

PRAGMATIC STRATEGIES USED BY THAI UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN AN ELF PERSPECTIVE: A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research aims at investigate how Thai undergraduate students communicate with interlocutors who have different L1 by using pragmatic strategies so as to reach successful communication. The 12 participants selected by using purposive and snowball sampling techniques were 8 Thai undergraduate students majoring in English and 4 foreigners, having group discussions on topics selected by the researchers. Due to the COVID-19 situation, the discussions were video recorded with their permission, and the spoken discourse was transcribed into text based on the VOICE transcription conventions (2007). A content analysis approach was used to analyze the collected data by coding and categorizing into themes and sub-themes.

The results showed that the participants employed a variety of strategies including code-switching, self-repetition, self-initiated repair, appeal for help, confirmation check, backchannel, lexical anticipation, and flow-keepers. It is concluded that pragmatic strategies should be consciously taken into account, and an awareness of using them appropriately should be raised because those pragmatic strategies cannot only solve misunderstanding problems or communicative breakdowns but also enhance successful communication in daily-basis conversations among any English users.

Keywords: ELF ; Pragmatic Strategies ; Communicative Breakdowns ; Successful Communication

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INTRODUCTION

The colonial period has influenced language usage since Europe initiated to seek for the new world, especially the British empire in 1600 - 1900 which it did not only lead to new country establishment but also native language was dominated by Europeans who use English as their mother tongue (Hickey, 2019). English has been widely used and known to communicate across the world as an official language, second language, and foreign language in a large number of countries. That is, English is considered to be used in several perspectives: English as a Native Language (ENL), English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language or English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). Crystal (2003) revealed that for international communication, it might be inevitable to choose English as the center language to achieve the conversation between a non-native English speaker and a native English speaker so as to avoid misunderstandings. Similarly, Ren (2016) demonstrated that ELF refers to the English usage as the communicative medium of choice in an interaction which is not overshadowed by native English speakers. Thailand has never been colonized by the British empire or any other powerful countries, more importantly, English is used for reasons such as academic purposes, and everyday-life conversations, political issues and tourism industry etc. (Baker, 2012). Therefore, English used in Thailand is reasonably categorized into ELF undeniably.

This investigation explores to what extent Thai undergraduate students majoring in English who are credited to use English frequently in life made use of their English and produced distinctive features of English in an ELF perspective. There must be a bunch of factors affecting or enhancing successful ELF communication, and one of significant features is

the use of pragmatic strategies in authentic communicative situations (e.g. Cogo, 2010; Cogo and Dewey, 2012; Cogo and Pitzl, 2016; Deterding, 2013; Cogo & House, 2017; Mauranen, 2006). Pragmatic strategies are used to both prevent and/or solve problems in ELF communicative interactions. More than that, not only to reach mutual understanding among all parties involved, the use of pragmatic strategies leads satisfaction as well as intimacy building and maintaining good relationships among them (Kotarpuh, 2020). Therefore, this study was designed to reveal pragmatic strategies hidden employed in the naturally-occurring English spoken discourse in an ELF perspective between Thais and multicultural-background interlocutors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to the purpose of the research to identify pragmatic strategies use naturally in the current pandemic, this dissertation thus applied purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques to select the participants. The study took place at a university in a northeastern part of Thailand. Therefore, the participants consisted of 12 participants who were willing to take part in this research: 8 Thai undergraduate students majoring in English and 4 foreigners from China, Germany, Italy, and New Zealand. Additionally, only the Thais' use of the strategies was the focus in this study because they had to be interviewed after the conversations, meanwhile the foreigners were not convenient to be conducted due to the different time zones.

The participants were divided into 2 groups (A and B). Thai participants were randomly divided, while the foreign participants were grouped according to the time zones that were closed to each other as follows: Group A: 4 Thai students, a German and an Italian

Group B: 4 Thai students, a Chinese and New Zealander

In a data collection phase, the researchers had provided interesting topics to all the non-Thai participants to communicate with all the Thai participants in order to find any use of pragmatic strategies while having the discussions. The topics discussed were about food, music, and dream destinations.

A group discussion method was implied as the main research instrument. Each of the group had a group discussion on selected topics, and later the 2 groups were gathered to have the last conversation on different topics. Later, in order to obtain the exact participants' purposes of using particular pragmatic strategies, a follow-up interview was conducted as an additional tool interviewing after the end of the conversations to confirm their intention of the strategy use.

The data collection process was set up through an online video conference because the participants stayed in different areas and/or countries. The video recording were made with all of the participants' permission through the consent form. The VOICE Transcription Convention (2007) was applied in the text transcription process so as to code and categorize all the data into themes.

The content analysis approach was applied in this qualitative research to analyze the data. Also, a deductive approach was adopted to aggregate and code the pragmatic strategies found. In addition, categorizing pragmatic strategies was based on previous research studies of Ollinger (2012) and Kotarpuh (2020) in terms of pragmatic strategies use in English communication divided into two themes: preventing and enhancing successful communication.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The findings demonstrated 8 pragmatic strategies used by the Thai undergraduate students including code-switching, self-repetition, self-initiated repair, appeal for help, confirmation check, backchannel, lexical anticipation, and flow-keepers while conversing with different linguistic and cultural background interlocutors in authentic and natural conversations. Samples of the findings are illustrated as follows.

Extract 1: code-switching

P7: thank you Rebecca. What about other
<L1th>Nong Nong</L1th>?

P4: me to::o. Like<L1th>P' KJ</L1th>
mentioned and Rebecca. K-pop right?

P7: <1> yeah </1>

FIT: <1> aha </1>

The code-switching strategy was also commonly used by participants in both Thais and Foreigners. It was observed twice in the conversation demonstrated in the above extract. P7 switches language into Thai by using the word “Nong Nong” which means “you guys” in English in order to ask about other Thai participants' opinions. The code-switching strategy also appeared in the next line “P'KJ” in Thai to mention to the previous speaker. P4 kept saying English but switched into, “P” which meant an older brother or older sister in English. This situation implied that the speakers P7 and P4 used the switching words based on their own cultural background. The conversation, however, kept going smoothly because FIT also responded to their utterances without confusion.

Extract 2: self-repetition

P7: uh. these days, and I really recommend you guys to try (.) e:r (.) what's it called? Bulkoki? **BULKOKI BULKOKI**, i think it's kind of like pork with rice or something.

The conversation talking about dream destination demonstrated the use of self-repetition strategy. It was to repeat the same word or phrase to preempt misunderstanding. P7 explained and repeated the word “BulkokiBolkoki” to her interlocutors thinking that if the interlocutors could not hear that word clearly.

Extract 3: self-initiated repair

FNZ: what is your favorite food? So (.) would somebody like to start and tell me? what food do they enjoy?

P2: hi. u:h (1) u:m (.) beingnow my favorite food is so many (2) **i can i can i could** not choose one but (1) I have one dish that all time my favorite (.) it is it is SOMTAM (2) uh i guess i guess that I am northeastern person from Isan and (.) i loving to eat Somtam you know? **how to** (.) uh **how us how being us** being Isan person, enjoying eating uh raw papaya eating e:r you know? (.) fish fish sauce **fermet fermented** fish sauce fish fish sauce er:m enjoying to eat like shrimp (.) crab that put inside that mix that mix together with somtam.

The self-initiated repair strategy was one of the frequently used one discovered in this study. In extract 3, firstly, P2 repaired herself by changing her word from “I can” into “I could ” to provide the interlocutor a more formal word. The speaker P2 said “how to” and “how us” and then immediately fixed the utterance to “how being us, being Isan person” to make its meaning clear (line 7). Lastly, the word “fermet” was immediately corrected to be

“fermented” because “fermet” is grammatically incorrect.

Extract 4: appeal for help

P1: it's like fried chicken and (.) **how does it called?** er:m noodles in in Korean

P4: Ramyon? =

P1: =RAMYON RAMYON (.) and one dishes that it's interesting is Jajangmyeon, but (1) when i first ate it, I found it wasn't really for me, it's kinda TOO sweet.

The appeal for help strategy was used to make the discourse ongoing and avoid any misunderstandings. In extract 4, it demonstrated that P1 used an appeal for help strategy when she tried to say the “Ramyon”, but she did not exactly know that word. Therefore, she asked her friend the question, “how does it called?”. After asking her friend, she was able to continue the conversation on the topic.

Extract 5: confirmation check

P7: thank you Rebecca. What about other Nong Nong?

P4: me too. Like P’KJ mentioned and Rebecca (1)K-pop **right?** (.)

P7: <1> yeah </1>

FIT: <1> aha </1>

The extract 5 showed the participants’ use of the confirmation check strategy. P4 said “right?” to make it clear in order to reassure if the information she had heard was correct. So, she use the word “right” with a rising intonation making it a question asking for a confirmation from the interlocutors.

Extract 6: backchannel

FNZ: YEAH SURE (.) i, i um when i was visiting in Thailand, (.)I remember (.) i think in Udon

Thani possibly er:m (1) and also i have been to MahaSarakhm (.)

P7: <1> uhm </1>

FNZ: <1> and </1>i guess it was a nightclub there (.) and i have uh a live band.

P7: =aha.

Extract 7: backchannel

P2: er:m (.) i mentioned that I love watching a horror movie till Taylor movie. Like you know (.) er crime crimecrime being one movie that come into my mind e:r (.) does anyone know SAW? (.) <spell> s a w</spell> SAW <1> franchise </1> the movie franchise

P1: <1> YEAH </1>

P2: i love watching that movie.

The backchannel strategy was rather frequently used by both Thai and foreign participants in the data collected. According to the two extracts above, they demonstrated that the listening participants actively listened to the speakers; the listeners responded to the speakers by using words and an explicit gesture making the conversations flowing well. In extract 6, P7 used the word “uhm” and “aha” responding to her interlocutor FNZ. Similarly, this strategy was observed when the listeners illustrated that they paid attention by answering the speakers’ questions in the extract 7 in that the participant P2 asked the listeners, “Does anyone know SAW?”, and then P1 immediately answered “YEAH” responding to the question that P2 had expressed.

Extract 8: lexical anticipation

P2: when when i (.) when i when i talk to you (1) when I talk in Music (1) i erm (.) e:r if you might, if you guys are my friends, you guys always know that i listen to Mor erm <1>Mor</1>

P1: <1> MOR LAM </1>

P2: <1> MOR LAM </1>

P2: MOR LAM (.) a type of folk song Thai Thai eastern folk song (.)

The lexical anticipation strategy was also discovered in the conversation when an interlocutor provided a word or a phrase for another interlocutor without any explicit asking for help to achieve the conversation. The extract 8 illustrated how the strategy was used during the discussion on the topic of favorite types of music.

In the extract, the lexical anticipation strategy occurred while P2 was talking to P2 on the topic of favorite music. Then, P1 immediately suggested the word “Mor Lum” to complete P2’s sentence and P2 accepted that word and repeat the phrase “Mor Lum” to complete their conversation.

Extract 9: flow-keepers

P7: i went to watch uh i forgot the name (2) Asen- Echan- Echanto Echanto? =

FIT: =Encanto.

P7: YEAH ENCANTO i cried twice **you know** (.) my mask was wet **was** kind of like soaking, so **it's kind of like** (.) i thought i can't explain and I can't use it anymore **you know** i came out of it, took it off and i just drove back to my dorm immediately **you know**, because it filled it, filled (.) with tears **you know**.

The flow-keepers strategy was used whenever speakers encountered difficulty assembling either language or content knowledge. In extract 9, the participant used the flow-keepers strategy to avoid blankness in the conversation. P7 used the phrases “kind of like” and “you know” to let their sentences flow without pauses. The structure of flow-keepers strategy seems like the self-repetition strategy, but it differs since the flow-keepers strategy is intentionally used to avoid dead air problems while the self-

repetition strategy is used to prevent misunderstanding in the conversation.

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

All the 8 pragmatic strategies employed in various communicative circumstances in this study: code-switching, self-repetition, self-initiated repair, appeal for help, confirmation check, backchannel, lexical anticipation, and flow-keepers, could be categorized into 2 themes due to the purposes of use. They were to solve the misunderstanding problems or communicative breakdowns, and to enhance successful communication.

The pragmatic strategies working on solving misunderstanding problems included code-switching, lexical anticipation and self-repetition, whereas the strategies enhancing successful communication were self-initiated repair, appeal for help, confirmation check, backchannel and flow-keepers.

For the theme of solving misunderstanding problems, the code-switching strategy was often found used in English communication, especially in an ELF perspective. Similar to Cogo's (2009) study, the code-switching strategy was considered to be an approach that was mostly used within multilingual conversations in order to achieve efficiency in sociolinguistics. In addition, the lexical anticipation strategy was found in the conversations when the interlocutors provided a word or a phrase for another predicting words to be said by another party in the conversations to achieve the conversation and to let the conversations flow continuously. This phenomenon reassured the findings in Sato, Yujobo, Okada & Ogane (2019) in that this strategy appeared when listeners helped speakers express words or phrases that could be possibly used in particular situations, and also keep the communication running smoothly and naturally. For

the last strategy categorized into this theme, the self-repetition strategy was one of common strategies employed by the Thai participants so as to prevent communication breakdowns expected by the speakers even though no signs from the listeners were explicitly revealed. This was similar to the findings in Kangasharji's (2002), Lichtkoppler's (2007) and Mauranen and Ranta's (2009) studies showing that the speakers repeated their previous word(s) promptly in order to assure if the interlocutor heard the expressed word(s) clearly and correctly in ELF communicative circumstances.

For the theme of enhancing successful communication where the 5 pragmatic strategies were discovered in this study, it was interesting that all of these strategies were selected unconsciously aiming at showing solidarity and unity among the interlocutors in ELF communication. To start with the self-initiated repair, it was to support the previous research revealed by Cogo and House (2017) in that it was used with the speakers' consciousness that the participants recognized the incorrectly grammatical words or sentences or even word choices; they immediately fixed and changed them so as to make sure that they could prevent misunderstanding before it took place eventually in the conversations. Moreover, the study of Kongsom, (2009) demonstrated that the appeal for help strategy was used among interlocutors to achieve the conversation while they were expressing to make the discourse run smoothly. In this investigation, it was used by the particular participants asking other interlocutors to assist their conversational flow and approach appropriate expressions which should be said in the conversations. Moving onto the confirmation check strategy, Mauranen (2006) initially released the use of this strategy in ELF. The present investigation also confirmed that ELF users employed this strategy used in their conversations. This strategy

was used to make a confirmation if the listeners obviously understood the previous words, phrases as well as sentences expressed by the speakers correctly based on the speakers' intentions so as to avoid misunderstanding. Another more frequently used strategy found in a spoken discourse is a backchannel strategy. In Lee's (2020) study, the backchannel strategy was an immediate latching and overlapping with the main speaker, signifying active and enthusiastic participation in the conversation. This phenomenon also appeared in this study in that the participants frequently used it in the conversations in order to keep their conversations flow naturally. Besides, the participants could express positive attitudes, supportiveness and essentials for good communication by explicitly applying the backchannel strategy in their conversations. For the last strategy in the theme of enhancing successful communication, the flow-keepers strategy was found useful in ELF communicative situations as could be seen in this investigation. It was also to support Ollinger's (2012) study in that the speakers tried to avoid the dead air to happen in the conversations; therefore, this strategy was chosen to fill in the situations. Although this strategy seemed to be similar to the self-repetition strategy, the speakers intentionally kept repeating particular words and/or phrases to make the conversation continue without silence; the words or phrases had no additional meaning or focus, but it was used to by the time conversing natural conversations. In conclusion, there were 2 principal purposes of pragmatic strategy use by the ELF users revealed in this study: To solve the misunderstanding problems or communicative breakdowns and to enhance successful communication that occurs in the conversations among the interlocutors. The most common used strategies were "flow-keepers" and "backchannel" - both of which were in the same

category which was to enhance successful understanding strategies. In other words, it can be seen that the strategies to solve misunderstanding problems were infrequently used comparing to another one. However, to conduct the conversations smoothly and successfully, the strategies to enhance successful understanding were more frequently used instead. It can be confirmed from these results of this study that all the 8 strategies were discovered as mentioned above. Moreover, in order to support the research in this field and raise awareness for English language users to communicate successfully, it is better to educate people to realize the functions and usage of these strategies. The employment of a particular strategy in various situations depends on particular contexts, and it is critical for English language users to consider employing appropriate strategies to suit communicative purposes leading to effective and successful communication.

SUGGESTIONS

Due to the limitation of time conducting this research as well as the COVID-19 pandemic situation, the number and a variety of the participants were limited. This reflected in the adjustment of sampling techniques eventually resulting in the changing target groups into a smaller number of the participants.

Furthermore, there are more interesting aspects of ELF used in a Thai context to be investigated as this linguistic approach is still on the go; more and more empirical studies are needed to be discovered so as to raise an awareness of English language users around the world of how global citizens make use of English differently depending on a variety of factors as well as intentions of the use.

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