Communication Strategies in the Chinese EFL Primary School Classroom

ZHANG Hongwu

Jiaying University, Meizhou, China

This study was designed to examine the communication strategies used by non-native speaker (NNSs) learners and the native speaker (NS) teacher in the foreign language classroom in China. The data, which was from the Grade 4 English classroom in a primary school in a south Guangdong province, showed that both the NS teacher and the NNS students use communication strategies (CSs) in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. It was found that in order to build a mutual interactional environment, the NS prefers foreigner talk, discourse management, and body language while the NNS learners tends to use avoidance, code-switching, and literal translation as their CSs. Analysis showed that adoption of CSs was the result of a lack of lexical competence on the part of NNS learners. However, CSs provide opportunities to keep the flow of conversation going and thus increase learners' exposure to input and produce pushed output. Therefore, using CSs either consciously or unconsciously in primary English classroom is an indispensable means of assisting L2 acquisition.

Keywords: communication strategies (CSs), English as a foreign language (EFL), primary school classroom, native speaker, non-native speaker

Introduction

Most foreign language learners have limited opportunities to communicate with native speakers. Compared with Chinese teachers, foreign teachers have some advantages, possessing more background knowledge of the target language and ability to stimulate students' interests by means of unique teaching methods. Thus, there exists a misunderstanding that students' oral English must be improved so long as they are taught by a native teacher. Those who hold this opinion may have paid less attention to communication barriers taking place in conversations between the NS teacher and NNS learners. It is thought that all the barriers could be removed if foreign teachers have a high level of teaching ability or there is a Chinese teaching assistant nearby. This misunderstanding might be caused by a lack of knowledge about communication strategies used in a real NS-NNSs interactional classroom and their role in helping both interlocutors removing communication barriers. This study aims to find out what strategies NS teacher and NNS learners use in the primary school English classroom and how these strategies are employed to facilitate second language acquisition.

ZHANG Hongwu, bachelor, associate professor, School of Foreign Languages, Jiaying University, Meizhou, China.

Relevant Studies on Communication Strategies

Definitions

According to *Oxford Study Dictionary* (1991), strategy refers to a plan or policy to achieve something, which is widely used in a plenty of fields, like in sport, military, and management. The term "communication strategy" was first proposed by Selinker (1972) as one of the five "processes" he identified in interlanguage development. He regarded communication strategy as a kind of verbal or non-verbal strategy used by learners in communication in the second language to fill up their linguistic competence deficiency and thought highly of its role in developing interlanguage. However, there is no consensus on the definition of communication strategies (CSs). Researchers distinguish two broad theoretical approaches to CSs. They can be viewed as discourse strategies that are evident in social interactions involving learners, or they can be treated as cognitive processes involved in the use of the L2 in reception and production (Ellis, 2018). According to Corder (1981), communication strategy is a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his meaning when faced with some difficulty. Here the difficulty refers uniquely to the speaker's inadequate command of the language used in the interaction. Thus, communication strategies can be summarized into strategies used by speakers and hearers on purpose both verbally and non-verbally in the process of communication for arriving at certain communication goal.

Taxonomies

There are different types of CSs summarized by different scholars. Dornyei and Scott (1977) provided a review of nine taxonomies and pointed out that six of the nine taxonomies dichotomize strategies into those that involve avoidance or reduction and achievement. Tarone (1977) summarized CSs into five types: avoidance, paraphrase, conscious transfer, appeal for help, and mime. However, the CSs used in the Nijmegen Project are divided into two main categories: conceptual and linguistic strategies, with the former including analytic and holistic strategies and the latter including transfer and morphological creativity.

CSs and Second Language Acquisition

Whether the use of CSs facilitates L2 acquisition is uncertain. According to Skehan (1998), development of a certain strategic competence lacks of linguistic competence. CSs avoid the need for learners to develop their interlanguage resources. Evidence for this position is based on Schmidt's (1983) study of Wes who developed his strategic competence at the expense of his linguistic competence. In contrast, Kasper and Kellerman (1997) identified a number of ways in which CSs may assist L2 acquisition: (1) CSs help to keep the flow of the conversation going and thus increase learners' exposure to input; (2) CSs trigger negotiation for meaning which aids acquisition; (3) CSs increase their control over their existing linguistic resources; (4) CSs enable learners to obtain access to new linguistic resources when they incorporate strategic solutions into their interlanguage; (5) CSs fill gaps in the learners' lexicon through positive feedback following requests for assistance; (6) CSs produce pushed output; and (7) CSs increase overall processing control.

As for empirical studies, most studies have been concerned with describing and quantifying the CSs used by different learners and with identifying the factors that influence strategy choice (Ellis, 2018). According to Poulisse and Schils (1989), lexical strategies were referential in nature. They involve attempts by speakers to encode messages that enable hearers to identify specific referents. Their study examined the effects of proficiency and task on the learners' use CSs and considered whether there was any evidence that learners used

CSs differently from native speakers. Results of the study showed that the less proficient learners used more CSs than the more proficient. There was also some evidence of proficiency-related effects on the type of strategies used. For example, the more advanced learners made greater use of holistic strategies involving super ordinates. The nature of task was found to have a marked effect on strategy selection. Learners chose to use different strategies in different tasks. It was also found that CSs are not a distinctive L2 phenomenon and that L2 learners do not have to develop a special L2 strategic competence but instead can apply their L1 strategic competence. Lafford (2004) examined the CSs used by stay-at home students of L2 Spanish and study-abroad students, and reported that although both groups possessed a wide repertoire of CSs, they mainly employed only two strategies: self-repair and own accuracy checks. It was found that both groups used fewer CSs in the post-test interview, but the study-abroad learners reduced their reliance on CSs to a much greater extent. It was also found that study-abroad experience had made learners less likely to be accuracy-oriented, and they become more tolerant of the mismatch between interlanguage forms and target language forms.

Kong Jingjing (2004) tape-recorded and analyzed the communication between several graduates who were not English majors and a foreigner, finding that these graduates use strategies based on native language and "appeal for assistance" more frequently. Liu Naimei (2005) made a survey on 273 students majoring in English about their attitudes towards communication strategies and use of them. It was found that elder students hold a positive attitude towards achievement strategies but a negative attitude towards reduction strategies. However, all the subjects are inclined to use reduction strategies. Houston (2006) examined CSs used by learners and teachers in the foreign language classroom. He discovered important differences between English as a second language (ESL) and foreign language (FL) strategy use, many of which were attributed to the fact that ESL learners do not share a common first language as FL learners do. The data illustrated the importance of conducting classes exclusively in the target language and creating opportunities for meaningful communication for developing strategic competence.

From the above literature review, it could be seen most studies focused on intermediate or advanced foreign language learners' use of CSs. Fewer studies focused on primary school learners' use of CSs, and none so far has studied the use of CSs by both the NS and NNS in a FL classroom. This study is aimed at what CSs are used in the conversation between NS teacher and NNS students in primary school EFL classroom and whether these strategies facilitate second language acquisition.

Research Design

Subjects

The subjects in this study were the NNS students and their NS teacher in a primary school in South Guangdong Province. The total number is 200, consisting of 108 girl pupils and 92 boy pupils. The students average 10 years old, most of whom have studied English for at least three years. Some even began their learning from Kindergarten. The NS teacher in this study is a 31-year-old man, coming from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania USA. He was teaching oral English for the young learners in this primary school when the study was conducted. The NS teacher was once a soldier. He then received professional training in teaching English as a second language in China. He had an 11-year teaching experience in China.

Research Questions and Procedure

The present study was designed to answer the following questions:

(1) What CSs would be used by the NNS primary students while interacting with their NS teacher in the classroom?

(2) What CSs would the foreign teacher (NS) use while interacting with his NNS primary students in the classroom?

(3) How do these CSs assist NNS learners in their second language acquisition?

The author video-recorded NS-NNS interactions in Grade 4 English class. The total length of the four video-recording amounts to 180 minutes (45 minutes per lesson). After class, the NS teacher and some NNS learners were interviewed about why they used certain CSs. All the NS-NNS interactions were transcribed according to the following transcription system:

T: teacher;

L: Learner (not identified);

L1: L2: etc.: identified learners;

LL: several learners speaking together;

TA: teaching assistant;

(.): pause of one second or less;

(4) Silence: length given in seconds;

(hm, hh): onomatopoeic representations of the audible exhalation of air;

Underline: Underlines indicate that the speaker makes emphasis on the underlined portion of the sentence;

↑↓: Up or down arrows are used to indicate that there is a sharply rising or falling intonation.

—: A dash indicates an abrupt cut off, where the speaker stopped speaking suddenly.

Findings

NS Teacher's Communication Strategies

It is known that teachers play an important role in a class and may decide how much knowledge learners obtain from instruction. Therefore, it is natural that most people will count on foreign teachers or teaching assistants to dismantle communication barriers in class. From the observation, we found that compared with the frequency of students' use of communication strategies, that of teachers' use is higher and that there are really some occasions where the goal of communication can only be arrived at with the assistance of teachers. The following are CSs used by NS teacher in the primary school classroom.

Use of Chinese. The teacher in this research uses this strategy to establish a close relationship with students and avoid unnecessary communication barriers. When class began, he asked students to stand up, to review the classroom rules with him together and then asked them to sit down, saying "谢谢" (thank you), which sometimes would be imitated by some students. Next the foreign teacher would smile back to the students who had imitated him and repeated the Chinese "谢谢", building up a close relationship and a relaxing learning environment. Moreover, to make sure students understand a task, the NS teacher will use Chinese after some long, difficult sentences in his PowerPoints. For example, there was a task that students needed to act on different roles according to their gender. Being worried about students' limited knowledge about English, the teacher added Chinese after the introduction. Thus, they appeared on the board in this way:

Example 1:

The girls will read for Alice. (女生扮演Alice)

The boys will read for Jill. (男生扮演Jill)

And teacher will read for Miss Fang. (老师扮演方小姐)

Through the demonstration in Chinese, students can fully understand what the teacher hopes them to do. It is really a good way for EFL teacher to avoid communication barriers and ensure the smooth process of teaching in class.

Use of foreigner talk. When a parent or caretaker speaks to a child, they simplify their speech so that the latter would have little trouble in understanding. Similarly, a NS modifies his speech while talking to second language learners. Such modified talk is called foreigner talk, which is characterized by slow rate, the conscious choices of easy words of high frequency, short, and simple sentences and so on. There are two kinds of foreigner talks: grammatical and ungrammatical talk. For the latter, the speaker usually deletes some grammatical features, such as the auxiliary verb "do" or omits some inflectional suffixes. In this study, we have found that the NS uses this strategy regularly. For example, when the teacher talked about what he did in the winter holiday. He said, "Teacher went to Megwa 14 days. Megwa, America". In this case, the NS teacher omitted the prepositions "for" and "in". He did not use "for" to modify time to make sure that the communication proceeds smoothly. After class, the author inquired the foreign teachers why he omitted them. He said that the reason is that he tried to avoid the subsequent similar sound of speech (for 14 days), which might easily cause unnecessary misunderstanding. Instead, omitting "for" and "in", students may understand the sentence more easily, which may also be consistent with their present language proficiency.

Use of discourse management. To achieve some communicative goal or offer as many chances as possible for students to speak, the NS would manage their discourse from time to time, such as selecting salient topics, doing some comprehension checks, paraphrasing, and so on.

Example 2:

T: What did you do in your holiday, young man?

L1: My winter holiday is very interesting and is bad (.) Because my air-conditioner is broken and my TV is broken, too. I cannot watch Chinese New Year—.hm(4).

LL: 联欢晚会 (The Spring Festival Gala).

T: Oh, no. You couldn't do what? (.) Did you have your family with you?

L1: Yes, I have. Two days later, my air-conditioner is ok. My TV is ok, too.

In this case, there was a communication breakdown when a pause occurred in a student's speech. He wanted to express the meaning that because of the broken TV, he could not watch the Spring Festival Gala. However, at that moment, he failed to search for the appropriate expressions in his word bank. The foreign teacher realized it and offered a new topic related to students' family to transcend this barrier. The topic "Family" was one of the units that students have learned in the textbook. It is smart for the NS teacher to change this topic. He took students' background knowledge into consideration while teaching and managed the discourse successfully by selecting an appropriate topic.

Example 3:

T: What is near you home, young lady?

L1: My home is near a cinema.

T: Oh, your home is near a cinema↑. Good sentence.

LL: What is cinema?

T: Cinema is where you watch films.

LL: hm…

From this example, we can see that some students did not understand the word "cinema". But after the foreign teacher paraphrased it to "where you watch films", most students got the meaning.

Use of body language. Opposed to words, body language is a type of non-verbal communication. It usually resorts to physical behavior to express or convey information, like facial expression, body posture, gesture, and so on, greatly helping to establish the relationship between interlocutors and regulating interaction. Compared with Chinese English teacher, NS teachers are more inclined to use body language. Evidence can be easily seen in their daily communication. For example, while teaching location words, the NS teacher would employ fists to demonstrate the abstract definitions of prepositions, which reduced a lot of unnecessary, long, and tedious explanations for merely a simple word, such as "outside". While learning the preposition "on", the teacher would put a hand above a fist; but put a finger inside a fist while learning "in", and keep the hand away from another fist while learning "outside". Moreover, in addition to using body language to transcend communication barriers, the NS teacher would also use it to establish and maintain the relationship with students as well as regard it as a tool to express confirmation and compliment. For example, when a student answers a question correctly, he will say, "Good sentence", "Good job", or "Very good", accompanying with a raised thumb. More frequently, he will clap with students when they speak a good sentence or offer a good answer. Not only do these behaviors give students a great amount of confidence to speak English, but also they help to establish a close relationship between the teacher and students.

Appeal for assistance. Even though the NS teacher tries everything to transcend the communication barriers appearing in class like resorting to Chinese or body language, there are still ones that he cannot manage to transcend without appealing for assistance. For example, in the case mentioned above, while talking about the topic "What is near your home", some students, due to limited vocabulary, failed to understand the meaning of the word "cinema". Although the NS used paraphrase strategy to fix this communication gap, not all students could understand what he meant at that moment. Thus, the teacher employed the blackboard and wrote the whole sentence on it that "Cinema is where you can watch movies", and then he asked students to repeat the sentence with him. The author found that even though students could read the sentence fluently after repeating it for several times, a few students still could not understand and began to whisper and ask their classmates about the meaning. Under this occasion, the NS teacher took out his phone and looked it up on the Internet. Then he found out the Chinese meaning and showed it to those who still had difficulty in understanding the word. If all these methods still do not work, he would ask the assistant teacher for help. But this move is not very common in these four classes.

The NNS Students' Strategies

Because of different native languages and culture backgrounds, there must be unavoidable communication barriers in NS-NNS communication. Moreover, due to low language proficiency and limited range of vocabulary, more communication barriers occurred in the primary school classroom than in the middle school, high school, or the college classrooms. This is the reason why there is often a teaching assistant in the primary oral English class. However, we have found that primary school students are able to use some communication strategies unconsciously.

Use of avoidance strategy. Sometimes, NNS students do not have the ability to answer teachers' questions or express their ideas in English. On these occasions, they will choose to avoid answering or to abandon their original ideas.

Example 4:

T: What do you like to eat?

L1: No. (Avoidance)

T: No?↑

…

L1: Pudding.

Example 5:

T: What do you want to buy in this shop?

L2: I want to buy a pink dress (.) with some (.) Shuijing. (crystal decoration)

T: What dress?↑ (Ungrammatical talk)

L2: A pink dress with a lot of cartoon. (Avoidance)

After the interview, the author learnt that in the first case, the student did not know how to say 果冻(jelly) in English at that moment when the NS asked her that question. Therefore, she refused to answer it directly. She wanted to look up the word in the word list in the textbook but failed. Suddenly, she found a similar word "pudding" and handed up to answer the question. In the second case, the second student acted like the first one. She abandoned her original idea that she wanted to buy a pink dress with some crystal decoration for her failure to recall the English word of at that moment. From these two cases, some primary students are intelligent enough to fulfill a communication gap and save themselves out from embarrassment in communication.

Use of code-switching. Based on observation, the author found out that avoidance strategy is usually used by introvert students who want to end the communication with the NS teacher as soon as possible or they will feel embarrassed. Learners with higher proficiency or having an outgoing character usually try their best to convey the information. Because of their thinking habits and higher proficiency of using the mother tongue, they will easily employ code-switching in most cases.

Example 6:

T: What weather do you like?

L1: I like Taifeng tian. (Typhoon)

Example 7:

T: Ok, tell teacher, what do you like to eat, young man? Teacher likes eating chicken and rice. What do you like to eat?

L2: I like eating Beijing KaoYa. (Beijing Roasted Dusk)

Example 8:

T: What did you do in your winter holiday, young man?

L3: My winter holiday is very interesting and is bad. Because my air-conditioner is broken. (Ungrammatical talk)

T: Oh, no.

L3: And my TV is broken, too. I can't watch Chinese New Year—hm (4).

LL: Lian Huan Wan Hui. (The Spring Festival Gala)

In these examples, students used Chinese "Taifeng tian", "Beijing Kao Ya", and "Lian Huan Wan Hui" instead of "typhoon", "Beijing Roasted Dusk", and "The Spring Festival Gala", respectively. The NNS students often use Chinese for the sake of failure to find some expressions in English in limited time or for entertaining others on purpose. They said that when they failed to express their ideas in English, mostly they would use Chinese to solve problems instinctively.

Though this method sometimes really can help transcend some barriers in communications between two or more non-native speakers, there are some prerequisites. First, the hearer should know clearly about the context of communication. Second, both the speaker and hearer should have some background knowledge about Chinese. Evidence can easily be found in the cases mentioned above. While one spoke Chinese in class, most Chinese students could understand what he means while the NS teacher could only understand the meaning of "Beijing KaoYa" because he had heard and seen it many times.

Literal translation. Due to limited linguistic knowledge, the NNS learners often use literal translation when they find it hard to express their ideas. Literal translation sounds very much like Chinese English since the speaker translates their thoughts word for word from their familiar mother tongue into the target language. Although poor grammar exists here and there, literal translation does keep communication going on.

Example 9:

...

T: Did you have your family with you?

L1: Yes, I have. And two days later, my air-conditioner is ok. My TV is OK, too.

The speaker wanted to say that two days later, his air-conditioner and TV got repaired and both could work again. However, under L1 influence, he directly translated the Chinese expression "Wo de kongtiao haole, wode dianshiji ye hao le" (my air-conditioner is ok. My TV is ok, too) into English. Though unidiomatic, it seems to make sense in oral English.

Example 10:

T: Now, somebody raise your hands. Tell teacher what did you do over winter holiday? (Slow down the speed)

L1: In Christmas, I go to HK play football.

T: Hm (.) I went to HK to play football. How long were you in HK?

L1: I go to four days.

In this dialogue, the student did not use the past tense to talk about his experience in the winter holiday. This is the result of L1 transfer since verbs in Chinese language have no tense markers. Moreover, *I go to four days* is also a literal translation from Chinese into English. But compared with refusing to say anything or resorting to the native language, this strategy can promote students' acquisition of English and reduce communication barriers.

Example 11:

T: What kind of weather is this?

L1: Sunny.

T: Ok, it's sunny. Now, tell teacher. When it's sunny outside ↑, what can you do ↓?

L1: I can play football in outside with my friends.

The student's utterance in this example is also influenced by the habits of using Chinese in some way. In Chinese, people say "*in outside*" to indicate location. This is the reason why the student would use "in" before "outside".

Based on these findings, while trying their best to arrive at a communicative goal, students will use literal translation unconsciously. Although this act may impede students' acquisition of grammatical rules, it can undoubtedly reduce some communication barriers because the NS teacher can still learn about the main idea of a sentence by ignoring some trivial ungrammatical problems. When students avoid answering or using Chinese to communicate with the foreign teacher, the difficulty of filling up a communicative gap will be bigger for sure.

Appeal for assistance. There is no denying that when there is a problem in communication, some primary school students especially those who have lower language proficiency will ask for help from their classmates, the NS teacher or the teaching assistant. Because by doing this, communication gaps can be quickly fixed by just sparing little efforts.

Example 12:

T: What can you do in sunny day?

L1: I can run in the (.) in the (4). (Thinking and waiting for foreign teacher to implement the whole sentence).

T: in?

L1: On the…the (4.)

T: On the playground?

L1: Yes.

In this case, the student did not ask for assistance directly, but he looked at the teacher and waited for the teacher to help him. This way of asking for assistance requires the teacher to pay full attention to students' state while the student behaves like this. If the teacher offers the assistance too easily, it may not be beneficial for students' growth of communicative competence. However, if the teacher fails to realize this invisible signal of asking for assistance, the student may become embarrassed for standing for a long time without working out true answers or a word and thus their confidence in speaking English may be affected.

Example 13:

(Talking about the weather)

L1: What's the weather do you like?

L2: I like rainy.

L1: What can you do in rainy?

L2: I can… 老师，睡觉怎么说？ (Teacher, how to say 睡觉 [sleep] in English?)

TA: Sleep.

L2: I can sleep.

L1: What do you need in rainy?

L2: I need an umbrella and… 老师，雨鞋怎么说？ (Teacher, how to say 雨鞋 [rainshoes] in English?)

TA: Rainshoes.

L2: I need an umbrella and rainshoes.

This dialogue happened between two non-native speakers. The author found out that compared with the first learner, the second one has lower language proficiency but higher motivation for speaking English. Thus, she appealed for assistance at a higher frequency. In order to encourage the second learner to speak English as much as she can, the author chose to offer the assistance even for twice.

Discussion

Despite the fact that there is a teaching assistant in class, both the NS foreign teacher and NNS primary students would use communication strategies consciously or unconsciously. The CSs used in foreign language classroom involved a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared (Tarone, 1980). It must be pointed out that both the NS and the NNSs have the responsibility to fulfill the communication. Results showed that the NS teacher used more strategies than his NNS partners. The purpose of his using strategies is to help NNS learners understand his utterances, encourage them to communicate their ideas, and keep the mutual interaction going on. For example, *use of Chinese* on PPT serves an indirect prompt for learners to know what their task is. *Foreigner talk* is used by NSs to facilitate NNSs' comprehension of L2 utterances. Many functional words are omitted in foreigner talk to make utterances easy to understand. As for *discourse management*, the NS teacher is skilled at managing discourse to enable NNSs to understand the topic of conversation. In Example 2, when the NS finds the learner speaker has difficulty in recalling a word, he successfully turned to a new topic and prevented the conversation from breaking down. *Body language* is the most frequently used non-verbal strategy used by the NS in foreign language class. It is especially useful in teaching location words for young kids. *Appeal for assistance* is a strategy we did not expect before the study, but it truly occurred. When the NS teacher found it hard to communicate with his students, he sought help from the teaching assistant or other resources, such as the internet. *Appeal for assistance* is the only strategy shared by both the NS and NNSs in this study.

For NNS learners, they tend to use *avoidance*, *code-switching*, *literal translation* as well as *appeal for assistance*. It must be pointed out that all the utterances in this study are spontaneous and unplanned. There is no training on the use of CSs before the study. All strategies arose naturally during the interactional conversations between the NS teacher and NNS students. Among these strategies, *appeal for assistance* is the only one strategy used by both the NS and the NNSs, which constitutes the most characteristic feature in the study. This is because the young learners lack L2 linguistic competence. In most situations when they find it hard to express their ideas, they rely on the NS to fill in a word in their utterance, or ask peers or the assistant teacher for help. However, the NS's *appeal for help* is different. He mainly resorts to Chinese translation, or the teaching assistant for help. Throughout the whole class, NNSs are very active and enthusiastic in answering questions, some raising hands even if they do not know the answer. When students give good answers, the NS teacher gives a friendly clap with the student. Such a body language encourages students to communicate their ideas in English and helps them build confidence.

Results show that NNS students have developed strategic competence under the guidance of the NS teacher. It is important to examine the CSs that learners use when their communicative need exceed the limits of their linguistic competence. Strategic competence can be defined as the ability to sustain communication when communicative demands exceed linguistic capacity (Houston, 2006). Strategic competence allows the learner to negotiate meaning, and to sustain negotiation when a given form is either not present or not accessible in the learner's interlanguage system. The NNS learners in this study have an implicit strategic competence which drives them to figure out ways and means to continue the communication in class. *Appeal for assistance*, *code-switching*, and *literal translation* are frequently used to cope with communication breakdowns. What is more, these strategies are used unconsciously and naturally by the NNS learners because of their limited linguistic competence. Quite a few NNS students, after being interviewed after class, said they

had a sense of achievement when they used code-switching and literal translation, because these CSs enable them to continue to speak and most peers could understand them and some of them could even help to find the right English words. When asked why they adopted avoidance, they said they had no choice but to quit because they could not find the word to answer the teacher's question. So, they chose another word instead. This is surely the result of a limited range of vocabulary. *Avoidance* is a very common and popular CS used by young learners in a foreign language classroom. They often use literal translation with the purpose of continuing the conversation. Literal translation also occurs frequently for the lack of grammatical competence. In most cases, the students cannot express their ideas using a complex English sentence, so they translate their ideas into simple Chinese-English sentence, such as "two days later, my air-conditioner is OK. My TV is ok, too".

Now let us discuss the third question as to how these communication strategies assist NNSs in their second language acquisition. The result of this study keeps in agreement with the finding of many early empirical studies of CSs in that the less proficient learners use more CSs than the more proficient, a function of their more limited control of L2 vocabulary (Ellis, 2018). It is true that the more limited learners' lexical ability is, the more CSs they use in communication. This is a universal phenomenon in foreign language learning. There is no denying that these CSs provide opportunities for young learners to keep the flow of the conversation going and thus increase learners' exposure to input which aids acquisition. Secondly, CSs increase learners' control over their existing linguistic resources. Thirdly, CSs produced pushed output. It could be seen that learners are totally immersed in a foreign language environment when conversing with the NS teacher. CSs play a very important role in facilitating communication, which further creates opportunities for acquisition.

Conclusion

This study was conducted from the interactional approach, proposed by Tarone (1977), which demonstrates that any communication gap should be fixed by mutual efforts from the interlocutors. It investigated the use of CSs by NS teacher and NNS primary school students in the classroom setting. The results show that both NNSs and NS employ assistance for help as a common CS. In addition, the NS teacher prefers foreigner talk, discourse management, body language and use of Chinese, while NNSs tend to use avoidance, code-switching, and literal translation as their communication strategies when hitting upon problems in the course of conversation with the NS teacher. It is true that these CSs are the result of low lexical ability and grammatical competence. But CSs play a significant role in creating opportunities for pushed output, which in turn assists acquisition. One limitation of the present study is that the data was limited to a small range of subjects and the video-recording lasted only 180 minutes. Although this might prevent us from seeing the whole picture of NS-NNS interaction in a foreign language classroom, it does have some important implications for EFL teaching in China.

References

Corder, S. P. (1981). *Error analysis and interlanguage.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dornyei, Z., & Scott, M. (1997). Communication strategies in a second language: Definitions and taxonomies. *Language Learning,* 47, 173-210.

Ellis, R. (2018). *The study of second language acquisition.* Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Houston, T. (2006). Communication strategies in the foreign language classroom. *Applied Language Learning*, (16), 65-82.

Kasper, G., & Kellerman, E. (Eds.). (1997). *Communication strategies: Psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics perspectives.* London: Longman.

Kong, J. J. (2004). A study on teaching communication strategies. *Foreign Language World*, (5), 33-39.

Lafford, B. (2004). The effect of the context of learning on the use of communication strategies by learners of Spanish as a second language. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, (26), 201-225.

Liu, N. M. (2005). The implications of communication strategy research on foreign language teaching in China. *Foreign Language World*, (3), 55-59.

Oxford Study Dictionary. (1991). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Poulisse, N., & Schils, E. (1989). The influence of task-and proficiency-related factors on the use of communication strategies: A quantitative analysis. *Language Learning*, (39), 15-48.

Schmidt, R. (1983). Interaction, acculturation and the acquisition of communication competence. In M. Wolfson and E. Judd (Eds.), *Socialinguistics and second language acquisition*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.

Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, (10), 209-230.

Skehan, P. (1998). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tarone, E. (1977). Conscious communication strategies in interlanguage: A progress report. In D. H. Brown, R. H. Crymes, and C. A. Yorio (Eds.), *On TESOL'77*. Washington D.C.: TESOL.

Tarone, E. (1980). Communication strategies, foreigner talk, and repair in interlanguage. *Language Learning*, (30), 417-431.