breakdown, but with more dependence on the interactional-based communication strategies (i.e. social-affective strategies and fluency-oriented strategies) than the psycholinguistic-based ones (i.e. negotiation for meaning strategies, accuracy-oriented strategies, and message reduction, orientation and non-verbal strategies).

This study delves into an important aspect of oral communication strategies, namely comparison between the respondents' use of interactional communication strategies and psycholinguistic ones. In actual

fact, not much research has been conducted in this regard. Nevertheless, the study fails to compare and contrast between the two categories of respondents used since they were not of the same educational background. Hence, there is a need to have new studies to further address this aspect.

Furthermore, Wan Hassan (2022) carried out their study to examine the use of fillers by Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) staff candidates during a recruitment process. This study obtained its data through an observation of a video recorded during a job interview of a group of 19 UiTM Malay staff candidates. Having used NVivo software (version 12) to analyse the elicited data, the researcher found that pause fillers were extensively used by the participants and are observed to be tremendously helpful to them in maintaining the available lexical items while endeavouring to achieve particular communicative goals.

Although this study was carefully conducted given its research design and the instrument used to analyse the obtained data, examining other communication strategies used by the respondents would have added more information about the use of communication strategies among Malays which could enlighten language educators on which communication strategies need to be taught to students. Therefore, for more impactful findings and implications, there is a need for more studies to centre upon a wide variety of communication strategies employed by Malay ESL learners.

Pratama and Zainil (2020) also carried out a study to examine the oral communication strategies used by a group of EFL learners at a faculty of education in an Indonesian university. Using a qualitative research design, the researchers obtained data through an observation of classroom discussions held by a group of 20 fourth year students from the faculty of education at an Indonesian university. The obtained data were then analysed according to the Kongsom's (2009) taxonomy of communication strategies. The findings revealed that the respondents used 13 kinds of communication strategies, 12 of which are included in the Kongsom's (2009) taxonomy, while the 13th strategy was identified as self-repetition. As earlier identified, self-repetition is all about the speaker repeating a word or strings of words which they have just uttered (Dornyei & Scott, 1997; Rababah, 2001). Out of the 13 communication strategies found, the most frequently used were pause fillers and hesitation devices, while the least frequently used were comprehension check, non-linguistic strategy and literal translation.

This study is in fact thorough in its method of addressing the issue in question. Its use of observation has actually led to more empirical findings. However, given the small number of respondents, new studies with larger samples of respondents are required to address the phenomenon with more thoroughness.

While L2 learners' awareness on communication strategies is an important factor which helps to effectively address the problems that usually leads to a communication breakdown, this research aims to explore the oral communication strategies that the South-western Nigerian university engineering students use in an effort to circumvent communication breakdowns amidst speech interactions and productions. It is designed to inform learners on the need to be aware of these strategies and their use in daily communications.

On top of that, it is hoped to inform language teachers of the need to realize the significance of promoting the teaching of strategic competence as part of the components that make up competence in communication.

Ever since the conduction of the recent quasi-experimental study to find out the impact of teaching oral communication strategies on South-Western Nigerian engineering students (Abdullateef Solihu, Normah & Abdul Azim, 2023), the authors, being driven by curiosity, have got the impetus to further explore the students' awareness of these communication strategies through a larger sample of respondents from the region so as to arrive at findings whose implications can be more generalizable on the entire population of engineering students in the region.

In addition to the Tarone's (1977) taxonomy of communication strategies adopted in the previous research, this study goes extra miles to adopt a collection of Tarone's (1977) traditional theory, Tarone's (1980) interactional theory and Dornyei's (1995) extended theory. This shall be further explained later in this paper.

Theoretical Framework

In a quest to find out and categorize the communicative strategies used by university engineering students in the South-Western Nigeria in their efforts to prevent communication breakdowns amidst speech interactions and productions, this study adopted a combination of Tarone's (1977) traditional theory, Tarone's (1980) interactional theory and Dornyei's (1995) extended theory.

To sum up, Table 1 presents the main items embodied in the present research's theoretical framework.

Table 1: Communication Strategies as Adapted from Tarone (1997 & 1980) and Dornyei's (1995)

No.	Communication Strategy	Description
1.	Topic Avoidance	The learner avoids talking about topics which they do not have enough vocabulary to express.
2.	Message Abandonment	The learner starts to address a topic but he/she suddenly abandons the speech due to lack of vocabulary to complete the message.
3.	Approximation	The learner uses lexical items known to be incorrect but closely related in meaning to the correct words (e.g. pipe for water pipe).
4.	Word Coinage	The learner invents new words while in an effort to communicate a given concept (e.g. air ball for balloon).

5.	Circumlocution	The learner gives a description of an object when he/she forgets or does not know the right word (e.g. She is, uh, smoking something. I don't know its name. That's, uh, Persian, and we use it in Turkey, a lot of).
6.	Literal Translation	The learner resorts to the literal translation of a concept from his/her first language to target language (e.g. "He invites him to drink, for they toast one another.")
7.	Language Switch	The learner turns to his/her first language to express a concept due to insufficient lexical items with which to express it in the target language (e.g. balon for balloon).
8.	Appeal for Assistance	The learner politely asks the audience for the correct term to be used (e.g. What is this? What is it called?)
9.	Mime	The learner uses a non-verbal language (such as body language and gestures) to express a meaning (e.g. clapping one's hand to express applause).
10.	Stalling Mechanisms	The learner employs certain devices (e.g. 'em', 'er') to fill a pause in speech while trying to gain time to think of the right lexical items to be used.
11.	Self-Repair Devices	The learner corrects the errors in speech which can adversely affect the message conveyed.
12.	Meaning Negotiation	The learner makes an effort (e.g. asking if they understand the message) to ensure a mutual understanding of the intended message between the interlocutors.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative method to identify and categorise the oral communication strategies which the targeted ESL learners employed in their endeavour to resolve communication breakdown issues amidst their communication interactions and productions. Therefore, the below sub-sections provide details about the participants of the study, the data collection instrument, the data collection process, and data analysis.

Participants

Undergraduate engineering students from four public universities in South-West Nigeria were selected as the participants of this study. Their age ranges from 18 to 26 years old. They are mainly indigenes of Yoruba, one of the three main Nigerian tribes whose mother tongue is Yoruba. Their experience as L2 English users began in upper primary school when English became the medium of instruction for all subjects, in addition to being a core language subject. Upon completing secondary education, these students took three categories of English-based assessments required for university admission.

Given the difficulties in accessing the entire student population due to time, budget, and resource limitations (Bartlett, Kotrlik, & Higgins, as cited by Memon et al., 2020; Bryman, 2016), a non-probability sampling approach was adopted, focusing on readily available participants. Specifically, convenience sampling was employed to gather data from 316 participants enrolled in engineering faculties at four public universities within the research area. Convenience sampling (also known as incidental or accidental sampling) involves selecting participants based on their ease of access and availability (Pandey & Pandey, 2015; Saunders et al., 2012).

Instrument

Pandey and Pandey (2015) define questionnaire as “a form prepared and distributed to secure responses to certain questions” (p. 58). Mohajan (2020) affirms that the use of questionnaires allows the researcher to easily gather a great deal of quantifiable data from respondents without much cost. A self-reporting communication strategies questionnaire designed by Alahmed (2017) communication strategies was adapted to gather information about the participants’ demography and information on their ways of circumventing communication breakdown amidst interactions and message productions. It is worth to note that the questionnaire was adapted to better suit the study’s oral communication strategies’ framework which comprises Tarone’s (1977) traditional theory, Tarone’s (1980) interactional theory and Dornyei’s (1995) communication strategies theory explained in the previous chapter.

Subsequently, the questionnaire underwent content validation by three experts: a psychometrician and two research experts specializing in the present research area. Following their assessment, minor modifications were incorporated into the final version. Internal consistency was then assessed through a pilot study with eight undergraduate engineering students at a public university in Lagos State, southwestern Nigeria. The resulting Cronbach's alpha of 0.764 indicates acceptable reliability. The questionnaire is included in the appendix.

Data Collection Procedure

Following satisfactory validation and reliability testing, the adapted questionnaire was administered online using Google Forms for ease of access and broad distribution. Dissemination through various social media platforms frequented by the target population maximized reach, exceeding what would have been feasible through manual distribution. Granello and Wheaton (2004) discuss the growing popularity and methodological considerations of online data collection. The advantages among others include lower cost, faster response, and design flexibility.

Data Analysis Procedure

The questionnaire responses, focusing on communication strategies employed by participants to circumvent communication breakdowns, were collected via Google Forms and subsequently analysed using SPSS (version 29). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated, and the data are presented in bar charts.

Findings and Discussions

Using descriptive analysis with graphical representations, this section presents the analysis of the data obtained from the participants. In other words, the following paragraphs are designed to provide details on the oral communication strategies that the participants reported themselves using in an effort to circumvent communication breakdowns amidst interactions and message productions. Using bar charts, the analyzed data are reported in the form of means and are further presented using bar charts. In order to have a more detailed analysis of the participants' use of the above communicative strategies, each strategy, with its constituents, is presented as follows.

Topic Avoidance

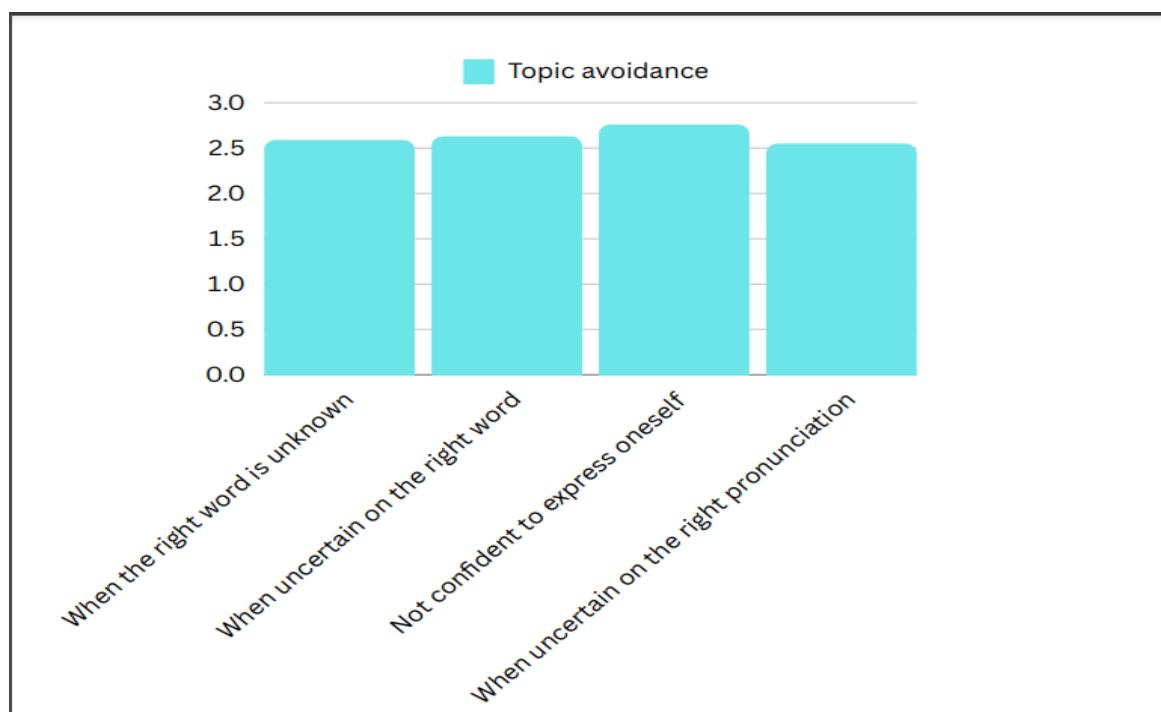


Chart 1: Participants' Use of Topic Avoidance

The participants self-rated their use of topic avoidance in four different situations as shown in Chart

1. To begin with, the participants reported their recourse to topic avoidance as a result of not knowing the

right English word (i.e. When I do not know the correct English words to use, I avoid talking about a particular topic or concept) at the mean score of $M=2.59$. Moreover, their use of topic avoidance due to uncertainty regarding whether the words they know are appropriate enough to communicate a particular concept/topic (i.e. When I am not sure of the right terminology to be used, I avoid talking about a particular topic or concept) reported at $M=2.63$. Similarly, resorting to topic avoidance due to anxiety/lack of confidence to express a given topic (i.e. When I am not confident enough to express it well, I avoid talking about a particular topic or concept) reported at $M=2.76$. Ultimately, the participants reported their employment of topic avoidance due to uncertainty regarding the accurate pronunciation of the terms involved in conveying a message (i.e. When I am not sure about the right pronunciation of the key terms involved, I avoid talking about a particular topic) at the means of $M=2.55$.

Conclusively, given its overall mean score, $M=2.63$, topic avoidance was showcased by participants as one of the communication strategies to which they sometimes have a recourse when they are faced with difficulty posed by linguistic resource deficit in the course of an attempt to communicate with others in English.

Message Abandonment

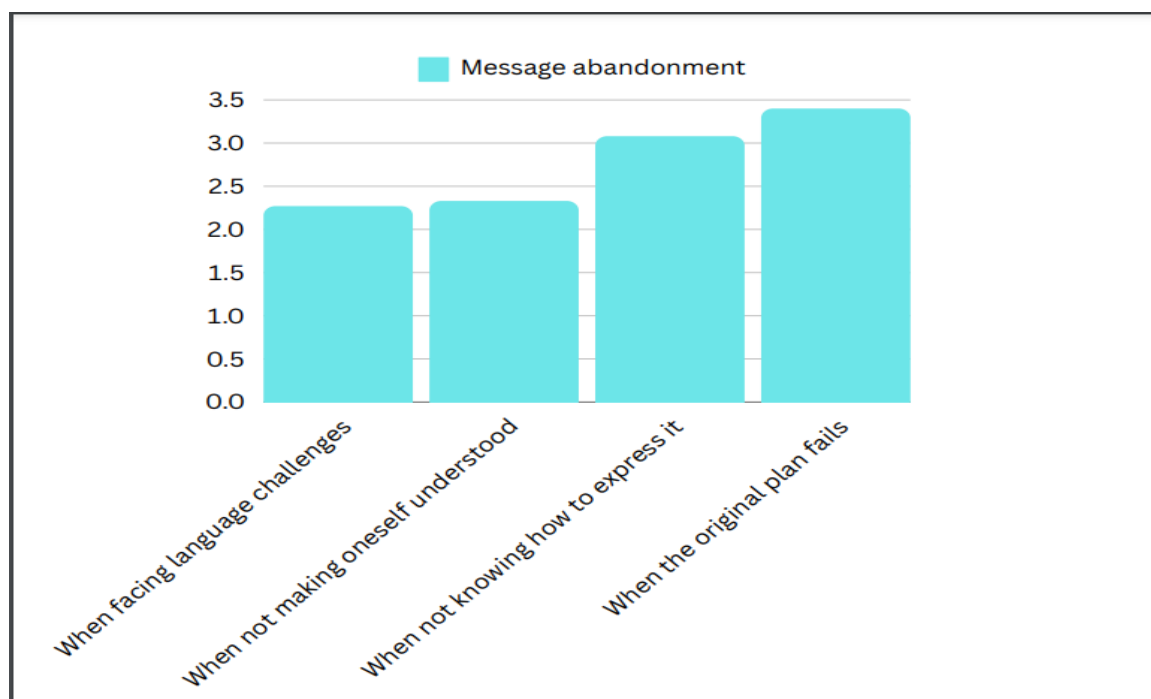


Chart 2: Participants' Use of Message Abandonment

Chart 2 presents the mean at which the participants use message abandonment amidst their interactions and message productions in English. Here, the participants showed four situations in which they resort

to message abandonment, and they rated the frequency at which they find themselves in each of the situations.

With the mean scores of $M=2.27$ and $M=2.33$ respectively, the participants reported themselves as ‘rarely’ using message abandonment once they begin to experience language challenges (i.e. I leave the intended message uncompleted once I start to encounter some language challenges) and when they feel that they cannot make themselves understood to the audience (i.e. I give up the intended message when I can’t make myself understood to the audience). However, their frequency of resorting to this strategy slightly increases to the mean scores of $M=3.08$ and $M=3.40$ respectively when they report themselves as ‘sometimes’ having a recourse to message abandonment due to not knowing how to express a particular concept/topic (i.e. When I don’t know how to express it, I abandon my original verbal plan and just say some words instead) and when the original plan for communicating an idea fails (i.e. I set up a new speech-plan when the original one fails).

In conclusion, considering its overall mean score, $M=2.77$, message abandonment represents an integral part of the participants’ strategic competence as they resort to it at intervals (i.e. sometimes) in an endeavor to circumvent communication difficulty that comes their way amidst message conveyance.

Approximation

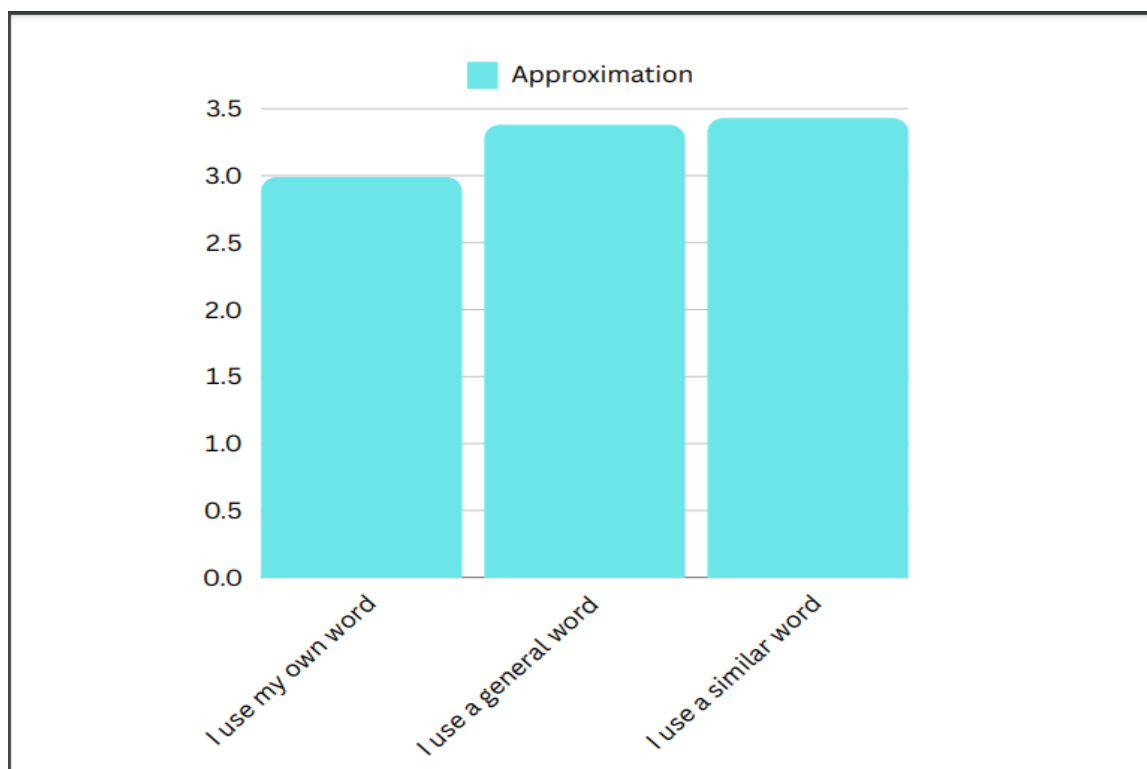


Chart 3: Participants’ Use of Approximation

Chart 3 above presents the participants' self-reported mean of their recourse to approximation with a view to tackling the imminent communication breakdown in the course of speaking interactions and productions. When they do not know or they are forgetful of the correct words to be used, the participants reported themselves as using the following sub-approximation strategies to handle the situation, namely coining their own words, using general words in place of specific ones, and using words similar in meaning to the coined terms.

Given the mean score of $M=2.99$, the participants reported themselves as 'sometimes' coining their own words (i.e. When I do not know the coined term to be used in a particular situation, I use my own word. For example, I use "manmade genius" instead of "artificial intelligence) when they are forgetful or lack the knowledge of the coined terms to be used in the course of communicating a concept or topic. Similarly, with the mean score of $M=3.38$, they reported that they 'sometimes' have a recourse to general words as an indication of the specific words they are forgetful of or they lack the knowledge of (i.e. I use a general word like "something", "stuff" to refer to an English word which I do not know). Likewise, with the mean score of $M=3.43$, they also reported that they 'sometimes' employ words with similar meaning to the most appropriate words (i.e. When I do not know the right English word, I use a word with a similar meaning. For example, I use "boat" instead of "ship").

To sum up, taking its overall mean score of $M=3.27$ into consideration, approximation emerge as an inseparable part of the participants' strategic competence as they 'sometimes' find it useful in resolving the communication crisis arising from forgetfulness or lack of knowledge of the right terminology with which to communicate a concept or topic.

Word Coinage

The mean of participants' recourse to word coinage amidst communication interactions and productions is presented in chart 4. When faced with a difficulty which requires a recourse to word coinage, there are three sub-word coinage strategies which the participants reported themselves using, namely inventing non-existing English words, foreignizing Yoruba words, forming new words based on an existing rule.

Given the mean score of $M=2.68$, the participants reported themselves as 'sometimes' inventing non-existing English words to solve crisis which could lead to an eventual communication breakdown (i.e. If I do not know the right English word, I invent a non-existing English word to communicate my idea. For example, "Airball" for "Balloon"). However, with the mean score of $M=2.59$, they reported themselves as 'rarely' using Yoruba words pronounced in an English accent (i.e. I use a Yoruba word pronounced in an English accent when I have difficulty using the right English word) to handle the challenge of an impending communication breakdown. Similarly, at the mean score of $M=2.37$, the participants self-rated themselves as

‘rarely’ resorting to formation of words according to a supposed rule (i.e. I make up a non-existing English word on the basis of a supposed rule (e.g. *vegetarianism* for *vegetarian*).

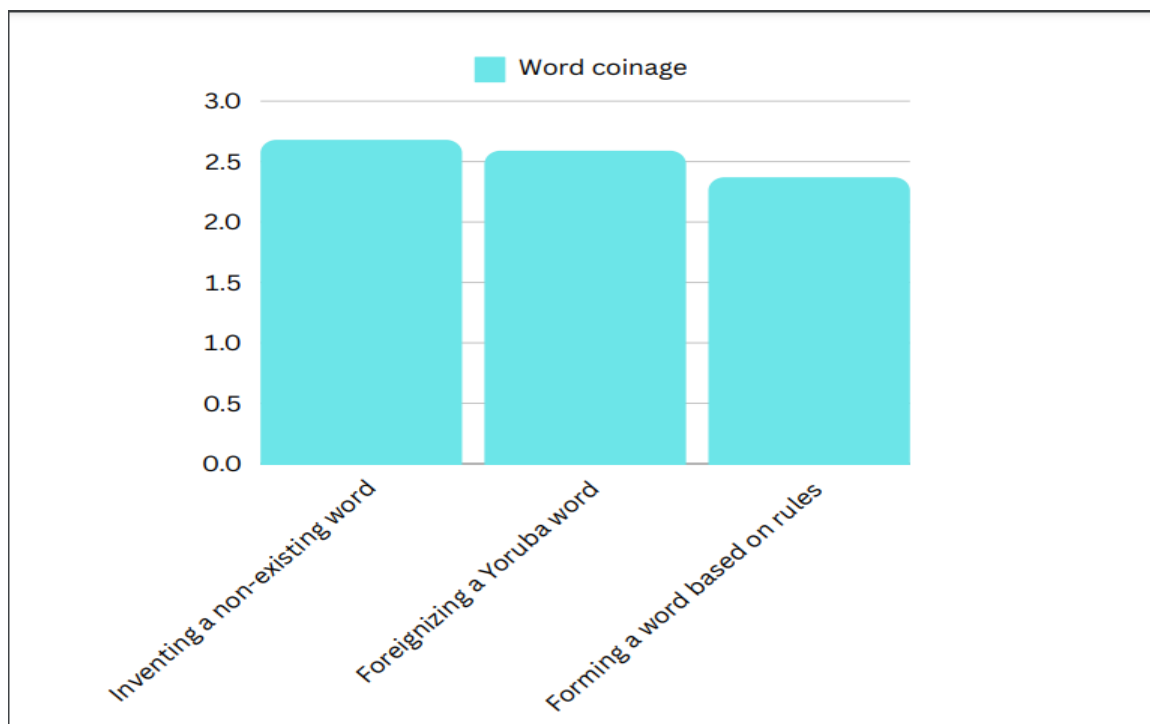


Chart 4: Participants’ Use of Word Coinage

To conclude, given its overall mean score which is $M=2.54$, word coinage is considered among the communicative strategies employed by participants although it is used in rare cases of their attempts to circumvent an impending communication breakdown.

Circumlocution

Chart 5 presents the participants’ self-reported use of circumlocution when it becomes necessary to use multiple words to express a meaning due to unavailability of the direct vocabulary to address it. The participants reported their use of circumlocution in three ways, namely making illustrations, giving descriptions, and making a sound imitation of the item in question.

Given the mean score $M=3.53$, the participants recorded themselves as ‘often’ using illustrations when they do not know how to express a concept (i.e. When I do not know how to present my idea in English, I give examples to explain it). Similarly, at the frequency mean score $M=3.69$, the participants reported that they ‘often’ give a description of the item in question when they fail to recall the term to indicate it (i.e. When I do not know how to say the English word to be used, I describe what the object looks like or what it is used for). The third component which is the use of a sound to imitate the object in question (i.e. I make a

sound imitation of something if I do not know the right word for it in English) was self-rated as slightly minimal as the participants affirmed that they ‘sometimes’ ($M=2.86$) have a recourse to it.

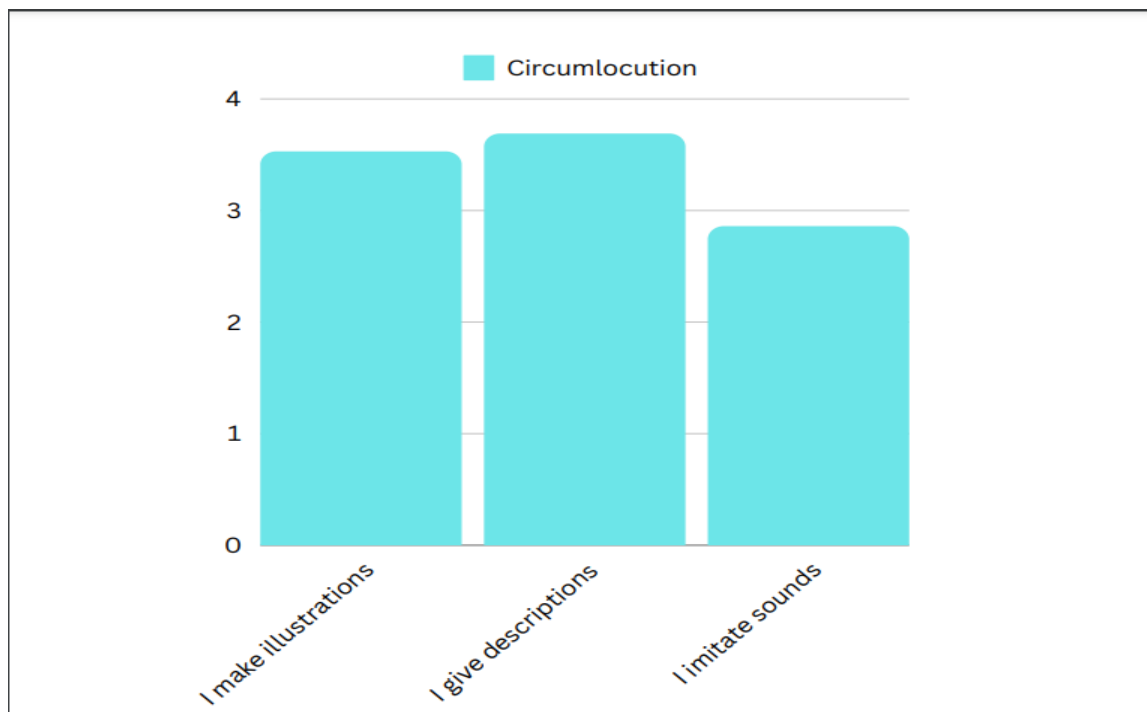


Chart 5: Participants' Use of Circumlocution

By and large, with the overall mean score of $M=3.36$, circumlocution represents an important part of participants' oral communication strategies as the participants ‘sometimes’ resort to it when faced with difficulty in the course of conveying their ideas.

Speech Act Literal Translation

Chart 6 presents the participants' mean of employing literal translation as a strategy with which to handle the language difficulty which may result in communication breakdown in the course of disseminating a particular message. When it becomes necessary to have a recourse to literal translation, the participants alternate between the following three means: thinking in Yoruba before constructing English sentences, using Yoruba words but with imitation of English pronunciation, literally translating Yoruba idioms to English.

As for the first of the three components, the participants reported themselves as ‘sometimes’ (i.e. $M=2.92$) processing a message in Yoruba, and later disseminate it literally in English to their audience (i.e. I think in Yoruba about what I want to say and then construct an English sentence based on that). Similarly, given the mean score $M=2.63$, the participants reported themselves as ‘sometimes’ pronouncing Yoruba words in English accent to replace the right English words they are forgetful of amidst communications (i.e. I use Yoruba word(s) with an English pronunciation when I have difficulty in communicating my ideas). They also

reported that they ‘sometimes’ (given the mean score $M=2.63$) recourse to literal translation of Yoruba idioms to express their ideas in English (i.e. I translate Yoruba idioms and/or proverbs words for words into English in the course of my conversations).

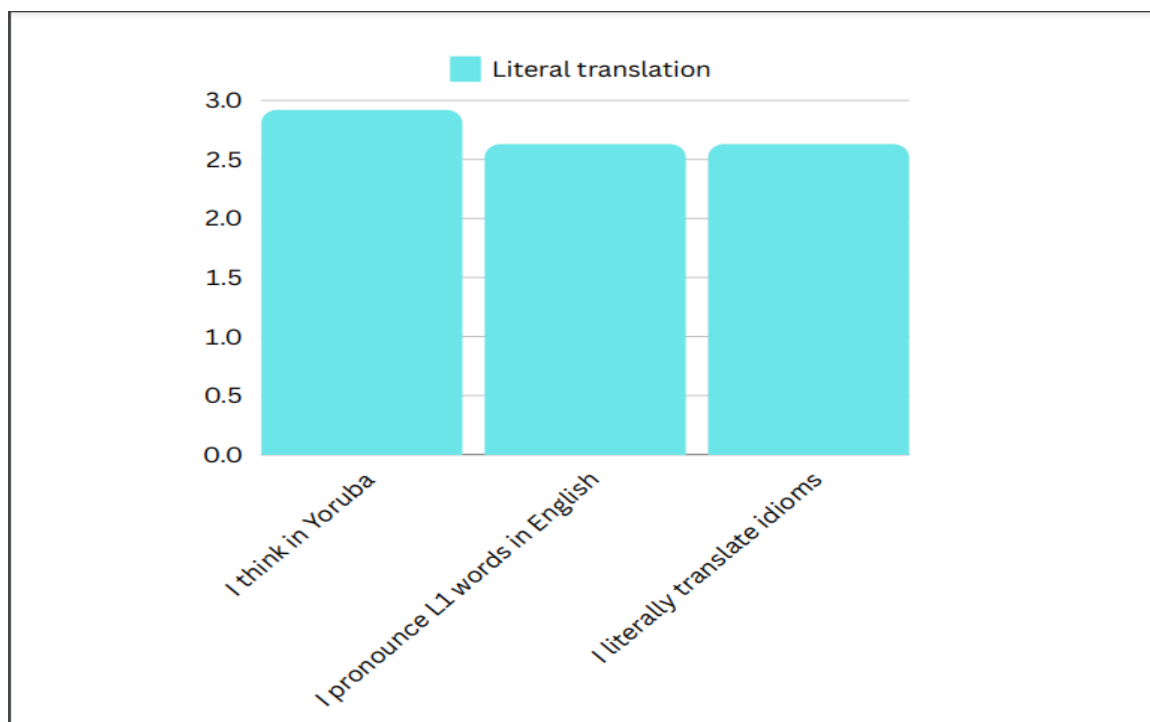


Chart 6: Participants' Use of Literal Translation

By and large, considering the overall means scores, $M=2.72$, which is recorded for the three components presented above, literal translation is said to be one of the key communication strategies used by the participants since they ‘sometimes’ resort to it in an effort to overcome difficulties encountered while attempting to communicate their ideas in English.

Language Switch

Chart 7 presents the participants' use of language switch as one of the communication strategies employed to tackle part of the arising challenges they face amidst message conveyance in English. These participants reported five reasons for having a recourse to a switch from English to Yoruba amidst their communication and the frequency at which each of them is used. The first reason being lack of remembrance of the right English word to indicate the item in question (i.e. If I cannot remember the right English word to communicate a concept, I use an equivalent Yoruba word, and then continue my speech in English) was reported as used ‘sometimes’, given the mean score, $M=2.78$. Following that is the speaker's cognizance of the audience's lack of understanding of the intended message (i.e. When my audience cannot seem to understand my

message, I quickly switch to Yoruba to make them understand) which the participants reported that they ‘sometimes’ use, given the recorded mean score, $M=2.97$. Likewise, with the mean score, $M=2.88$, participants reported that they ‘sometimes’ resort to language switch when they feel that they are not confident enough to convey an idea in English (i.e. I switch to Yoruba amidst my speech when I feel that I am not confident enough to communicate an idea in English). Moreover, according to their report, the participants ‘sometimes’ use language switch (given the mean score, $M=2.84$) when they find it necessary to make emphasis on an important point during a conversation (i.e. I switch to Yoruba when I feel the need to emphasize on a particular point I make in a dialogue (For example, using Yoruba ‘*discourse markers*’ such as ‘*Abi?*’ (i.e. isn’t it?), ‘*Ani*’ (i.e. I insist)). Lastly, given the mean score $M=3.10$, the participants reported themselves as ‘sometimes’ having a recourse to language switch when they find a need to strengthen a rapport with their audience (i.e. I switch to Yoruba when I feel the need to maintain rapport and interpersonal relationships with my interlocutor/audience).

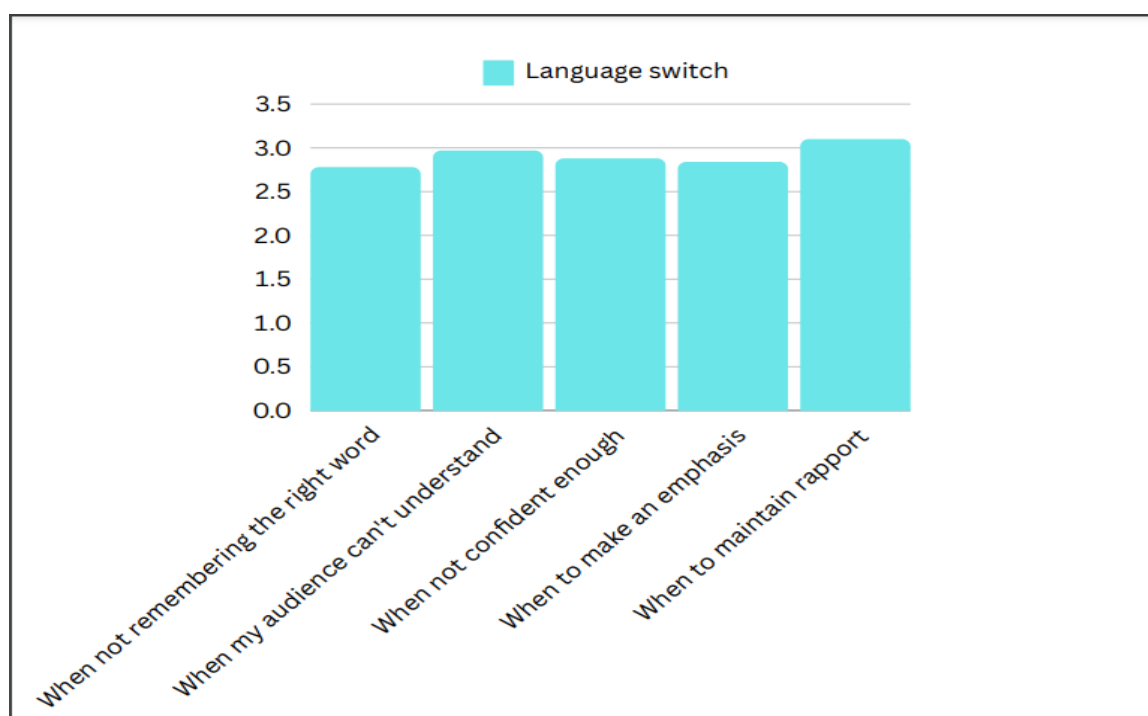


Chart 7: Participants' Use of Language Switch

Conclusively, given the overall mean scores of its whole components ($M=2.92$), the participants are said to sometimes use language switch as one of the communication strategies with which they resolve the imminent communication breakdown.

Appeal for Assistance

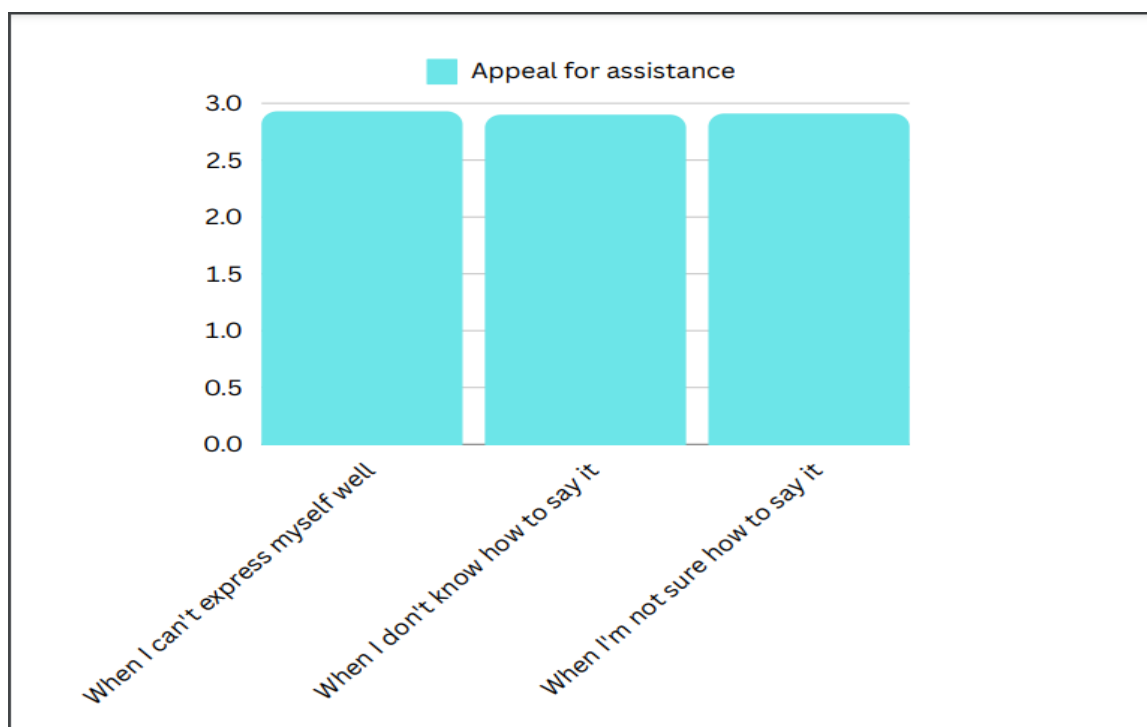


Chart 8: Participants' Use of Appeal for Assistance

Chart 8 highlights the participants' self-reported use of appeal for assistance as one of the communication strategies they employ in an effort to tackle the arising problems amid communication which result from insufficiency of lexical items with which to express their ideas. As shown in chart 9, participants reported their recourse to appeal for assistance amidst communication when they fall in any of the following three situations, namely when they are unable to express their ideas well, when they do not know how to say a word, and when they are unsure of the right way to say a word.

To be specific, given the mean score $M=2.93$, the participants reported themselves as 'sometimes' using appeal for assistance when they find it hard to communicate their ideas well (i.e. I ask a person I am speaking with for help when I cannot communicate my idea well). Likewise, given the mean score $M=2.90$, they reported themselves as 'sometimes' resorting to appeal for assistance when they do not know how to say a word in English (i.e. If I do not know how to say a word in English, I directly ask for help, for example, "How do you say in English?", "What do you call....in English?"). Also, with the mean score $M=2.91$, they self-rated their use of appeal for assistance when they are uncertain of the correct pronunciation of a particular English word (i.e. If I am not sure how to say a word in English, I indirectly ask for help, for example, "I am not sure how to say it in English").

Overall, considering the overall mean score $M=2.9$ (i.e. indicating that it is sometimes used), appeal for assistance is regarded as an important oral communication strategy with which communication difficulties posed by insufficient lexical items to communicate one's ideas is properly dealt with.

Mime

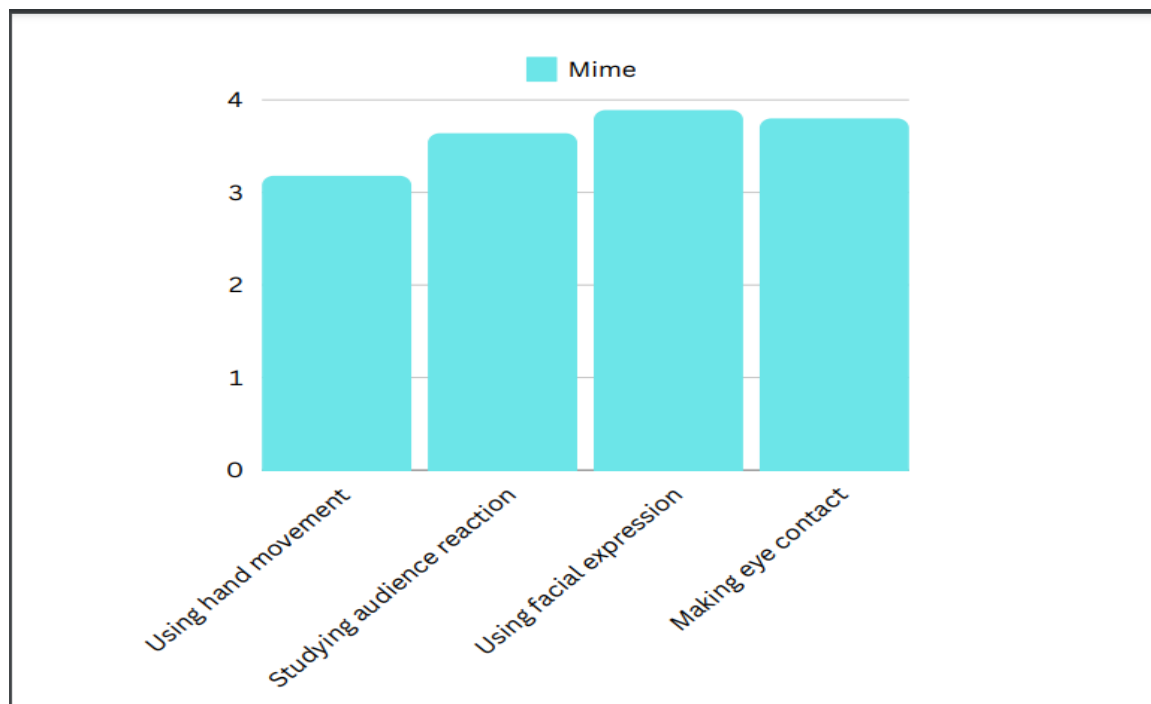


Chart 9: Participants' Use of Mime

Chart 9 above is a presentation of participants' use of mime as one of the strategies to circumvent communication breakdown which usually occurs due to insufficiency of lexical items with which to express themselves. The participants self-rated their recourse to this strategy through the following four means, namely using hand movement, studying audience reaction, using facial expression, and making eye contact. Specifically, with a frequency whose mean score is $M=3.18$, participants reported themselves as 'sometimes' using hand movements to demonstrate a particular meaning they intend to convey (i.e. When I communicate, I use hand movements if I have difficulty conveying an idea). Nevertheless, given the frequency with the mean score of $M=3.64$, they reported that they 'often' pay attention to the audience's reaction to their message (i.e. I pay attention to the listener's reaction to my speech to know if she/he understands me). Similarly, the participants show that they 'often' ($M=3.89$) resort to the use of facial expression in an attempt to convey a meaning their level of proficiency cannot express (i.e. I use my facial expressions (smile, laugh, eyebrows) to communicate what I want to say). Lastly, the participants reported themselves as 'often'

(M=3.80) making use of eye contact to make their message well understood to their audience (i.e. I make eye contact with the listener to communicate what I want to say).

Conclusively, given its overall mean score, M=3.63, which signifies that they ‘sometimes’ resort to its use amidst communication challenges leading to an impending communication breakdown, the above report shows mime as a key communication strategy with which the participants handle the problem of insufficient lexical items they face while in an endeavor to convey a message.

Stalling or Time Gaining Strategy

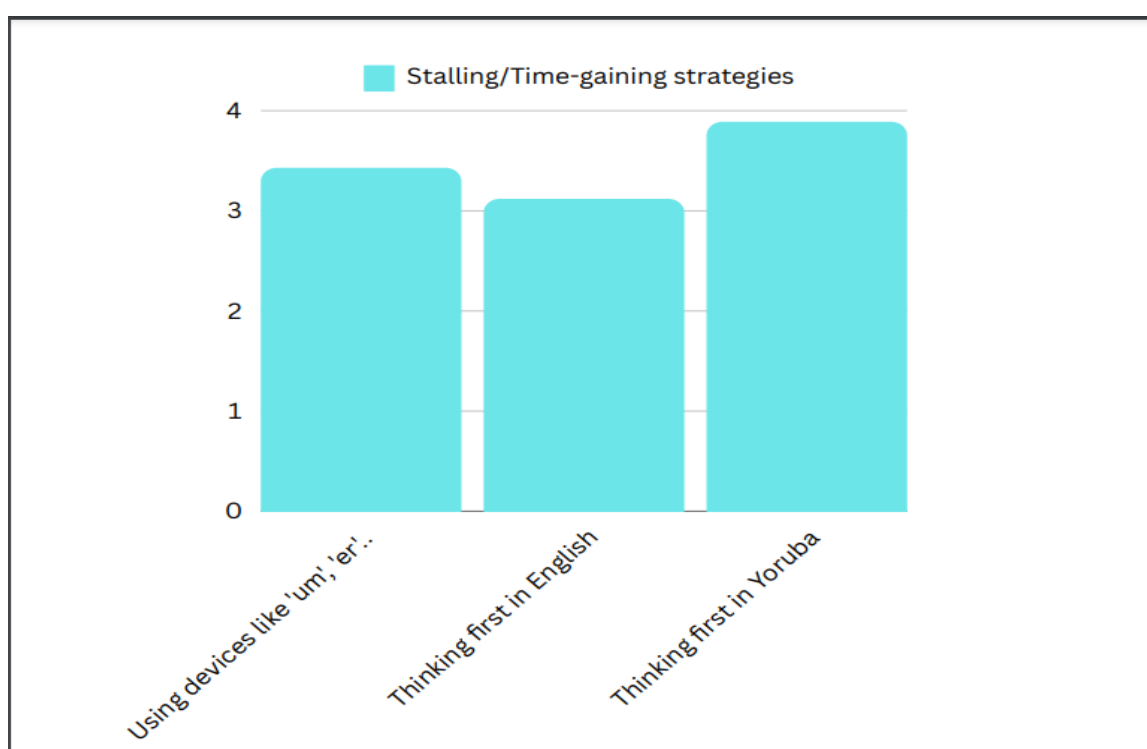


Chart 10: Participants' Use of Stalling and Time-Gaining Strategy

Chart 10 above presents the participants' use of stalling and time gaining strategy to prevent imminent communication breakdown in their daily English communicative interactions and productions. According to the chart, the participants highlighted three ways by which this strategy is employed, namely using devices like ‘em’, ‘er’, thinking first in English, and thinking first in Yoruba.

Given the mean score of M=3.43, the participants reported themselves as ‘often’ using stalling devices such as ‘em’, ‘er’ and so on (i.e. I try to use devices such as “em” to fill the pause in my speech while I am still thinking of the right word to use) to fill in the intermittent pauses (amidst message dissemination) which can lead to communication breakdown. However, with the mean score of M=3.12, the participants reported that they ‘sometimes’ expend the pause time amidst communication using English to think of the

next to say (i.e. I think first of a sentence I already know in English and then try to change it to fit the situation). Likewise, given the mean score of $M=2.89$, they also ‘sometimes’ spend their pause time using Yoruba to think of what next to say (i.e. I think first of what I want to say in my native language and then construct the English sentence).

In conclusion, considering the overall mean score of the three components reported above ($M=3.15$), it is palpable that stalling or time gaining strategy is one of the communication strategies that the participants sometimes employ in an effort to ensure smooth processing of information while conveying a message.

Negotiation for Meaning

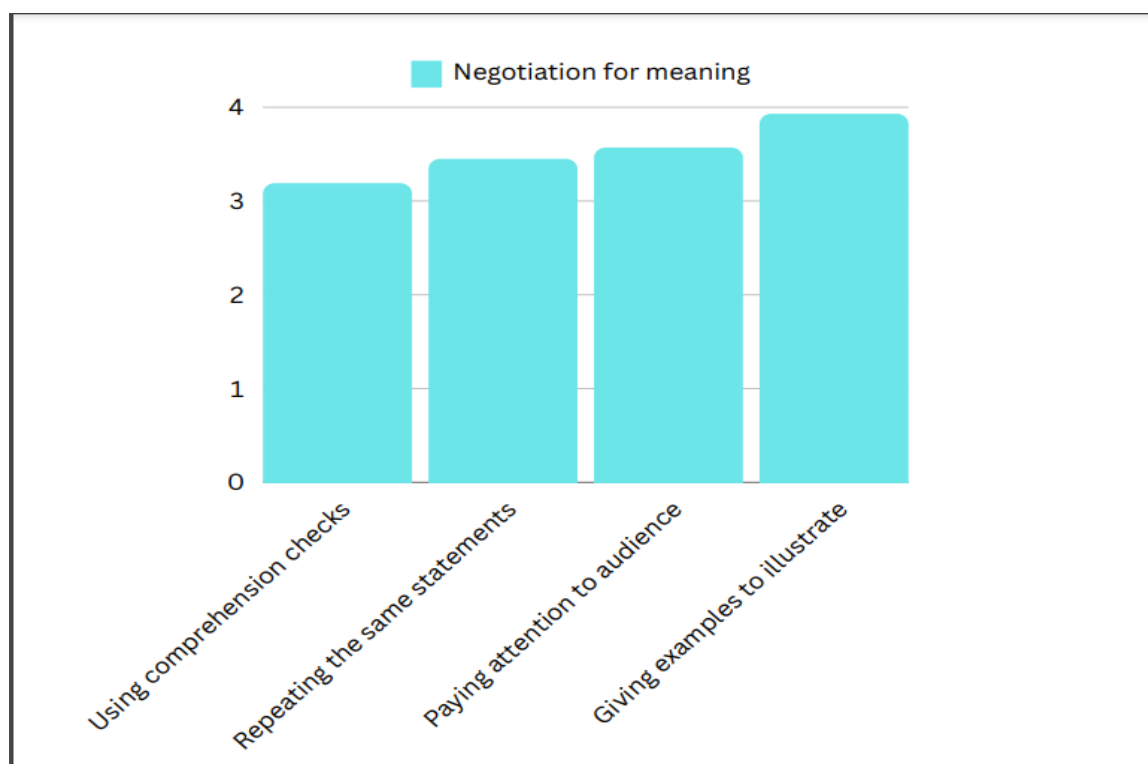


Chart 11: Participants' Use of Negotiation for Meaning

Chart 11 highlights the participants' employment of meaning negotiation strategies to improve the quality of their communication. Participants show the frequency at which they employ negotiation of meaning strategy via the above four means, namely using comprehension checks (like ‘You know’, ‘Alright?’, ‘Okay?’ and so forth), repeating the same statements till the listener understands, paying attention to the listener's reaction to the speech, and giving examples to illustrate the concept being addressed.

Given the mean score, $M=3.19$, participants reported themselves as ‘sometimes’ using comprehension checks to improve the quality of their communication. The rest three means of negotiation for meanings

(i.e. repeating the same statements, paying attention to audience, and giving examples to illustrate) with their mean scores being $M=3.54$, $M=3.57$, and $M=3.93$ respectively are, however, shown to be ‘often’ employed by participants amidst their communication interactions and productions.

Overall, negotiation of meanings represents an important part of the participants’ strategic competence as they generally ‘sometimes’ have a recourse to it in an effort to ensure that their intended message is effectively conveyed.

Participants’ Oral Communicative Strategies

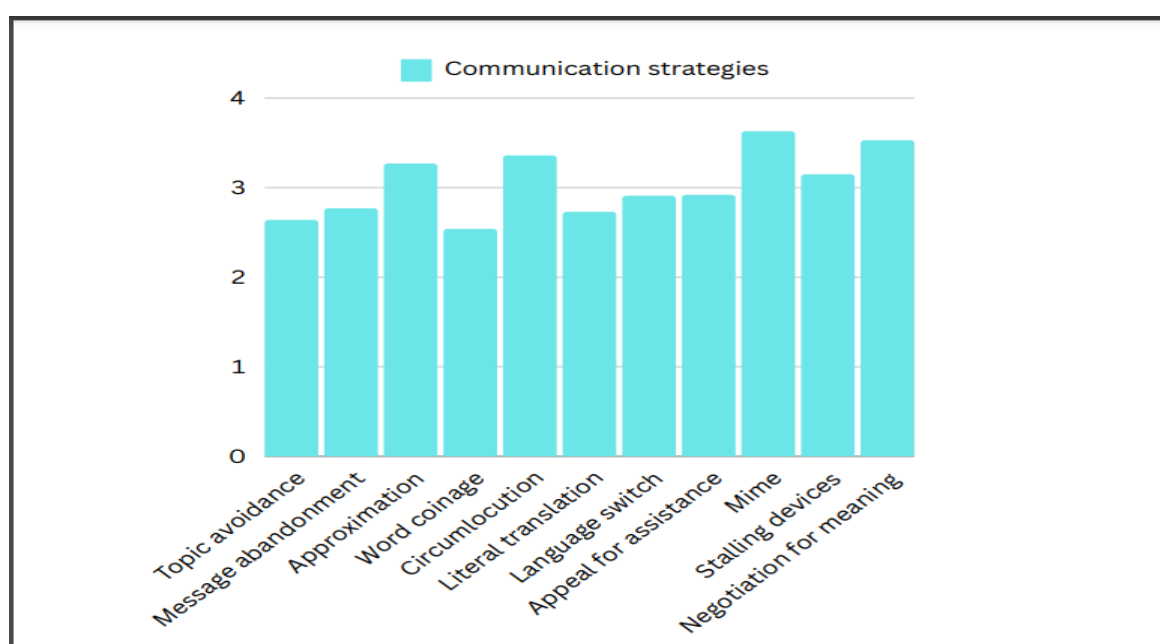


Chart 12: Participants’ Mean Use of Communicative Strategies

Chart 12 above presents a descriptive analysis of the participants’ self-reported communicative strategies via the administered questionnaire. Overall, all the 11 oral communicative strategies adopted by the study are reportedly used by the participants, although the frequency at which they use them varies from ‘rarely’ to ‘sometimes’ and to ‘often’, while none of them is ‘always’ used. To be specific, mime ($M=3.63$) and negotiation for meanings ($M=3.53$) which are reportedly ‘often’ used emerge as the most frequently used communicative strategies by the participants. Following this category are circumlocution ($M=3.36$), approximation ($M=3.27$), stalling and time gaining strategies ($M=3.15$), appeal for assistance ($M=2.92$), language switch ($M=2.91$), message abandonment ($M=2.77$), literal translation ($M=2.73$) and topic avoidance ($M=2.64$) which the participants reported they ‘sometimes’ use. However, word coinage ($M=2.54$) which represents the least frequently used communicative strategy is reported as ‘rarely’ used by the participants.

As can be rightly conceptualized from the previous paragraphs, the participants reported themselves as sometimes using most of the above communication strategies in handling the impending communication breakdowns amidst speech delivery and interactions. To begin with, the fact that the participants use a range of communication strategies is held as an index that South-Western Nigerian university engineering students are a population of ESL learners who are capable of expressing their ideas eloquently with the aid of different communicative strategies used to tackle the imminent communication breakdowns in the course of conversations and message disseminations. This agrees with a number of previous studies such as Abdullateef Solihu et al. (2023), Namaziadost and Imani (2020), and Suwartono and Kerti (2020) who found that ESL/EFL spoken discourse contains a variety of communicative strategies with which the problems that arise amidst communication attempts are addressed.

What is more, the conspicuous precedence given to mime, negotiation for meaning, approximation, circumlocution and stalling devices among other strategies is symptomatic of their preference for achievement strategies over reduction strategies in handling the arising problems amidst communication endeavors. By implication, these participants tend to prioritize fluency over accuracy as they appear courageous enough to take risks in an effort to articulate themselves. This finding corresponds with that of Lewis (2011) when he found that L2 users who give preference to fluency over accuracy in communication usually prefer to take risks in their attempts to convey messages, thereby tending to use more of achievement strategies, while their counterparts, who tend to dodge challenges in an effort to communicate a meaning, often use reduction strategies.

This obvious positive attitude towards communication strategies needs to be reinforced in students as it is envisaged to help them pave ways out of communication problems arising from linguistic resource deficit, thereby improving their communicative competence.

Conclusion

The participants' acknowledgment and self-reported frequency of using oral communication strategies strongly suggests that L2 users proactively, whether consciously or unconsciously, take steps to prevent communication breakdowns caused by limited language resources. While ongoing and rigorous training in communicative language use remains crucial for mastery, the value of reinforcing these strategies should not be overlooked. These strategies offer essential tools for overcoming communicative challenges, especially as learners work towards proficiency.

Although more work is needed to ensure that university English courses are tailored to the current and future communication needs of Nigerian engineering students, this study highlights for university language instructors the importance of teaching engineering students a wider array of oral communication strategies and how to use them effectively.

Author contributions

All authors contributed immensely to this article. Author 1 designed the research, collected and analysed the data, and wrote the draft. Authors 2 and 3 supervised the work by reviewing the manuscript and approving the final version of the paper.

Funding

The author(s) did not receive any financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Acknowledgement

My sincere gratitude goes to my supervisors for their immense contributions to this research, which were invaluable. Their reviews and comments provided valuable insights and guidance, leading to significant improvements in this article. I would also like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the Academy of Language Studies, UiTM, for providing the necessary resources and a conducive environment for conducting this research. Lastly, we extend our thanks to our families and friends for their encouragement and support throughout this study.

References

- Abdullateef Solihu, Normah Abdullah, Abdul Azim, M.I. (2023). Impact of teaching oral communication strategies to engineering students at a South-Western Nigerian university. *International Journal of Language Education and Applied Linguistics*, 13(2), 28-39.
<https://doi.org/10.15282/ijleal.v13i2.8896>
- Alahmed, K. I. (2017). *Developing Strategic Competence through Task-Based Language Teaching: A Comparison of Implicit and Explicit Instruction*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of York. UK. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358148713>

- Alsadat Mir, E.M.M. & Shirkhani, S. (2020). Oral communication strategies used by Iranian EFL learners and their relationship with the learners' self-efficacy beliefs and anxiety level. *Research in English Language Pedagogy*, 8(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.30486/RELP.2019.669075>
- Asma, A.K. & Avan, F.J. (2022). The effect of English proficiency on the use of communication strategies. Researchgate, 1-32, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360184986>
- Bartlett, J. E, Kotrlik, J. W. & Higgins, C. C. (2001). Organizational research: determining appropriate sample size in survey research, *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*, 19(1), 43-50. <https://www.opalco.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Reading-Sample-Size1.pdf>
- Belaman, J. A. X., Zakaria, S. F. B., Nasharudin, S. N. S., Ibrahim, I. W., Abdullah, S. A. S., & Rahmat, N. H. (2022). Balancing the Use of Oral Communication Strategies and Fear for Oral Presentation: The Case for Language Learning. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*. 12(6), 849 – 868. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i6/13207>
- Benali, H. T. & Lopez, S. P. (2021). A training to enhance oral communication strategies for Spanish learners of English. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 10(3), 75-84. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.10n.3p.75>
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. Oxford university press.
- Dornyei, Z. (1995). On the Teachability of Communication Strategies. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29, 55–85. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587805>
- Dornyei, Z. & Scott, M. L. (1997). Communication strategies in a second language: definitions and taxonomies. *Language Learning*, 47, 173–210. <http://doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.51997005>
- Endler, N.S. (1980). Person-situation interaction and anxiety. In I. L. Kutash (Ed.), *Handbook on stress and anxiety*. Jossey-Bass, 249-266.
- Faerch, C., & Kasper, G. (1983). Plans and Strategies in Foreign Language Communication. In Faerch & Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in Interlanguage Communication* (pp. 20-60). Longman.
- Harare, S. (2019). A comparison between male and female in their willingness to communicate and use of socio-cognitive strategies. *Philosophy Study*, 9(7), 408-413. <https://doi.org/10.17265/2159-5313/2019.07.004>
- Horwitz, E., Horwitz, M., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70, 125-132. <https://doi.org/10.2307/327317>
- Janan, Q. (2022). *A study on communication strategies used by students at SMA Muhammadiyah program Khusus Kartasura*. Unpublished Master's dissertation, Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.
- Kaothong, T. & Kongsom, T. (2021). The use of English oral communication strategies of Thai engineers in a manufacturing industry. *Asian Journal of Behavioural Sciences*, 3(4), 64-78. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342509675>

- Kongsom, T. (2009). *The Effects of Teaching Communication Strategies to Thai Learners of English*. Ph.D Thesis. University of Southampton.
- Lewis, L. K. (2011). *Organizational Change: Creating change through strategic communication*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mael, M. R., & Kitano, H. (2023). Use of daily communication strategies for basic-level Japanese learners. *Paramasastra: Jurnal Ilmiah Bahasa Sastra dan Pembelajarannya*, 10(2), 162–174. <https://doi.org/10.26740/paramasastra.v10n2.p162-174>
- Mansyera, V.P. & Zainil, Y. (2019). EFL learners' communication strategy on speaking performance of interpersonal conversation in classroom discussion presentation. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 411, 29-36. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200306.006>
- Memon, M. A., Ting, H., Cheah, J. H., Thurasamy, R., Chuah, F., & Cham, T. H. (2020). Sample size for survey research: review and recommendations. *Journal of Applied Structural Equation Modeling*, 4(2), 1-20. [https://doi.org/10.47263/JASEM.4\(2\)01](https://doi.org/10.47263/JASEM.4(2)01)
- Mohajan, H. K. (2020). Quantitative research: a successful investigation in natural and social sciences. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, 9(4), 50-79. <https://doi.org/10.26458/jedep.v9i4.679>
- Nakatani, Y. (2005). The effects of awareness-raising training on oral communication strategy use. *Modern Language Journal*, 89, 76–91. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0026-7902.2005.00266.x>
- Noor Rachmawaty, Aridah, Weningtyas, P.S. & Syamdianita (2021). Oral Communication Strategies Training: The Case of PreService English Teachers in Indonesia. *Journal of Linguistic and English Teaching*, 6(2), 169-189. <https://doi.org/10.24903/sj.v6i2.799>
- Pandey, P. & Pandey, M. M. (2015). *Research methodology tools and techniques*. Bridge Center.
- Pratama, V. M. & Zainil, Y. (2020). EFL learners' communication strategy on speaking performance of interpersonal conversation in classroom discussion presentation. In *7th International Conference on English Language and Teaching (ICOELT 2019)* (29-36), Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200306.006>
- Rababah, G. A. (2001). *An Investigation into the Strategic Competence of Arab Learners of English at Jordanian Universitites*. Ph.D Thesis, Universty of New Castle. <https://doi.org/10.20448/804.2.2.153.158>
- Tarone, E. (1977). Conscious communication strategies in interlanguage: a progress report. *TESOL*, 77, 194-203.
- Tarone, E. (1980). Communication strategies, foreign talk, and repair in interlanguage. *Language learning*, 30(2), 417-428. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1980.tb00326.x>

- Tarone, E. (1981). Some thoughts on the notion of communication strategy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 15(3), 285–295. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3586754>
- Wan Hassan, W. N. F. (2022). *Interviewers' perspectives on the use of communication strategies by English second language speakers during job interview sessions*, Doctoral dissertation, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM).
- Yaman, S., & Kavasoglu, M. (2013). The adaptation study of oral communication strategy inventory into Turkish. *International Journal of Human Sciences*, 10(2), 400-419. <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:141662301>
- Zamani, N. F. M., Rahmat, N. H., Sim, M. S., Bithiah, S. B. V., Hanafi, M., Ghani, M. & Azram, A. A. R. (2022). Exploring the use of communication strategies in oral communication. *European Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 6(2), 61-75. <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejfl.v6i2.4320>