

Communication Strategies in Text-Based Interaction between NNS & NNS

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This study investigates the use of communication strategies by Korean and Japanese learners of English in terms of the type, the frequency and the distribution pattern. The chatting data produced by Korean and Japanese students who participated in the Korea-Waseda Cross-Cultural Distance Learning Program (KWCCDL) were analyzed based on the Tarone's typology of communication strategies. The result shows that both Korean and Japanese student used communication strategies with similar distribution pattern, but Korean students used them more often than Japanese students. Furthermore, Korean juniors and seniors used communication strategies more diversely and evenly than freshmen, and also Japanese students who interacted with Korean juniors and seniors showed more diverse use of communication strategies.

1. Introduction

As English comes to be used as a global language, the communication between non-native speakers (NNS) is getting more attention. In the NNS-NNS interactions, one of the most important competences is the ability to use communication strategies (CS), which refer to the strategies used to overcome communication breakdowns caused by the insufficient competence. Because not only NNSs don't have enough knowledge about target language itself but also they have different socio-cultural backgrounds, many problems are expected to occur in the communication and the ways of solving the problems must be different depending on individuals and culture as well. Thus, an aim of this research is to see how communication strategies were used in the computer mediated chatting of Korean and Japanese learners of English.

2. Theoretical background of the study

According to Tarone (1981), communication strategy is a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures are not shared. The earliest study in this field is taxonomic approach by Tarone (1977; 1981). Her methodology has served a basis for subsequent studies of communication strategies, resulting in further typologies. (Bialystok 1990). She suggested CS typology based on output differences in the task-based interaction between native speakers (NS) and NNSs. Her typology consists of 5 types of CS, which are avoidance, paraphrase,

conscious transfer, appeal for assistance, and mime, and the first three CSs have some subcategories: topic avoidance and message abandonment for avoidance, approximation, word coinage, and circumlocution for paraphrase, and literal translation and language switch for conscious transfer.

Tarone & Yule (1987) is one of few research conducted on both the NNS-NNS interactions and the NS-NS interaction based on Tarone's typology. They investigated the use of CSs employed by South American and Asian speakers of English as a second language, as well as by native English speakers in referential task. In each session, two subjects participated, who are consist of South American and Asian pairs or native speakers pairs, and one was asked to describe a set of visual stimuli, and the other was asked to choose what has been described by the speaker among some choices. The result shows that a number of the CSs already noted in the NS-NNS interaction also occurred in this NNS-NNS interactions using English: circumlocution, approximation, avoidance, message abandonment, mime and literal translation. Especially, circumlocution and approximation occurred with high frequency. Topic avoidance and message abandonment were attempted by a few subjects, but they occurred relatively infrequently. The CS of mime seemed to be used fairly frequently because usually mime is considered to replace a desired structure or item. Some literal translation was observed in the production by Spanish speakers. It assumed that they thought the speaker's native language (Spanish) and the target language (English) are similar enough in structure so that literal translation from the native language was considered to make sense by them. Two strategies did not occur: language switch and appeal to authority. It shows the speaker probably didn't assume that the hearer knows the speaker's native language, and also has either the information or the language to respond. This is one major difference of this study from the previous studies which examined NS & NNS interaction. Three CSs not previously noted in the literature were observed in this study: repetition, explication and over-explicitness. Tarone and Yule assumed that all these three strategies were observed because both the speaker and the listener are NNSs so sometimes the speaker need time to think or they have to estimate how much the listener know of the language being used. They also observed that NNS seemed to be careful not to use culturally based information which their NNS listeners could not be expected to know, but were willing to use culturally based information which their listeners were likely to be familiar with.

Another research on CS types and distribution pattern is Bialystok (1990). She investigated the CSs employed by children and adult second language learners in referential communication, and compared the range and distribution of CS use by them. In her experiment, 9-year-old English speaking girls, 17-year-old English speaking students and adults in a civil service training program participated, all of whom were learning French as a second language. They were asked to describe a complex picture and to reconstruct it out of the component part or to select the card describing the same

objects. The result shows that the overall distributions produced by children, students, and adults were similar. That is, circumlocution strategy was used most frequently, approximation was next and the other strategies were not nearly used. The use of strategies by children is more similar with the 17-year-old students' use. And also the frequency of approximation increased and that of circumlocution decreased as the subjects' age increases. This research has been a model of the distribution patterns study, and used to compare with other research with different subjects in different tasks.

3. The purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to examine what types of communication strategy with what distribution pattern and frequency Korean and Japanese learners of English use in the computer mediated chatting, and to consider how they reflect cultural background, and how different they are from the results of the previous researches. The research questions are as follows: i) what types of CS and distribution of frequency are found in the NNSs' computer mediated interaction? ii) how different is the distribution pattern of Korean freshmen from those of juniors and seniors and what distribution patterns do their Japanese partners show? iii) what differences are found between Korean learners' use of CS and Japanese learners' in terms of the type and the distribution pattern?

4. The study

4.1 Participants and method

30 non-native Korean and Japanese university students participating in the Cross-Cultural Distance Learning (CCDL) program were examined. Data were collected over 4 months in the fall semester of 2002 and spring semester of 2003. In Korean side, 5 pairs of them are freshmen and 10 pairs of them are juniors and seniors. 25 chatting data from the 5 pairs and 30 chatting data from the 10 pairs were analyzed.

5. Results & Discussion

5.1 NNSs' use of communication strategies in computer mediated chatting (CMC)

When Korean and Japanese non-native speakers of English have troubles in their computer-based communication with interlocutors, they tend to solve problems mostly by paraphrasing messages (54.9%), as shown in table 1. This indicates NNSs overcome communication problems by rewording the messages in alternate language construction or language items. The fact that the result is very similar with that found in the face-to-face communication between NS & NNS (Bialystok, 1990) means paraphrasing is a universal way of solving communication problems.

Table 1. NNSs' use of communication strategies

	avoidance		Paraphrase			conscious transfer		appeal for assistance	mime	total
N (%)	43 (22.3)		106 (54.9)			29 (15)		11 (5.7)	4 (2.1)	193 (100)
	TA	MA	AP	WC	CI	LT	LS			
N (%)	27 (14)	16 (8.3)	48 (24.9)	N/A (0)	58 (30)	6 (3.1)	23 (11.9)			

What is noticeable in table 1 is the high frequency of avoidance strategies (22.3%) next to paraphrase in CMC, which is the unexpected result. The reason for the high frequency of avoidance strategies can be explained by three factors: lack of language knowledge, topic difficulty, and the communication mode. Not surprisingly, NNSs' lack of language knowledge leads NNSs to produce a lot of ungrammatical expressions or inappropriate words. When NNSs have communicational problems due to lack of language knowledge, they usually avoid topics and abandon delivering further messages. Topic introduced into conversation also can be an obstacle for the NNSs. Topics that are difficult to deal with demand NNS conversationalists to use more specific expressions and make NNSs avoid those topics in advance. Besides, the communication mode, CMC, leads participants to have difficulty in responding immediately to the interlocutors and thus interlocutors come to have difficulties in deciding when to initiate a new topic and when to respond properly.

While as whole NNSs paraphrased and avoid topics the most in their solving communication problems, conscious transfer, especially language switch (11.9%) is another way of overcoming communication problems. For example, Korean NNSs use Korean, 'gochujang' for 'red pepper paste', and Japanese NNSs use their native language, 'tsuyu' for 'rainy season'. This tells that when NNSs have problems employing proper words or expression, they easily depend on their mother languages and inserted corresponding mother languages in their L2 communication.

5.2 Communication strategies – Korean vs. Japanese NNSs

All non-native speakers in this study employ circumlocution, approximation, topic avoidance, language switch, message abandonment, literal translation, and mime in their frequency order. Then are there any difference between the CSs used by Japanese non-native speakers and Korean non-native speakers?

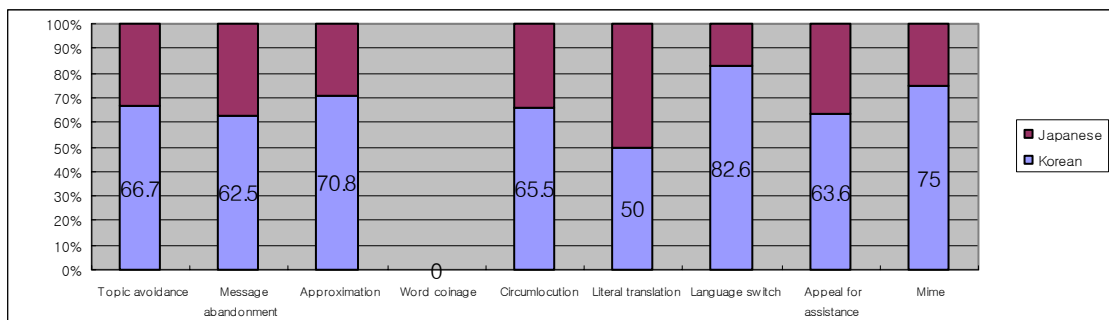
Table 2. Korean and Japanese NNSs' use of communication strategies

	avoidance		Paraphrase			conscious transfer		appeal for assistance	mime	total
Korean n (%)	28(21.2)		72(54.5)			22(16.7)		7 (5.3%)	3 (2.3)	132 (100)
Japanese n (%)	15(24.6)		34(55.7)			7(11.5)		4 (6.6)	1 (1.6)	61 (100)
	TA	MA	AP	WC	CI	LT	LS			
Korean n (%)	18 (13.6)	10 (9.8)	14 (22.9)	N/A	38 (28.8)	2 (2.3)	19 (14.4)			
Japanese n (%)	9 (14.8)	6 (9.8)	14 (22.9)	N/A	20 (32.8)	3 (4.9)	4 (6.6)			

Table 2 shows Korean and Japanese are similar in the overall distribution of communicational strategies: paraphrase > avoidance > conscious transfer > appeal for assistance > mime. And both non-native speakers used circumlocution (Korean: 28.8%, Japanese: 32.8%) and approximation (Korean: 22.9%, Japanese: 22.9%) most often.

However, there is a slight difference in their proportional number of specific CSs as illustrated in Figure1. Korean non-native speakers used all CSs more often and variously than Japanese non-native did. This indicates that Korean non-native speakers had more chances to use CSs and put more efforts to overcome the communication problems.

Figure 1. The proportional rates of CS used by Korean vs. Japanese.



5.3 Communication strategies used by different years

The participants in the present study are freshmen, juniors and seniors. The freshmen are regarded as non-native speakers who are less exposed to English than juniors and seniors. Therefore, the CSs used by difference school year and their corresponding Japanese interlocutors are noteworthy.

5.3.1 1st year students vs. 3rd & 4th year Korean students

Table 3 shows freshmen students use circumlocution > approximation > topic avoidance > language switch > message abandonment, appeal for assistance & literal translation, while juniors and seniors used approximation > circumlocution > language switch > topic avoidance > message abandonment > appeal for assistance > mime > literal translation. The frequency number in table 3 tells senior students as English learners who are more accustomed to use English used strategies more diversely and evenly than freshmen did. This result indicates that, though it is difficult to postulate that the seniors are more proficient learners of English in this study, the learners who seems to be more exposed to target language longer employ strategies more often to solve communicational problems.

Table 3. CS used by Korean NNSs of freshmen vs. juniors and seniors

	avoidance		paraphrase			conscious transfer		appeal for assistance	mime	total
freshmen n (%)	8 (18.6)		29(67.5)			5(11.6)		1 (2.3)	N/A (0)	122 (100)
Senior & Juniors n (%)	20(22.5)		43(48.3)			17(19.1)		6 (6.7)	3 (3.4)	89 (100)
	TA	MA	AP	WC	CI	LT	LS			
freshmen n (%)	N/A (0)	41 (19)	6 (28.6)	N/A (0)	11 (52.4)	N/A (0)	N/A (0)			
Senior & Juniors n (%)	91 (22.5)	2 (5)	82 (24.7)	N/A (0)	21 (23.6)	2 (2.2)	15 (16.9)			

5.3.2 Japanese students' use of CS

Table 4 shows the CSs used by Japanese interlocutors of Korean non-native speakers. Since it was impossible to get information about the year to which Japanese students belong, they were categorized just as interlocutors of Korean students with different school year.

Table 4 shows Japanese students chatting with the 3rd and 4th year Korean students used all strategies more diversely than those who had chat with freshmen Korean. This means that more experienced language learners encourage their conversation partners to be involved in interaction.

Table 4. CS used by Japanese partners of 1st year vs. 3rd & 4th year students.

	avoidance		paraphrase			conscious transfer		appeal for assistance	mime	total
freshmen n (%)	4(19)		17(71.9)			N/A(0)		N/A(0)	N/A(0)	21 (100)
Senior & Juniors n (%)	11(27.5)		17(42.5)			7(17.5)		4 (10)	1 (2.5)	40 (100)
	TA	MA	AP	WC	CI	LT	LS			
freshmen n (%)	N/A (0)	4 (19)	6 (28.6)	N/A (0)	11 (52.4)	N/A (0)	N/A (0)			
Senior & Juniors n (%)	9 (22.5)	2 (5)	8 (20)	N/A (0)	9 (22.5)	3 (7.5)	45 (10)			

6. Conclusion

NNS, whether they are Korean or Japanese, showed similar patterns in their use of CSs. They usually resolve communication problems by employing paraphrase. When learners have difficulties in continuing their conversation, they substitute words into more accurate vocabularies or items which share enough semantic features, or they describe the characteristics or elements of the objects or action instead of using the appropriate target language structure. This finding is same with that found in face-to-face communication. However, as the computer-based communication impedes interlocutors to respond as immediately as face-to-face communication, avoidance strategies were high in frequency. Though the overall pattern of CSs are turned out similar in both non-native speakers, Korean students used CSs more often than Japanese students. Among Korean students, the 3rd and 4th year students and their Japanese interlocutors used strategies more diversely and often than 1st year students and their partners.

These findings show that in EFL situation, communication with NNSs with different linguistic and cultural background provides learners with chances to use CSs in natural interaction, and to develop learners' communicative competence. As pedagogical implication, more active strategies such as approximation and circumlocution, and strategies that make students use more linguistics expression should be encouraged.

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