

Strategies of Communication in "Amazing Thailand" Year



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One day while having a stroll in Chatuchak Weekend Market, I happened to see a tourist couple asking a Thai guy about something. The man, shaking his head, gave them an embarrassing smile and walked away quickly. The tourist couple, looking upset, shook their heads, too. This is a common scene we frequently see in any tourist attraction in Bangkok.

It goes without saying that this embarrassing situation is caused by the language barrier. As a matter of fact, that guy didn't know that he could use various ways to communicate with the tourist couple even if he had limited English. He could mime, draw a picture or even say long sentences to help make the tourists understand him. These techniques used in a conver

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sation by a speaker to compensate for his missing knowledge are called "communication strategies".

Communication Strategies Defined

Strategies of communication were first invoked by Selinker (1972) in his paper entitled 'Interlanguage' to account for certain classes of errors made by learners of a foreign language. These errors were regarded as a byproduct of the attempt to a learner to express his meaning in spontaneous speech with an inadequate grasp of the target language system. Defined in the term of language learning, communication strategies are systematic techniques employed by a speaker to express his meaning when faced with some difficulty (Corder 1978).

Difficulty in this definition is taken to refer uniquely to the speaker's inadequate command of the language used in the interaction. Sometimes communication strategies will enable the learner to fill in some gaps when he is uncertain of the correct or appropriate linguistic form. Most of the time, in a proficient speaker, communication strategies that are virtually subconscious will result in correct and unambiguous

output in the target language (Brown 1980).

In "Strategies in Interlanguage Communication", Elaine Tarone, Andrew D. Cohen and Guy Dumas (1983) identified several distinct types of communication strategies observable in interlanguages such as avoidance, paraphrase, word coinage, circumlocution, etc.

Strategies Commonly Used

1. **Transfer.** It is a type of negative transfer from the native language resulting in utterances that are not just inappropriate but actually incorrect by native standards. The speaker may substitute his native language's rules for forming the possessive ; for example, "the passport of Mr. Jack" for "Mr. Jack's passport" (พาสปอร์ตของมิสเตอร์แจ๊ค)

2. **Overgeneralization.** It is the application of a rule of the target language to inappropriate target language forms or contexts. This type of error is often found in Thai students' performance of a statement when the question-word order comes with subject-verb inversion : I don't know WHAT IS IT. (The correct sentence pattern is : I

don't know what it is.)

3. Prefabricated Pattern.

Defined by Hakuta (Brown 1980), it refers to a regular patterned segment of speech employed without the knowledge of its underlying structure, but with the knowledge as to which particular situations call for what patterns. Generally speaking, "tourist survival" is full of prefabricated patterns, most of which can be found in pocket bilingual "phrase" books which hundreds of sentences for various occasions are listed. "*How much does this cost ?*" "*Where is the toilet ?*" "*I don't speak English.*" "*I don't understand you.*" are the sorts of prefabricated patterns that one sometimes learns at the beginning of a language learning experience when the structure of the language is not known. Prefabricated patterns are sometimes the source of merriment. H. Douglas Brown (Brown 1980) revealed his experience of learning an African dialect, Kikongo. In the first few days of Kikongo learning in Africa, he tried to say, in Kikongo, "I don't know Kikongo" to those who attempted to converse with him beyond his limits; he was later embarrassed to discover that,

in the first few attempts at producing the prefabricated pattern, instead of saying "Kizeyi Kikongo ko." He said, "Kizolele Kikongo ko." (I don't like Kikongo!), which brought out reaction ranging from amusement to hostility from Kikongo listeners.

Generally speaking, prefabricated patterns like *can you*, *where's*, *what's* are useful phrases for learners to master early in the acquisition process, before the structures are really known. In other words, learners who develop the phrases like the child learning his first language are able to express functions which they can't perform from their linguistic system. In the process of storing such phrases or patterns; however, errors are often made because roteness is a factor of a lack of knowledge of the structural rules to produce the particular utterances. So, it is better for the learners to understand the underlying structure of the language they are learning.

4. Avoidance.

This type of strategy consists of various means of getting around the target language rules or forms which are not yet an established part of the learner's

competence. There are three interest in the sentence.

ing categories of avoidance :

4.1 Topic Avoidance. This of communication refers to the rewording of the message in an alternate, interesting both psychologically and acceptable target language construction. In the area of paraphrase, we may find several types of this strategy such as :

4.3.1 Word Colnage. the word that is made up by the learner in an attempt to fill out a gap in the knowledge of the target language item.

A: Did you enjoy ice-hockey ?
B: Huh ?
A: The ice-hockey -- the game played with sticks on Friday night. Did you enjoy it ?

For example, the speaker lacks the word "refrigerator", he will call it "an ice box", "airball" for "balloon".

4.2 Appeal to Authority. This strategy occurs when the learner "stucks" for a particular word or phrase and he directly asks a native speaker of the language (the authority) for verification. For example :

4.3.2 Circumlocution. the description of a word may be used when a word is unknown. For example :

The speaker lacks the word "towel".

A: When the bus came round the corner, it-er-meet and-er-a van. I can't say that. How do you say this action in English ?

A: Is there a thing you dry your hands on in the toilet ?
B: Oh, you mean the towel. Here it is

B: Collide.

4.3.3 Language Switch. a word from the mother tongue may be used when the target language word cannot be remembered :

Furthermore, the learner can also look a word or structure up in a dictionary to find the correct and appropriate word or expression to put

A: I need un couteau to cut this chicken. Un couteau .you know ?

this chicken. Un couteau ,you know ?

B: You want a knife ?

A: Certainly.

In addition, the learner must not forget a resort to paralinguistic devices, which are typically mime, gesture and sound-imitation, to appeal for help from the interlocutor for a word or expression.

A : Then the plane.. (mimes a plane taking off)

B : It took off ?

A : Yes,

It can therefore be concluded that communication strategies can solve the problems in producing utterances. Be that as it may, each type of strategies seems to be risk-taking in that it can run the danger of failure. Often do both the speaker and his interlocutor misunderstand each other and the communication breaks down. The crucial problems frequently caused by these communication strategies are errors in using the target language. However, the manipulation of these communication strategies can-

lead to achievement of second language learning; that is to say, when his interlocutor can interpret what the learner tries to convey, the learner can also develop his second language learning.

Thus, it is better for a waiter in a restaurant with limited English to say something not quite correct than to get nervous and refuse to speak to foreign customers. Errors are inevitable and indeed necessary part of the process of learning a language of the speaker who can get the feedback that enables him to learn from his errors. The most important of all, such marvels of using the communication strategies provide a precious experience for the speaker and a remedy for the people who are in the despair of attempting to communicate in a foreign tongue. So, having difficulty in speaking to foreigners in 'Amazing Thailand Year ? Why don't you try "tourist survival language" with communication strategies ?



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