

# **Fillers, Mime and Self-Repetitions as Most Frequently Used Communication Strategies in Oral Expositions**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Achieving competence in an oral communication situation has always been the ultimate goal of both teacher and students in an ESL classroom. Long years of schooling and prolonged exposure to speech communication had empowered students' speaking ability, but anxieties still emerge in their oral expositions. This exploratory study investigated the communication strategies of students in overcoming communication anxieties in their oral expositions. It also delved into the factors affecting their communication anxieties. Using Laurilla's (2003)

Categories of Communication Strategies, data were obtained from the 25 third year BS Tourism Management students of the Mariano Marcos State University, Philippines chosen through systematic random sampling. Transcriptions of their videotaped oral expositions were analyzed in terms of the frequency of occurrence of specific communication strategies. Interview was also utilized to support gathered quantitative data. Results revealed that the most common strategies of students in managing their communication anxieties during their oral expositions included fillers, mime, self-repetition, self-repair, and mumbling. It also disclosed that attitude toward language learning, motivation in learning the language, and socio-economic status are the factors that would affect communication anxieties.

**Keywords** - Linguistics, communication strategies, descriptive design, Batac City, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

When students are asked to expound a theme for at least two to three minutes in an oral exposition, they find difficulties in expressing their views. However, when they are requested to write an essay for about 150-300 words in length, they could effortlessly come up with one that is longer. In speaking, students tend to feel anxious to express their insights eloquently on an assigned topic; whereas, in writing, they can express their viewpoints spontaneously. Given this scenario, students may pose a problem in speaking activities since there are some courses that require speaking as a form of assessment. For example, in Mariano Marcos State University, the terminal activities or requirements for Tourism Management students enrolled in CA 3 or Business Communication subject are oral presentation and mock job interview. In assessing the speaking performance of the students, they are required to think sharply and express confidently their opinions about a given topic.

Interactive survival in an age marked by exponential change necessitates the development of oral communication skills. In fact, this is the main goal of language teaching and learning since then. Communication strategies are rooted in understanding its nature as both informational and relational between distinct human beings. This means that the information exchange in communication is simultaneously a goal-oriented act that ideally maintains and enhances the relationship in which it occurs. To achieve this end, Poliden (2012) suggested that language learners should be provided with varied activities utilizing multiple

representations and protracted language event. Learner's exposure to challenging tasks develops language proficiency and critical thinking which transcend learning objectives and prepare them to engage in real life communicative goals and situations.

Communication strategies play a vital role in oral language learning. Willems (1987), argues that communication strategies allow the language learners to develop a feeling of being able to do something with the language and thus derive motivation in language learning. According to Laurilla (2003), communication strategies are used as coping mechanisms to overcome speech anxieties and difficulties in interacting with another person. Through communication strategies, speakers are motivated to fluently and accurately express their points of view using the target language.

Zare (2010), on the other hand, states that communication strategies emphasize the process of communication through conversation and getting meaning across or clarifying what the speaker intended. Similarly, Somsai and Intarapraser (2011) assert that language learners can significantly improve their communicative competence by developing their ability to use communication strategies to cope with face-to-face oral communication problems. Communication strategies are thus utilized by speakers when they are faced with some problems or difficulties regarding their conversations or when confronted with misunderstanding by a co-speaker. In actual interaction, communication strategies exploit one's linguistic or communicative knowledge to remain in the conversation.

To date, studies investigating communication strategies focus mostly on EFL speaking courses with students of varied linguistic backgrounds. In the Philippines, there is a paucity of researches on communication strategies and the factors affecting students' communication anxieties. Moreover, none of these local researches investigated an Ilocano community application of a framework used in studies that have shown results from a general Philippine perspective and a western point of view. Addressing this concern, several literature and studies related to the present study were reviewed to provide empirical and scientific bases in explaining common observations on communication strategies used to overcome speech anxieties.

## **FRAMEWORK**

The concept of communication strategies was proposed by Selinker in 1972. He defines it as the offshoot of a learner's effort to verbalize meaning

in an extemporaneous speaking through a restricted target language system. Since then, the consensus of its correct definition has been the subject of much scholarly discussions among researchers. There are those who define it in the inter-individual or interactional perspective and consider it as elements of discourse. Others view it in the intra-individual or psychological perspective and regard it as internal and individual plans that language learners employ to solve their oral communication problems.

Tarone (1980) asserts that communication strategies are mutual attempts of two individuals to agree on the meaning in situations where they do not seem to share requisite meaning structures. In like manner, Faerch and Kasper (1983) claim communication strategies are potentially conscious plans for solving linguistic difficulties in achieving a specific communicative goal. Jamshidnejad (2011) concludes that the usage of communication strategies enables language learners to promote accuracy level of their target language aside from the negotiation of meaning. However, Canale (1981) argues communication strategies as verbal and non-verbal strategies that may be called into action to enhance the effectiveness of communication and to compensate communication breakdowns due to performance variables and insufficient competence. Further, Nakatani and Goh (2007) view communication strategies as tactics adopted by ESL students to solve oral communication problems. Moreover, Huang (2010) regard communication strategies as language learner's problem-solving behavior in the process of target language communication.

Despite the widespread disagreement in the research literature about the exact nature of communication strategies, it boils down to the idea that communication strategies are utilized to bridge the gap between the linguistic knowledge of the language learner and that of the target language interlocutor in actual communication situations so as to avoid communication disruptions. In other words, communication strategies enable the language learners to compensate for their target language deficiencies, enhance interaction in the target language, and develop communicative competence (Huang, 2010).

Most literature on communication strategies embodies similar and overlapping taxonomies. In Japan, Nakatani (2006) developed the Oral Communication Strategy Inventory to identify the strategies that facilitate EFL learners' oral communication. In 2010, he found that social-affective, fluency-oriented, and negotiation of meaning strategies could enhance learners' communicative ability; while message abandonment and less active listener strategies characterize low proficient learners or ineffective speakers.

Using the same instrument Nakatani (2006) developed, Huang (2010) investigated the factors influencing the oral communication strategies of technological university students in Taiwan. Results revealed that students most often employed message reduction and alternation strategies, and least often employed message abandonment strategies. Furthermore, students' self-perceived oral proficiency, motivation in speaking English and the frequency of speaking English outside the classroom were significantly related with the use of oral communication strategies. Nevertheless, English proficiency and gender did not have any effect on the use of oral communication strategies. Moreover, the frequency of speaking English outside the classroom and motivation in speaking English were the powerful predictors of the use of oral communication strategies among this group of learners.

Lam (2010) ascertained the effects of strategy instruction on strategy use and task performance of low-proficiency and high-proficiency students at the same course level in Hong Kong. He discovered that strategy instruction was associated with the overall higher reported strategy and increased use of resourcing by low-proficiency students than their high-proficiency counterparts. Qualitative analysis demonstrated that many low-proficiency students deployed resourcing to understand others, to understand the tasks, to generate ideas, and to generate language.

Jamshidnejad (2011) explored how a group of Persian learners of English Literature and Translation develop the accuracy level of their target language in oral communication. The study disclosed that the participants utilized repairing, self-accuracy check, retrieval, verbal strategy markers, and requesting help for negotiation of form to promote language accuracy in their utterances. It also indicated that the frequency of strategies employed to promote the accuracy level of language in communication is more than those for maintaining the flow of conversation and those for promoting meaning transfer.

Bei (2012) conducted a focused investigation into the immediate effects of oral narrative task repetition by two adult EFL learners of intermediate and high proficiency. The participants performed a narrative speaking task after watching a cartoon video clip and repeated their performance three times, followed by a retrospective report in an interview. Results disclosed that the repetition of narrative tasks increased fluency and accuracy while complexity was the least sensitive to the practice effect. It was also found that the learners had generally correct self-perception of their performances, which was the interaction of enhanced repeated performance, fatigue, and their proficiency levels.

The present study was drawn from Laurilla (2003) who determined which linguistic features from the taxonomy of communication strategies by Dornyei and Scott (1997) most commonly occurred in the students' speeches; and find out how the students processed the speaking task as they produced the communication output. This framework for the study of communication strategies that she extracted from Dornyei and Scott (1997) is a local application of the descriptions of communication strategies and analyses of students' oral performances.

According to Laurilla (2003), communication strategies have previously been theorized as coping strategies or devices employed during discourse in an effort to handle difficulties or breakdowns in communication. In her study, she found out that fillers, mime and self-repetitions were the most frequently used communication strategies by advanced oral communication students. However, their paralinguistic mannerisms did not all enhance the clarity of their message but functioned as markers of anxiety or bidding for time, and hence were considered processing time strategies.

What matters most in all mentioned situations is the use of communication strategies as coping mechanisms of language learners. However, the factors that impede their success in oral communication were not investigated in these studies. Hence, this study probed the most commonly used strategies in managing speech anxieties and the factors account for in managing communication apprehensions during oral expositions.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study aimed to categorize the communication strategies in the oral expositions of Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management (BSTM) students of the Mariano Marcos State University during the First Semester of Academic Year 2013-2014. Specifically, it determined the most commonly used communication strategies of students in overcoming their communication anxieties in their oral expositions. It also ascertained the factors affecting their communication anxieties.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

In the course of the study, the researchers utilized the descriptive design

of research. Moreover, it made use of the mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative research process. The use of qualitative and quantitative data was valuable in order to give a fuller and richer picture of the participants' experiences on communication strategies.

### **Research Setting**

The study was conducted during the first and second weeks of September 2013. The researchers videotaped the participants' oral expositions which they delivered at the Reading Center, College of Arts and Sciences, Mariano Marcos State University, Batac City, Philippines. The participants' videotaped and/or recorded speeches were transcribed and analyzed. Crosschecking of the data or verification of the accuracy of the transcription was done by three raters who are experts in the field through analyzing the written transcriptions and watching the taped presentations.

The researchers examined the transcripts, coded or highlighted the utterances that typified each communication strategy, and tabulated the frequency of occurrence of strategies that appeared in the transcript and videotape.

### **Research Instrument**

The categories of communication strategies conceptualized by Laurilla (2003) served as an instrument for the analysis in the present study. The communication strategies are subcategorized into three, namely: direct strategies; interactional strategies; and indirect strategies. Direct strategies deal with the target language while interactional strategies involve the use of the target language in interactions. Both pertain to problems of resource-deficit and other deficits that are own [speaker] performance related, and other [audience] performance related. On the other hand, indirect strategies contain other performance-related mechanisms to achieve competence such as processing time related problems.

Laurilla(2003) listed examples under each category and subcategory to operationalize the description. She constructed this instrument to facilitate encoding of results from the videotapes and transcriptions. Frequency counts of the occurrences of the common communication strategies were made and used as a basis for analyzing the aspects of speech. Other aspects of the research involved searching for commonalities, themes, differences, and variances.

### **Respondents of the Study**

The participants of the study were the 25 third year BS in Tourism Management students. They were enrolled in CA 3 (Business Communication) during the first

semester of school year 2013-2014 at Mariano Marcos State University, Batac City, Philippines. They were chosen through systematic random sampling. Their ages ranged from 18-20. Each student delivered a three minute persuasive speech on the topic of their choice.

Since this study concerned in investigating the communication strategies of speakers, the researchers videoed the participants while delivering their speeches. A consent from them was solicited a week before the conduct of the study. They were assured that the videotaped speeches would be used for the attainment of the objectives of the study. Further, that their recorded speeches would be transcribed and analyzed for purpose of accuracy.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To make sense of the data from the transcriptions and the crosschecking with the video, the researchers utilized Laurilla’s (2003) categories of communication strategies. Table 1 presents the typical utterances that were coded as instances of each communication strategy.

Table 1. Communication Strategies and Some Examples

Categories	Examples
Use of fillers	Ummmmm.../ahh.../uhh.../ammmmm...
Mime	Licking lips, hands clasped throughout speech, swallowing everytime he/she pauses, excessive roaming of eyes
Self-repetition	it is... it is... it is becoming/thinking it’s a joke... thinking it’s a joke
Self-repair	I croute... I quote/Everything you... whenever you
Mumbling	swallowing or muttering an inaudible word
Restructuring	And I’d like to see... (totally changes what student wanted to say) So not everybody can afford...
Self-rephrasing	We don’t have... All the GLOBE subscribers don’t have...
Verbal strategy markers	“What do you call that?”/ “This means that...”/ Use of “well...” and “so...”
Message of replacement	but everything you --- whenever you hear a word.../ the next time to drink cow --- think cow’s milk...
Omission	as far as consumed emission which causes [gap] this is because... (leaving one sentence unfinished and carrying on as if it was fully said



Circumlocution	studies show that horsepower [...] it means that, for example, one liter of gasoline to... (sort of paraphrasing)
Code switching	After you pala... ay... sorry! (Filipino-English)
Approximation	I will support... I will CONVINCE you that karate or self-defense... (changing or qualifying support to convince)
Use of similar sounding words	If you wanna... or if you don't want to... Unintended pregnancies (to substitute for the word unwanted pregnancies)/... children exhibiting misbehavior (to substitute for the word misbehavior)

Table 1 shows which communication strategies were present in the students' speeches. Fourteen strategies emerged in their utterances. This includes fillers, mime, self-repetition, self-repair, mumbling, restructuring, self-rephrasing, verbal strategy marker, message replacement, omission, circumlocution, code switching, approximation, and use of similar sounding words. More than merely considering these as errors, they were treated as communication strategies that L2 learners used to manage their difficulties or goals for the speaking task. As Laurilla (2003) mentioned, communication strategies were characterized by problem-orientedness and consciousness. None of the students asked for help from their classmates; therefore, interactional strategies were excluded from the study.

Table 2 exhibits the frequency of occurrence of each type of communication strategy that was verbalized by each speaker. It was found out that the frequency of occurrence of verbalized communication strategies varied for each student. The top five most frequently occurring were fillers (534), mime (250), and self-repetition (192). The rest of the communication strategies have fewer occurrences. This finding confirms the study of Laurilla (2003) that fillers, mime and self-repetitions were the most frequently used communication strategies by advanced oral communication students. Further, this seems to support the findings of Jamshidnejad (2011) that repairing, own accuracy check, retrieval, verbal strategy markers, and requesting help for negotiation of form are the common communication strategies of EFL learners to promote accuracy in their interactions. The table also indicates that although fillers were the most frequently occurring communication strategy, 4 out of the 25 speakers verbalized very few instances of this particular strategy. Moreover, the use of similar sounding words, approximation, and code-switching are the least communication strategies used in their oral expositions.

Table 2. Categorization of communication strategies used by the respondents in their oral expositions

Strategy	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	R11	R12	R13	R14	R15	R16	R17	R18	R19	R20	R21	R22	R23	R24	R25	TOL	
Use of fillers	26	18	29	16	31	14	39	9	54	17	39	8	33	13	15	13	11	6	14	5	11	23	26	28	36	36	534
Mime	32	7	3	7	5	17		30	6	14	13	12	7	9	5	15		4	11	7	30	8	3	5	5	250	
Self-repetition	10	5	12	15	3	5	11	7	3	7	15	5	6	5	32	7	3	8	13	1	3	9	5	2	192		
Self-repair	3	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	2	5	2	3	5	2	2	2	2	2	2	70	
Mumbling	10				9	1			2	2	2	7						4	4		2	2			1	38	
Restructuring	1	2	3	1	1	2	4	4	4	4	4	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	36
Self-rephrasing	5	2	1	10	3	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	1						2	2	2	2			2	34	
Verbal strategy markers	2		1	1	5	1	1	2	4	9	1	1	1						1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	29
Message replacement	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	1			2	1								19
Omission	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	14
Circumlocution	2				2							2							2	2	2	2					10
Code switching								1									2		2					1			8
Approximation														1								1					4
Use of similar sounding words	1																								1		2
TOTAL	89	45	42	47	75	49	54	27	104	29	73	47	74	34	50	51	40	14	27	48	21	68	43	40	50	50	1,240

Table 3 categorizes the 14 relevant communication strategies in terms of their frequency of occurrence and their relative distribution according to Laurilla's (2003) framework.

Table 3. Ranking and distribution of the 14 common strategies

	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Direct Strategy: Resource Deficit			
1.	Mime (non-linguistic)	250	20.16
2.	Mumbling	38	3.06
3.	Restructuring	36	2.90
4.	Message replacement	19	1.53
5.	Omission	14	1.13
6.	Circumlocution	10	0.81
7.	Code switching	8	0.65
8.	Approximation	4	0.32
9.	Use of similar sounding words	2	0.16
Indirect Strategy: Processing Time			
10.	Use of fillers	534	43.06
11.	Self-repetition	192	15.48
Indirect Strategy: Own Performance			
12.	Verbal strategy markers	29	2.34
13.	Self-repair	70	5.65
14.	Self-rephrasing	34	2.74
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,240</b>	<b>100%</b>

The top three communication strategies were fillers (43.06%), self-repetition (15.48%) which are both concerned with processing time, and mime (20.16%) which is non-linguistic but a direct strategy focusing on resource deficit. The rest of the communication strategies occurred with less frequency. The high frequency of occurrence of these communication strategies suggests that the students were under a state of communication apprehension because the task was graded. Speaking in front of an audience that would be rating their performance also contributed to their speaking anxiety. Unlike in informal speaking contexts, the level and kind of communication anxiety in graded performances was far greater. If students were given opportunities to limit their communication apprehension

or anxiety, it might have been a different case.

In an in-depth interview with the students, it emerged from their responses that attitude toward English language, motivation in learning the language, and socio-economic status are the factors that might have affected their communication apprehensions or anxieties.

In the study of Nakatani (2006), the frequency of speaking English outside the classroom and motivation in speaking English were the powerful predictors of the use of oral communication strategies among Japanese language learners. Francis and Miller (2007) further found that students use elements of communication-orientation motivation, intrapersonal communication, guided visualization, skills training, physical self-regulation, preparation, practice, humor, and a combination approach to managing their own apprehension. However, Tipan's (2008) study contradicts the above findings because his investigation revealed that acquisition context, speech norms accommodation and code switching, degree of contact with L2 speakers, and confidence level affect language competencies. It could be deduced, therefore, that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are vital in the development of accuracy and fluency in oral communication. Hence, motivation leads the students to the attainment of their desired goal in communicative competence.

These perceptions reflected on how much effort the students exerted when preparing for their speech, but more so during the actual performance. While it was true that the majority of them really prepared, some tended to perform just to comply with the requirement. As a result, they ended up getting more anxious, given the negative preconceived notions they harbored about the subject. Quantitative interpretation was not done since this study did not aim to correlate the communication strategies with these factors.

Since the study focused only on the oral expositions of Tourism Management students who were enrolled in CA 3 within Mariano Marcos State University, the results of the study may not apply to students of other CA 3 classes of other universities or fields at MMSU. The following are the scope and limitations of the study:

1. It analyzed only 25 speech samples from CA 3 class.
2. The length of the transcriptions varied according to the intelligibility of the recordings. Hence, the inaudible parts were discarded, so not all utterances were accounted for.
3. An attempt at establishing inter-rater reliability was made by re-viewing the recorded speeches. However, inter-rater reliability for the purpose of doing another evaluation was not done due to time constraints.

## CONCLUSIONS

The goal of the language educators or communication arts teachers is to equip students with the necessary linguistic and communicative competencies needed in different situations that they can find themselves immersed into. Achieving this goal involves some level of fluency, accuracy, appropriacy and efficacy. The results of the study revealed that fillers, mime, and self-repetitions were the most frequently used communication strategies of the students.

Since these strategies were clearly signs of how the students managed communication apprehension, the study again demonstrated how Dornyei and Scott (1997) described the nature of communication strategies. They are language devices for problem management, and are coping mechanisms for difficulties in L2 learning.

## TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The results of this study would provide language teachers in the selection of instructional materials, teaching strategies and evaluation techniques to insure the effectiveness and efficiency of classroom instruction. As such, the identified communication strategies are useful tools for the language teachers in designing speech activities to enhance students' communicative competence. These activities involve utilizing popular media and immersing students with tasks that integrate the four macro-skills in language learning. Complementing listening skill with speaking opportunities to reading and writing lessons creates interactive possibilities and encompasses different strengths of the students. Engaging the students with challenging activities where they can develop their creativity, artistry and resourcefulness would allow them to renew and increase their interest in learning the English language and to minimize the verbalization of coping strategies.

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