Impact of Training on Communication Strategy Use of Less Proficient English Speakers in Malaysia

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This study examined the impact of training on communication strategy used by speakers with limited English proficiency. The 13-week training involved 23 limited English proficiency speakers in a culinary course, who were taught 13 lexical, negotiation, and discourse-based communication strategies. Their speech in presentations, role plays and group discussions were recorded, and the 29,492-word data set was analysed for the use of communication strategies. The results showed 1,307 instances of use of communication strategies. The most frequently used strategy was fillers (145.1 ptw), followed by lexical repetition (107.4 ptw) and response utterance (99.4 ptw). Discourse-based strategies were used more frequently than lexical and negotiation strategies, and the most often used was lexical repetition which is a versatile strategy for facilitating transfer of key information for conversational maintenance. Interactions (431.5 ptw) were more linguistically and cognitively challenging, calling more communication strategies into use than presentations (210.5 ptw). The findings suggest the necessity for communication strategies training to help speakers with limited English proficiency expand their repertoire of strategies and facilitate communication.

Keywords: strategic competence, communication strategies, English Proficiency, fillers, lexical repetition

INTRODUCTION

In second and foreign language learning, learners take time to develop communicative competence which consists of grammatical competence,

sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). As many second and foreign language learners find it hard to achieve grammatical competence, it may be more worthwhile to focus on helping them to develop strategic competence. Canale and Swain (1980, p. 30) conceptualised strategic competence as consisting of "verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient [grammatical and sociolinguistic] competence". Examples of communication strategies are language switch, word coinage, restructuring, and asking for help.

Communication strategies can be categorised into linguistic (e.g., restructuring, word coinage, substitution, paraphrasing), behavioural (e.g., mime, gesture), and cooperative strategies (e.g., direct or indirect appeal for help). Studies have shown that less proficient language learners tend to use linguistic strategies for short-term conversational repair. For example, university students with intermediate English proficiency in Paramasivam's (2009) study relied on language switch and literal translation to deal with breakdowns when communicating in English. Other strategies that foreign language learners used were paraphrasing and self-repetition (Derwing & Rossiter, 2002). Second language learners of Arabic in Saudi Arabia also frequently used paraphrasing, restructuring, fillers and repetition when interacting in role-plays and interviews on everyday topics involving concrete language (Rabab'ah & Bulut, 2007). For the English majors in Wang, Lai, and Leslie's (2015) study, substitution, approximation, literal translation, circumlocution, and exemplification accounted for 76.16% of 902 instances of strategy usage.

Some recent research has indicated that proficient speakers put communication strategies to good use to enhance the clarity of communication. Azar and Mohammadzadeh (2013) found that the Iranian EFL teachers reported more frequent use of discourse-based strategies than lexically-based achievement strategies to transfer the key information and emphasised important topics in class. In another study, Zhu, Liao, and Cheong (2019) found that the high-performing students used the clarification strategy significantly more frequently than the medium-performing students, but it was not a significant predictor of task performance in the group discussion. Clarification is a negotiation strategy which involves the joint effort between

interlocutors to agree on a shared meaning. These findings suggest that the "better" strategies that are used by proficient speakers should be taught to less proficient speakers.

Less proficient learners can benefit from communication strategy training. In a study conducted on Taiwanese EFL college students, Tsai (2018) found that in terms of their speaking anxiety and strategy use, the lower-proficiency group responded better to the communication strategy training than the intermediate and higher proficiency groups. Three strategies were taught (i.e., avoiding L1, circumlocution, and fillers), but Tsai (2018) did not report which strategies were more appropriate for training. Contradictory results were obtained by Nakatani (2010) whereby the proficient learners improved in their fluency more than the less proficient learners.

However, the teachability of communication strategies has been a controversy. Kellerman (1991) asserted that it was better to spend time teaching learners more language rather than compensatory strategies (see also Bialystok, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980), but others believed in the positive effects of training (Dörnyei, 1995; Færch & Kasper, 1983; Nakatani, 2010; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Tarone, 1984; Willems, 1987). Despite the success of some studies (e.g., Dörnyei, 1995; Nakatani, 2010; Rabab'ah, 2016), other studies have found that the communication strategy training is ineffective in helping the learners to develop strategic competence (Lam, 2006; Lam & Wong, 2000; Rossiter, 2003). Previous training studies have focussed on EFL and ESL learners (Guo, 2011).

This study examined the impact of communication strategy training on less proficient speakers in an English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) programme. The objectives of the study were to (1) examine the frequency of communication strategies used in presentations and interactions; and (2) compare the frequency of lexical, negotiation, and discourse-based communication strategies. Less proficient speakers were chosen to establish whether they could benefit from strategy training, and EOP was chosen as the context where the impact of communication strategy training can be examined in a more challenging English usage environment because of the technical subject matter.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF STUDY

The theoretical framework for this study is an integrated typology of communication strategies comprising psycholinguistic problem-solving (Færch & Kasper, 1980; 1983), and interactional (Tarone, 1980) and discourse (Clennell, 1994, 1995) frameworks.

In Færch and Kasper's (1980, 1983) psycholinguistic view, communication strategies are seen as having a compensatory role. Færch and Kasper (1980) defined communication strategies as "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal" (p. 36). To achieve the goal of overcoming a problem in communication, learners may use reduction strategies that involve change of goal and achievement strategies that involve developing an alternative plan to achieve the goal (i.e., applying interlanguage, cooperative attitudes, and non-verbal language). Functional reduction strategies may be realised as topic avoidance, message abandonment, and meaning replacement, while examples of verbal behaviours that realise achievement strategies are code-switching, intra/interlingual transfer, interlanguage-based strategies (e.g., generalisation, paraphrasing, word coinage, restructuring), cooperative strategies (including appeals), and non-linguistic strategies such as mime, gesture, and sound imitation (Færch & Kasper, 1980, p. 99).

In the interactional perspective on communication strategies, Tarone (1980) defined communication strategy as "a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared" (p. 419). Strategies to bridge the gap between the linguistic and semantic knowledge of two speakers include the following categories: paraphrasing (approximation, word coinage, and circumlocution), borrowing (literal translation, language switch), mime, appeal for assistance, and avoidance (topic avoidance and message abandonment). At the formal level, some of Tarone's (1981) communication strategies to negotiate meaning are similar to Færch and Kasper's (1980) although different terms are used: paraphrasing (word coinage), borrowing, appeals, mime, and avoidance. However, the difference is in the role attributed to communication strategies in achieving communicative goals.

The third perspective on communication strategies is that of Clennell (1995) where communication strategies are divided into three categories. The

first category consists of lexical strategies for conversational repair composed of Færch and Kasper's (1980) strategies and part of Tarone's (1981) strategies. The second category comprises negotiation or interaction strategies, and the three discourse strategies are clarification request, confirmation check, and comprehension check. These are used when potential breakdown in communication is detected. The third category comprises collaboration or planning strategies for facilitating information transfer strategies: topic fronting, tonicity, and lexical repetition (see Appendix 1 for definitions). In the communication strategy training conducted in this study, learners were trained to use strategies from all three categories.

In the early years of communication strategy training, the psycholinguistic perspective of communication strategies for problem-solving was dominant. For example, Dörnyei (1995) taught 109 Hungarian secondary school students how to use topic avoidance and replacement, circumlocution, and fillers and hesitation devices. The experimental group used more fillers after the 6-week training, resulting in a higher speech rate and increased fluency. However, the students used circumlocution minimally either because it was not common in everyday speech or the students were practising topic avoidance. In Rossiter's (2003) study, 30 international ESL students in Canada were trained to use paraphrasing (i.e., approximation, superordination, analogy, all-purpose words, and circumlocution). The experimental group used a greater range of strategies in the immediate post-test (Week 5). However, by the time of the delayed post-test (Week 10), the control group had reached almost the same range, indicating that the doubtful effectiveness of the communication strategy training.

However, in later years researchers have focussed on the interactional perspective on communication strategies. For example, in Hong Kong, Lam (2006) trained his students to use resourcing, paraphrasing, self-repetition, fillers, self-correction, asking for repetition, asking for clarification, and asking for confirmation. The training focussed on one strategy per lesson. Unfortunately, the training only increased the use of resourcing (i.e., strategic use of available words in the task instructions) but not the use of communication strategies. Similarly, Rabab'ah (2016) only succeeded in getting the experimental group to use more circumlocution and self-repair. In comparison, the increase in the number of negotiation strategies was not obvious (i.e., appeal for help, asking for repetition, clarification request,

confirmation request). Nevertheless, Nakatani (2010) managed to increase his learners' fluency through the communication strategy training. Nakatani (2010) showed that his 12-week strategy training was successful in teaching Japanese EFL learners to use achievement strategies (confirmation check, comprehension check, clarification request, shadowing, and active response).

Thus far, studies on communication strategy training have not included discourse-based strategies proposed by Clennell (1995) although researchers have found better use of discourse-based strategies among the proficient learners compared to the less proficient learners (Soekarno & Ting, 2020; Ting, Musa, & Sim, 2013; Ting & Phan, 2008). In view of the mixed results in past studies, it is important for more studies on communication strategy training to be conducted to investigate the impact of teaching different categories of strategies.

METHOD OF THE STUDY

The communication strategy training programme was underpinned by a theoretical framework that integrated the psycholinguistic, interactional, and discourse perspectives on communication strategies. The response utterance strategies, as well as tasks and staging of the training sessions, were adapted from Nakatani (2005, 2010). The task types chosen were technical presentations and interactions. Interaction tasks raise the difficulty of communication for these speakers higher compared to technical presentations for which participants could rehearse. For this reason, tasks such as reading aloud, answering questions, and describing pictures (Huang, 2016; Rossiter, 2003) were not adopted in the present study as a means to observe the participants' performance in using communication strategies. To raise the task difficulty for adult learners, other researchers also used interactive tasks such as group discussion (Zhu, Liao, & Cheong, 2019), and giving instructions and exchanging opinions (Paramasivam, 2009). In the present study, the task difficulty was even higher because of the technical content in a specialised discipline (i.e., culinary science).

Participants

The participants were 23 Year 1 students in their early twenties in a Malaysian

Skills Certificate (Culinary) programme which trained them to be kitchen assistants, chef de partie, and eventually skilled sous chefs. The name of the institution is kept anonymous in this paper. The participants had limited English proficiency, based on the results of a public examination in Malaysia (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia, translated as Malaysian Education Certificate) which students sit for at the end of their secondary school education. They obtained only a passing grade in the English subject after 11 years of learning English in school where Malay was the medium of instruction. They could speak Malay and their ethnic language (i.e., Dusun, Sino Natives, Sama'an, and Orang Sungai), but some were unable to produce comprehensible utterances in English. The trainer was the first researcher. The study was conducted in Sabah, an East Malaysian state.

Instrument

The instrument for the study was a 13-session communication strategy training programme, which incorporated communication strategies into a curriculum designed for the Malaysian Skills Certificate (Culinary) course. Table 1 shows the communication strategy taught, each session lasting 120 minutes. The practice sessions comprised dyadic interaction, individual presentation, and group discussions to suit the topic that was taught.

Each session consisted of the following stages: (1) raising learners' awareness of the strategy; (2) modelling the use of strategy; (3) giving explicit instructions on the task and use of strategy; and (4) practising strategy use. In the 15-minute awareness-raising stage, the trainer described the communication strategy (with examples), the functions of the strategy, and the way it was used in different contexts. The total amount of time for the training (i.e., 26 hours) was longer than other communication strategy training studies such as Nakatani (2005; 2010) who had 12 sessions lasting for 90 minutes each. Other researchers had fewer sessions as explained in the Introduction section (Lam, 2006; Rabab'ah, 2016; Rossiter, 2003).

Table 1
Focus of Communication Strategy Training

Session	Communication strategy taught	Topic	Task
S1	Fillers	Workplace communication	Dyadic interaction
S2	Appealing for help by asking for repetition	Directory instruction	Individual presentation
S3	Appealing for help by asking for the correct item or structure	Daily routine	Individual presentation
S4	Circumlocution	Anecdotal report	Individual presentation
S5	Approximation	Incident report	Individual presentation
S6	Restructuring	Technical report (lab/field)	Individual presentation & Dyadic interaction
S7	Tonicity	Proposal (e.g., family day)	Group discussion (not recorded)
S8	Topic fronting	Progress report	Group discussion
S9	Lexical repetition	Project report	Group discussion
S10	Confirmation check	Risk management (e.g. potential hazards)	Group discussion
S11	Comprehension check	Crisis management	Group discussion
S12	Clarification request	Negligence and Malpractice	Dyadic interaction
S13	Response utterances comprising (1) rephrasing/ shadowing and (2) offering the target item	Workplace communication	Dyadic interaction

Data Collection Procedures

During the training, the participants were asked to video-record the sessions using their mobile phones. This was less intimidating than the trainer recording the participants in action. However, the trainer was present during the video recording to ensure that the discussions were not rehearsed. Undoubtedly, the participants' use of communication strategies

may not be in a natural situation because the instructor had emphasised the practice of certain strategies. However, for the purposes of studying the effect of communication strategy training, this was inevitable.

Table 1 shows the topics and types of tasks that were video-recorded for 12 sessions during the 13 weeks of training. Only Session 7 was not video-recorded because participants were new to the subject matter and were anxious about their interactions being recorded. Although there were 13 sessions during the training, the five group discussion sessions were excluded as the focus of this paper was on the presentations and dyadic interactions. Therefore, the data were from nine sessions (5 presentations, 4 dyadic interactions).

Data Analysis Procedure

The first researcher transcribed the presentations and interactions, taking into account overlaps in speech (denoted by // in the transcripts). The transcripts also showed fillers (e.g., umm/uhh) and the rise/fall in pitch and stress (marked by / and \). Six participants assisted in verifying the accuracy of the transcripts, particularly the use of slang and other expressions which were unfamiliar to the researcher. The total word count of the transcript was 29,492 words (i.e., 10,509 words for presentations; 9,402 words for interactions; 9,581 words for discussions).

Later the transcripts were coded for communication strategies using Appendix 1 as the analysis framework. Similar to Zhu et al. (2019), reduction strategies were excluded as these do not help participants to overcome the challenges faced during the communication. Exemplifications were coded as circumlocution because examples are given to replace the target item. As for response utterances, the different forms encompassing rephrasing, shadowing and offering help were coded separately during analysis but grouped together in the presentation of results (Table 2) as these were all taught in S13.

The frequencies of the strategies were computed out of 1,000 words to facilitate comparison across the nine sets of oral data (5 presentations, 4 interactions) which had different word-counts. The calculation of communication strategies per thousand word for a particular training session was as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Frequency in which a communication strategy is used during a session}}{} \times 1000$$

Total word count for the particular session

RESULTS

In this section, the participants are referred to as P1 to P23 and the trainer as T. Sessions 1 to 13 are referred as S1 to S13.

Frequency of Communication Strategies Used

The analysis identified 1,307 instances of communication strategy usage (554 or 42.4% for presentations; 753 or 57.6% for interactions). Table 2 shows the frequency of communication strategy use per thousand words so that the basis for comparison of frequencies was the same for the five presentation and eight interaction sessions. The most frequently used strategy was fillers (145.1 ptw), followed by lexical repetition (107.4 ptw) and response utterance (99.4 ptw).

The most useful strategy was fillers, a time-gaining strategy taught in S1. The participants were taught to use formulaic expressions to buy time and maintain the conversation. Excerpt 1 shows the use of fillers by P19 ("Oh yeah," "so") and P10 ("oh well," "you know"). These fillers gave them a few extra seconds to think of what to say next before they began talking.

Excerpt 1

P19: [Oh yeah?] [So][filler] how your daily work here?
P10: [Oh well],[filler] [you know],filler daily routine for chef. [Cooking, cooking, cooking.][lexical repetition]

Session 1/Transcript P10:P19

However, when the subject matter was challenging and the participants had to think on their feet, they fell back on filled pauses ("uhh"), as shown in Excerpt 2. Because of her limited English proficiency, P10 struggled with technical terms related to the malfunction of kitchen equipment, and filled pauses made her speech sound hesitant.

Excerpt 2

[uhh] Today we will talk about equipment malfunction and personal hygiene. [uhh] for our priority [uhh] we will [uhh] we have pick equipment malfunction, [uhh] this are the reason because [uhh] this equipment can cause severe damage to us and anyone around us especially in the kitchen, for example, [umm] knife is [uhh] categorise in equipment [exemplification] [p] it is quite dangerous

because we're handling knife, especially around people in the kitchen [p] we could accidentally stab people around us or even ourself when we fall or move around.

Session 10/Transcript P10

Table 2

Frequency of Communication Strategies Used in Presentation and Interactions (in per thousand words).

Strategy	Presentation Sessions						Interaction Sessions								Grand Total
	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total	S1	S6	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12	S13	Total	
Fillers[L]	8.0	4.7	7.1	9.8	6.2	**35.8**	46.4	10.1	3.9	3.6	12.3	9.7	15.8	7.5	**109.3**	**145.1**
Lexical repetition[D]	14.2	0.6	5.0	17.7	15.9	**53.4**	2.3	7.2	5.2	5.6	10.3	4.2	10.1	9.1	**54.0**	**107.4**
Response Utterance[N]	5.6	28.2	0	1.1	0	**34.9**	4.7	4.3	5.2	4.2	0.5	1.5	15.6	28.5	**64.5**	**99.4**
Circumlocution[L]	7.4	4.1	8.4	6.0	4.4	**30.3**	1.4	5.8	0	2.0	2.0	1.2	5.0	2.8	**20.2**	**50.5**
Tonicity[D]	0.6	3.5	2.1	1.6	0.9	**8.7**	9.4	0	9.2	3.6	0.5	6.7	3.5	7.1	**39.9**	**48.7**
Clarification requests[N]	1.8	6.5	0	0.6	0	**8.9**	0.5	4.3	7.8	5.3	2.6	2.7	8.2	6.7	**38.1**	**47.0**
Confirmation checks[N]	0	4.7	0	0.3	0	**5.0**	1.9	2.9	10.5	7.0	1.5	1.5	5.4	4.0	**34.7**	**39.7**
Topic fronting[D]	2.5	1.2	0	1.6	0	**5.3**	0	0	6.5	1.7	2.0	1.2	5.4	0.8	**17.6**	**22.9**
Comprehension checks[N]	1.8	4.1	0.8	0	0	**6.7**	0	0	6.5	1.7	1.5	1.5	2.5	1.2	**14.9**	**21.6**
Restructuring[L]	1.8	0.6	0	3.0	2.6	**8.0**	0	2.9	2.6	0.6	1.0	2.4	2.2	1.2	**12.9**	**20.9**
Approximation[L]	0.6	0	3.8	2.7	1.8	**8.9**	0	2.9	0	1.4	1.5	3.3	1.2	1.6	**11.9**	**20.8**
Appeal for help[N]	0	2.4	0	0	0	**2.4**	0.9	0	0	0	0	0.3	5.2	0.8	**7.2**	**9.6**
Request repetition[N]	2.5	0	0	0	0	**2.5**	0	1.4	1.3	0	0	1.2	1.5	1.2	**6.6**	**9.1**
Total CS per session	46.8	60.6	27.2	44.4	31.8	**210.8**	67.5	41.8	58.7	36.7	35.7	37.4	81.6	72.5	**431.9**	**642.7**

Note: In the Communication Strategy column, lexical, negotiation, and discourse strategies are indicated by superscripts L, N and D

Lexical repetition is the second most frequently used communication strategy in the study. Excerpt 3 is taken from S5 transcript where the participants gave individual presentations on an incident report such as an Independence Day celebration or a market visit which was part of the service training. Here, P11 used the lexical repetition strategy a few times ("baking," "there is no," "the acting," "they do") when he described the involvement of different groups of students in the activities. The lexical repetitions enabled him to formulate what he wanted to say and move on with his presentation. He did not attempt to restructure the syntax of his utterances.

Excerpt 3

And for the, for [uhh] baking, [the baking][lexical repetition] was involve by the Culinary student, and one of the participant is, is me, and the, the theme of, [the theme

> [uhh] that time is [uhh] free,]approximation [I mean there is no,]filler [there is no]lexical repetition [uhh] *bebas*, so, [uhh] for the acting, [the acting]lexical repetition was [uhh] did by the housekeeping student, they do [uhh] [they do]lexical repetition what, about Japanese occupation, and the, the acting was [uhh] [p] rising our spirit, spirit of [p] patriotism, and other than that [uhh] the arm wrestling was [uhh] involve by [uhh] what, many student, boy, [boy student]lexical repetition and, and the //
>
> Session 5/Transcript P11

Lexical repetitions, when used with rising and falling tone, are useful for conveying different discourse functions ranging from discourse and topic maintenance, topic salience marker, appeal for assistance, and request for clarification (Clennell, 1994). Excerpt 3 shows some evidence of P11 marking the salience of "the baking" which was done by culinary students as well as "the acting" which was done by housekeeping students. The lexical repetitions here served as back-channels to indicate comprehension, which helped to maintain discourse. In interactive tasks, lexical repetition can also be used to appeal for assistance and to request clarification from interlocutors. The high frequency of lexical repetitions suggests that it might be a natural behaviour for them to use lexical repetition. However, participants need to be trained to use lexical repetition for more diverse functions such as appeal for assistance and clarification requests instead of merely discourse and topic maintenance, and topic salience marking.

Next, response utterances were the third most frequently used strategies (e.g., rephrasing/shadowing, offering assistance). Excerpt 4 shows that P17 used rephrasing and shadowing strategies in S9, where the trainer was guiding him to talk about the fee they were going to charge for the culinary family day. Initially P17 misheard the trainer's utterance "fifty" as "fifteen" but when the trainer corrected him ("one five"), he shadowed her response to show that he had heard it correctly. Excerpt 5 shows three participants also discussing the same topic using response utterances to clarify how much the bus fare cost and who could take the bus to go to a recreational park.

Excerpt 4

P17: [uhh] For this moment we going to charge them around fifty ringgit but //
Trainer: [Fifty?]shadow
P17: [Fifteen.]rephr
Trainer: Fifteen, [one five?]confm
P17: Yeah, [one five.]shadow
Trainer: Oh.

P17: But maybe if anything change, [anything change,]lex in the here we will inform.

Session 09/Transcript P17

Excerpt 5

P09: [About the transport?]clarification request
P18: [One hundred and twenty ringgit for bus fees.]reply
P05: [We will provide, yeah for all.]reply
P18: [Yeap, for all.]shadow

Session 9/Transcript P05:P18

The results showed that the training helped the less proficient speakers to learn how to use response utterances to maintain conversations by rephrasing, shadowing, and offering target items to their interlocutors.

It can be concluded that training can help less proficient speakers to learn communication strategies, particularly the use of fillers, lexical repetitions and response utterances, to assist them in reaching their communicative goals. Overall, the participants used more communication strategies for interactive tasks (431.9 ptw) than individual presentation tasks (210.8 ptw). This is because participants could rehearse for presentations, resulting in a smoother delivery, and they had lesser need for communication strategies. Impromptu interactions were more challenging because participants could not anticipate what their interlocutors might say next, and they needed to use more strategies in order to formulate their thoughts.

Comparison of Categories of Communication Strategies Used During Technical Presentations and Interactions

Table 3 shows that the participants used more lexical and discourse strategies than negotiation strategies. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between category of strategies and task type. The results showed significant differences between the categories of strategies used and the task type, X^2 (2, N = 643) = 7.13, p = .05.

The mean frequencies showed that lexical and discourse strategies were mainly used during interactions whereas negotiation strategies were mainly used during presentations. The higher frequency of negotiation strategies in individual presentations is unexpected because monologues should not require the use of negotiation strategies (i.e., response utterance, clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks, appeal for help, request repetition).

Table 3

Total and Mean Frequency of Communication Strategies Used During the 13 Training Sessions by Category (ptw)

Category	Presentation sessions		Interaction sessions	
	Total	Mean frequency	Total	Mean frequency
Lexical strategies	83.0	20.8	154.3	38.6
Negotiation strategies	60.4	10.1	166.0	3.66
Discourse strategies	67.4	22.5	111.6	37.2
Total	210.8		431.9	

Note: The mean frequency is calculated by dividing the total number of strategies (ptw) by the number of strategies in the category (lexical strategies: 4; negotiation strategies: 6; discourse strategies: 3). For specific strategies in these categories, see Table 2.

To find out the effect of the training, the frequencies of strategy use in the first and last sessions were compared by category (Table 4). Both sessions involved interactions in the form of small talk in the workplace. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between category of strategies and number of strategies at the beginning and at the end of the training. The results showed significant differences between the categories of strategies used and the training session, X^2 (2, N = 643) = 44.11, p = .01. The mean frequencies show a decrease in the use of lexical strategies (e.g., fillers, circumlocution, restructuring, approximation) and an increase in the use of negotiation and discourse strategies during the period of the training. The participants used more lexical strategies than expected in the first session of the training, but in the last session of the training, the participants used more negotiation strategies than expected. The increased use of negotiation strategies in session 13 suggests the usefulness of the training in helping less proficient speakers to use response utterances, clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks, appeal for help, and request repetition to enhance their communication. However, the training did not succeed in increasing the less proficient speakers' use of discourse strategies as the frequency was less than expected. These results are further explained next.

Table 4
Frequency of Communication Strategies at the Beginning and End of Strategy Training (ptw)

Category	Session 1	Session 13
Lexical strategies	47.8	13.1
Negotiation strategies	8.0	42.4
Discourse strategies	11.7	17.0
Total	67.5	72.5

The training successfully reduced the participants' reliance on lexical strategies (from 47.8 ptw to 13.1 ptw, Table 4). The frequency of negotiation strategies showed a five-fold increase after the training (from 8.0 ptw to 42.4 ptw, Table 4), particularly response utterances involving rephrasing, shadowing, and offering the target language item to interlocutors.

A novel aspect of the training carried out in the present study was the incorporation of discourse strategies which were absent from previous strategy training studies. However, the increase in discourse strategies was minimal (from 11.7 ptw to 17.0 ptw, Table 4). While the training heightened the use of lexical repetition, it did not have the same effect on tonicity and topic fronting (Table 2). Discourse strategies have an edge over lexical and negotiation strategies because they make use of already existing linguistic resources. Lexical repetition only involves repetition, tonicity only requires the strategic use of stress and pitch, and topic fronting merely involves announcing the subject before offering the details. Lexical repetition is useful as a stalling device for discourse maintenance and topic salience marker.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study on the positive impact of communication strategy training showed that the less proficient English speakers used more negotiation and discourse strategies at the end of the training and that their use of lexical strategies decreased. Three findings are worthy of a discussion.

Firstly, regardless of output task type, fillers were the most frequently used communication strategy, followed by lexical repetition and response utterances. Using fillers is a lexical strategy, and appropriate use of stock phrases can bridge communicative gaps and are better than filled pauses

which make the speakers sound hesitant. The use of fillers illustrates the compensatory role of communication strategies. Lexical strategies require the use of existing linguistic resources. For example, circumlocution and approximation require learners to explain the intended meaning using other words. Less proficient speakers have immense linguistic deficits, and excessive restructuring of the syntax of utterances jeopardises the fluency of their speech. The reduced reliance on lexical strategies at the end of the training indicate that the less proficient speakers were possibly using communication strategies less for solving communication problems but more for message enhancement. Other studies have shown that communication strategy training can increase the frequency of lexical strategy usage (Rabab'ah, 2016) and the variety of lexical strategies used (Rossiter, 2003). Their training did not include negotiation and discourse strategies; hence, their goal was to enable the learners to use more lexical communication strategies. However, in the present study, two other categories of communication strategies were taught and the less proficient speakers' use of strategies in these categories increased.

Secondly, the training enabled the less proficient speakers to learn how to produce lexical repetitions in different tones to achieve a variety of discourse functions, and the advantage of this communication strategy is that additional linguistic resources are not required. Lexical repetition is useful as a stalling device for discourse maintenance and as topic salience marker. In fact, without training, learners already often used lexical repetition, but these were based on their self-reports (Azar & Mohammadzadeh, 2013; Ting, Soekarno, & Lee, 2017). The literature shows that while training can increase the use of lexical repetition (partly because it is already the natural behaviour of participants), it is more important to expand the range of functions – particularly to replace stock phrases for meaning negotiation strategies. For example, "do you get what I mean?" (comprehension check), "can you explain that again?" or "I didn't catch you?" (clarification request), and "let me get this right, are you saying that …" (confirmation check). With a skilful use of rising and falling tone, the same meanings can be conveyed through lexical repetition, circumventing the need to use stock phrases, which can be difficult for less proficient learners to master. Besides lexical repetition, the other important discourse strategy to include in strategy training is tonicity, and it is easier to learn to use stress and pitch than

topic fronting which involves manipulation of the syntax of utterances. By using negotiation strategies, the clarity of meanings in interactions can be enhanced particularly in interactions.

Thirdly, it was difficult for the less proficient speakers to learn negotiation strategies, particularly clarification request, confirmation check, and comprehension check as these strategies were seldom used during the duration of the training. It is possible that metacognitive awareness is required to monitor how the exchange of meaning is going and to step in with strategies to ensure that meanings continue to be shared among the interlocutors. Past research using transcript analysis (Zhu et al., 2019) found that high-performing students used clarification requests more frequently than medium-performing students, indicating that negotiation strategies is a mark of more proficient learners. With training, participants can learn negotiation strategies as shown by Nakatani (2005), but there have been contradicting results (Rabab'ah, 2016). Lam and Wong (2000) reported that the Hong Kong students used more negotiation strategies after the training, albeit ineffectively. In other words, frequency alone is not sufficient to measure the effectiveness of strategy training, and qualitative analysis needs to be employed to verify whether the negotiation strategies enhance meaning making.

The study showed that communication strategy training can expand the less proficient English speakers' range of strategies and introduce them to discourse strategies that do not require additional linguistic resources. Conscious attention to a communication strategy may lead to more frequent use of the strategies (Bøhn & Myklevold, 2018). Awareness of a variety of strategies is only the beginning; learners need to have adequate opportunities for specific focused practice for "the transfer of the new strategies to new tasks" to take place (Dörnyei, 1995, p.65). Some researchers (Lam, 2006; Lam & Wong, 2000) have reported unsatisfactory outcomes of communication strategy training. From the literature, it is clear that most studies allocated one strategy per session for the training, but this is not adequate. The limited time for speaking practice does not allow automatisation of communication strategy use (Rossiter, 2003). A longer duration of training may produce greater impact in terms of automatisation of communication strategy use but most studies seemed to have been constrained by a 14-week semester. In view of the time constraint and findings on strategies used by proficient

speakers, it is suggested that the training focus on lexical strategies (e.g., fillers, circumlocution) for conversational repair and discourse strategies (e.g., lexical repetition, tonicity) for meaning enhancement. However, as research (Lam & Wong, 2000; Rabab'ah, 2016; Zhu et al., 2019) has indicated the difficulty of training learners to use negotiation strategies, further research is needed to uncover better approaches of teaching learners to have metacognitive awareness of their communication and to use these collaborative strategies to improve their meaning-making and fluency.

DECLARATIONS

Availability of data and materials

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

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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APPENDIX 1
Definition of Communication Strategies

Strategy	Description	Example
1. Fillers	The speaker uses time gaining strategies – fillers etc. to think and to keep the communication channel open.	Actually what I'm trying to say is
2. Asking for repetition	The speaker asks for repetition to show that s/he did not hear or understand an utterance, sometimes by using a questioning tone.	P17: uhh. For this moment we going to charge them around fifty ringgit but T: Fifty? P17: Fifteen.
3. Appeal for help	The speaker asks for the correct item or structure.	Can I ask you something? How do you say X?
4. Circumlocution	The speaker describes characteristics or elements of the object or action instead of using the appropriate target language structure.	Uhh, the, the, the movie one, the, the, English show
5. Approximation	The speaker uses an alternative expression that had semantic features similar to those of the intended term.	So you wear the suitable, uhh, footwear, it will, umm
6. Restructuring	The speaker restructures the syntax of an utterance.	So is it really, do you need to utilise the one hour for "Finding the difference"?
7. Tonicity	The speaker uses stress and pitch to mark key information or to differentiate given from new information.	Oh, the CHEAPEST because we are student, so it's uhh, maybe it's the CHEAPEST for …
8. Topic fronting	The speaker makes use of subject plus predicate syntactic structure to parcel up information to emphasise the topic.	Then our venue, we will do it at Ascot Academy, umm, if we can use the venue here.

9. Lexical repetition	The speaker repeats words or phrases with a system of tones for discourse and topic maintenance, topic salience marker, appeal for assistance, request for clarification and to indicate comprehension.	But maybe if anything change, anything change, in the here we will inform.
10. Confirmation check	The speaker queries to affirm he has understood something correctly which sometimes include repeated words or phrases.	But I put a salt, so the food becomes salty, so, it was a, very bad for serve the food, right?
11. Comprehension check	The speaker queries to see if the listener has understood correctly which sometimes include repeated words or phrases.	The Borneo Battle of the Band is to identify talent in Sabah, Sarawak, Brunei or Sumatera Indonesia. Alright?
12. Clarification request	The speaker asks for an explanation when the speaker does not entirely comprehend something which sometimes include repeated words or phrases.	What do you mean, madam? Effect, you mean?
13. Response utterance: - Rephrasing/ Shadowing	The speaker uses the exact, partial or expanded repetitions of the interlocutor's preceding utterance in order to show the listener's understanding of important issues.	Yeah, one five.
14. Response utterance: offering target item	The speaker offers the target item to the interlocutor.	No, we just approximate about the time.