English Language Teaching; Vol. 15, No. 10; 2022
ISSN 1916-4742 E-ISSN 1916-4750
Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education

Use of Communication Strategies in Oral Interactions: (In)effectiveness of CLT Approach in L2 Teaching

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Received: August 15, 2022 Accepted: September 26, 2022 Online Published: September 28, 2022

doi: 10.5539/elt.v15n10p64 URL: https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v15n10p64

Abstract

Communication strategies (CS) have been generally used to overcome oral communication problems in delivering the intended messages. While studies on CS mostly involved simulated communication contexts, the current study deviates from the past studies on CS by identifying the types of CS employed by candidates of real job interviews and examining the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach adopted in Malaysian schools in English language teaching. The data were collected from observations made on oral interactions between candidates and the panelists of academic staff recruitment interviews at one public university in the east coast of Malaysia. The recorded oral data were imported into NVivo software (version 12) before the use of CS by the candidates were categorised based on CS taxonomies proposed by Dörnyei and Scott, and Clennell. The results revealed that the candidates employed various types of CS with fillers and self-repetitions being the most frequently employed strategies while the two least employed strategies were asking for clarification and guessing. While the results showed extensive use of CS in the interactions, the high frequency use of fillers as a time-gaining strategy might reflect that the speakers lacked competency in conveying their messages. Additionally, too much use of fillers might not be favoured by the interlocutors since the strategy could occur unpredictably. The findings indicate that CLT approach has not been effective in enhancing English language competency among L2 learners. Considering this, intervention measures to improve the current situation by looking at the root problems in the implementation of CLT are needed if the government decides to retain this teaching approach in Malaysian schools.

Keywords: communication strategies, communicative language teaching approach, ESL speakers, oral communication, real job interviews

1. Introduction

1.1 Introducing the Problem

It is a well-known fact that English is broadly used not solely in its native countries but also in globalized traits. Improving communication skills in English would be an advantage to speakers of English, regardless it being the first or second language, as in Malaysia. However, speaking in English can be a challenge to many, particularly in high stake interactions such as job interviews. In this regard, many prospective employers reported that Malaysian graduates lack the skills to communicate their knowledge particularly in the English. This is seen as the main reason for low employability rates among Malaysian graduates (Seetha et al., 2020). This is worrying since candidates who possess limited English oral communication skills, may miss an opportunity to be hired (Siti et al., 2019). This is supported by Ting et al. (2017) whose study reported that excessive unemployment rate is regularly caused by the speakers' low use of the English language and poor communication skills.

In addressing the above problem, numerous studies have been conducted to examine speakers' competency in oral communication, particularly in using the English language in various communication contexts. Many of these studies focused on communication strategies (CS); the notion firstly introduced by Selinker (1972) using the term "strategy of communication" which was concerned with the linguistic aspects of the psychology of second language learning. According to Selinker (1972: 217), there are five processes that are central to second

language (L2) learning; overgeneralization, language transfer, transfer-of-training, strategies of second-language learning and strategies of second language communication. It is in the last two processes that the notion of CS was discussed.

1.2 Use of English in the Malaysian Education System

English language teaching (ELT) was first introduced in Malaysia in early nineteenth century by the British colonial government through the setting up of English medium schools. The language was used as a medium of instruction in schools for about a decade after the then Federation of Malaya gained its independence from Britain although the Malay language (Bahasa Melayu) had already been proclaimed as the national language. The language which had at first served as an official language, later took the position as second language (L2) while 'Bahasa Melayu' was strengthened as the national language. When Education Act 1961 was implemented in the country, the Malay language became the medium of instruction in schools at all levels (Abu Bakar et al., 2021). This was also the time when all schools have a common curriculum and public examinations. Later, in 1970, the National Education was implemented, resulting in the conversion of English medium schools to national schools where Malay language was not only used as the medium of instruction but learnt as a subject in both primary and secondary schools while English language retained as an important L2 subject taught in schools.

With regard to the teaching of English in Malaysia, it started with structural-situational method before it was changed to communicative approach in early 1980s when Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) became a popular approach in second language teaching. Adopted in Malaysian schools in early 1980s, the use of CLT was timely because this was the time when the Ministry of Education and the Malaysian government established the Integrated English Language Syllabus for Primary School (KBSR) by utilising communicative language education (Abu Bakar et al., 2021).

The growing concern for communication skills and ability to speak competently in English language has provided CLT a firm position in English language teaching approach in this country. This is evident when CLT was retained as the English language teaching approach in schools despite a few revamps that took place in the Malaysian school curriculum. It started in 1994 when the Integrated Primary School Curriculum was first implemented to replace the New Primary School Curriculum which was reported to be lacking in terms of learner autonomy, study skills and thinking skills (Pandian, 2002). Later in 2003, a revised version of the Integrated Primary School Curriculum took place before the introduction of the Curriculum Standards for Primary Schools in 2011. Designed to emphasize creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship across all subjects, the latest curriculum is hoped to be able to foster a responsible attitude among learners towards their own learning through exploration activities that can highlight their potential. Additionally, there are sports subjects which are intended to form balanced and well-rounded individuals (Malaysian Education Blueprint, 2013-2025).

Despite these major revamps in Malaysian school curriculum, CLT remains as the approach used in the English language teaching in the country. The government's effort in improving students' competency in the language is proven when the Ministry of Education (MOE) launched a program called "The Roadmap for English Language Education in Malaysia 2015-2025" to support Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (MEB). Particularly on the teaching of English in Malaysian schools, MEB serves as a guide for English language educators and curriculum developers in ensuring the students achieve proficiency levels aligned with Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). CEFR is an international standard evaluation framework with the main idea to produce more competent speakers of English (Norazrina et al., 2022).

1.3 Significance of the Study

The worldwide adoption of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in English language teaching in late 1970s and late 1980s in some parts of the world became an attraction to scholars and researchers to conduct studies not only on CLT but also its related notion, i.e., communicative competence which consists of four types of competencies namely grammatical, sociolinguistics, discourse and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). The fourth type of competence is made up of "knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that are recalled to compensate for communication failure due to insufficient competence in one or more components of the communicative competence" (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 30). It is this type of competency that CS is referred to in this study.

While many past studies indicated that CS were widely employed by ESL (English as a second language) speakers (Gusti et al., 2019; Kalisa, 2019; Suraprajit, 2020), it would be useful to examine whether English language teaching in this country has been effective in enhancing ESL learners' competency in using the language. For this reason, the current study is set to identify the types of CS employed by L2 speakers in

Malaysia and to examine whether CLT approach adopted in Malaysian schools has been effective in producing competent speakers of English in this country.

1.4 Literature Review

1.4.1 Communicative Approach in ESL Teaching in Malaysia

CLT approach has been adopted in Malaysian schools for decades in the teaching of English. This teaching approach aims to develop learners' communication skills by taking communicative competence as the ultimate goal of foreign language teaching (Nunan, 2000; Zhou & Niu, 2015). Being communicatively competent means the speakers possess both knowledge about the target language and knowing how to use it appropriately (Hymes, 1972). In Malaysia, the target language is the English language. Due to its emphasis on speakers' communicative competence, CLT approach has been recognized as an effective approach to increase learners' abilities to communicate in the target language competently (Savignon, 2001).

According to Agung (2022), CLT approach emphasises a meaningful and interactive communication context based on tasks or activities deemed authentic (Teh, 2021). Ideally, this teaching approach should result in language fluency and accuracy which would allow the learners to communicate in different settings and real-life situations. This is because the approach boosts learners' speaking skills (Mangaleswaran & Azlina Abdul Aziz, 2019) and allows them to connect meaningfully and make genuine communication as the focal point of language learning. Simply put, in this approach, language has double functions as both content and vehicle of interaction (Agung, 2022), making it a comprehensive approach that encompasses various teaching methods while paying attention on motivations for learning English and the needs of the learners. With increasing expectations for good communication skills in any types of communication contexts including job interviews, CLT remains relevant in the teaching of English in Malaysian schools in this country until today.

1.4.2 Past Studies on CS

Since its introduction in the early 1970s, a considerable number of studies have been conducted to identify the types of CS employed by ESL speakers in various communication contexts. Gusti et al. (2019), Kalisa (2019) and Suraprajit (2020) for instance, obtained their data from university students' oral presentation, students' learning activities and students' participation in simulated job interviews, respectively; all of which were non-real-life communication. Ugla et al. (2019) however, deviates from these studies by gaining their data from questionnaires given to university students in Malaysia in order to elicit their use of CS in the contexts given in the questionnaires.

Going beyond categorising the types of CS, some researchers tried to relate the use of CS with the speakers' L2 proficiency level such as Hanita et al. (2018), while others sought to discover the dominant types of CS in different communication contexts. Hanita et al. (2018) found that the types of CS employed differed among learners according to their L2 proficiency level. They reported that, among others, high proficient students employed message abandonment, all-purpose words, restructuring, self-repetition, self-rephrasing, and appeal for help. While many of these strategies were also employed by low proficient students, these students were also reported to employ topic avoidance, code switching and negotiation of meaning. Generally, all these studies reported a wide use of CS in L2 oral interactions which include the use of fillers, repetitions, message replacement, message abandonment, all-purpose words, circumlocution, approximation, word coinage, literal translation, code switching and appeal for help.

While there is a vast number of studies conducted to categorize the types of CS employed by ESL speakers, many of them employed simulated context of interactions aside from classroom activities. The current study deviates from these past studies by identifying the types of CS employed in real-life communication and further, examining whether CLT approach adopted in Malaysian schools has been effective in producing competent speakers of English in this country. The study is contextualized in real academic staff interviews. Based on the findings, it is hoped that measures can be taken to implement more effective teaching using CLT approach in this country. This might require revising the current ESL teaching practice in Malaysian schools in order to enhance L2 learners' competency in using the English language.

1.4.3 The Notion of Communication Strategies

As communicative competence became more prominent in the 1970s, so did CS. This has resulted in the emergence of many CS scholars such as Bialystok (1983); Clennell (1995); Faerch and Kasper (1983); Poulisse (1993); Tarone (1981) and Dörnyei and Scott (1997). Unlike Faerch and Kasper (1983) and Tarone (1981) who view CS from the psychological and interactive perspectives, respectively, Dörnyei and Scott (1997) propose a "holistic" taxonomy of CS because it is constrained neither from psycholinguistic nor interactional perspectives

of CS. The term is referred to as any intentional attempts to tackle any types of language problems that the speaker is aware of during communication (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997, p. 179). Earlier, Clennell (1995) had proposed that CS were used not only to handle various communication problems due to inadequate communicative competence but also to enhance the effectiveness of communication (Clennell, 1995). Table 1 illustrates the CS taxonomy as proposed by Dörnyei and Scott (1997) while Table 2 shows Clennell's (1995) perspective on CS.

Table 1. Dörnyei and Scott's (1997) taxonomy of CS

Categories of Dörnyei and Scott's taxonomy	Communication strategies
Direct Strategies:	
Resource deficit related strategies	Message abandonment
	Message reduction
	Message replacement
	Circumlocution
	Approximation
	Use of all-purpose words
	Word-coinage
	Restructuring
	Literal translation
	Foreignizing
	Code switching
	Use of similar sounding words
	Mumbling
	Omission
	Retrieval
	Mime
Own performance problem-related strategies	Self-rephrasing
	Self-repair
Other performance problem-related strategies	Other-repair
Interactional Strategies:	
Resource deficit-related strategies	Appeals for help
Own performance problem-related strategies	Comprehension check
	Own accuracy check
Other performance problem-related strategies	Asking for repetition
	Asking for clarification
	Asking for confirmation
	Guessing
	Expressing non-understanding
	Interpretive summary
	Responses
	repeat
	repair
	rephrase
	expand
	confirm
	reject
Indirect Strategies:	
Processing time-pressure related strategies	Use of fillers
	Repetitions
Own performance problem-related strategies	Verbal strategy markers
Other performance problem-related strategies	Feigning understanding

(Dörnyei & Scott, 1997, p. 197)

As seen in Table 1, Dörnyei and Scott (1997) divide the major categories into three, namely direct strategies, interactional strategies, and indirect strategies, with various strategies under each category. Direct strategies help to overcome language-based problems by providing alternatives to compensate for language gap while interactional strategies involve cooperation among the participants to carry out troubleshooting exchanges to reach mutual understanding to achieve successful interactions. Meanwhile, indirect strategies are not precisely problem-solving devices but are helpful in the conveyance of meaning directly. In short, they help to prevent communication breakdowns by keeping the interaction channel open to reach mutual understanding.

Under these main CS categories, there are subcategories namely Resource deficit related strategies, Own performance problem related strategies, Other performance problem related strategies and Processing time pressure related strategies. The first strategies are employed when there is a gap in speakers' knowledge that prohibits them from successfully verbalizing their messages (e.g. message abandonment) while the second strategies occur when the speakers make corrections to their earlier utterances (e.g. self-repair). Meanwhile, the third strategies are employed when the speakers encounter some communication problems due to the interlocutors' speech (e.g., asking for repetition) and the fourth strategies are employed when the speakers need additional time to process and prepare their L2 speech. This specifically refers to the use of fillers to fill pauses, to stall, and to gain time to keep the communication channel open and maintain discourse at times of difficulty (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). According to Dörnyei and Scott (1997), there are two types of fillers namely lexicalised pause fillers and hesitation gambits. The former comes in the form of short structures such as "well", "actually", and "okay" while the latter refers to sounds such as "aaa", "erm", and "emm".

Unlike Dörnyei and Scott (1997) who stipulated the types of CS clearly under each main category, Clennell (1995) who viewed CS from a discourse-based perspective, emphasizing the pragmatic functions of CS gave only examples of CS according to their functions as stated in Table 2. He listed only a few examples of CS as he was more interested in the pragmatic functions of CS in enhancing the effectiveness of communication as seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Clennell (1995) taxonomy of CS

Categories of CS	Functions	Examples of CS
Category 1	Improvisation/Avoidance as in typical communication strategies	Circumlocution, paraphrase, word coinage
Category 2	Negotiation/Interaction as in Interactive (Modification) Strategies	Clarification Requests; Confirmation Checks
Category 3	Collaboration/Planning as in Information Transfer Strategies	Tonicity, Repetitions, Topic Fronting

(Clennell, 1995, p. 10)

Referring to Table 2, the first function, Improvisation refers to "those self-directed adjustments to a conversation where the pragmatic intention is to overcome short-term communication difficulty" (e.g. word coinage). The second function, Negotiation refers to strategies used in negotiation between the speaker and interlocutor (e.g. clarification requests) while the third function, Collaboration involves "a mutually shared and systematic 'procedure' for facilitating information transfer". As for the third theme, Clennell focuses on three strategies which he termed as "tonicity", "lexical repetition" and "topic fronting". To sum up, Clennell provided pragmatic functions that help to enhance the effectiveness of communication.

Based on Dörnyei and Scott (1997) and Clennell's (1995) taxonomies of CS, this study defines CS as strategies used to overcome oral communication troubles rooted from inadequate knowledge as well as to facilitate and enhance the effectiveness of communication. This becomes an operational definition of CS in the current study and the two taxonomies were referred to in analysing the data.

2. Method

2.1 Participants of the Study

Using convenience sampling, the participants of this study were 19 Malay ESL speakers who were invited and attended academic staff recruitment interviews located at one public university in east coast Malaysia on January 31, 2021 and February 1, 2021. The interviews were conducted to select permanent and full-time part-time

academic staff for three faculties namely the Faculty of Art and Design (FSSR), the Faculty of Information Management (IM), and the Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS). Most of the respondents were fresh graduates who had learned English for 11 years in school before taking a few more English courses at university level.

Since the interviews were conducted during COVID-19 pandemic, the campus adopted both physical and online modes, following the candidates' preference. The interview panelists comprised the Rector of the campus, the Deputy Rector of Academic Affairs, and the Heads of the three faculties mentioned earlier who were all placed in a meeting room at the campus. Meanwhile, the three Deans from the respective faculties attended the interview sessions virtually from the main campus in Shah Alam, resulting in a total of eight panelists. The interviews were conducted in English.

2.3 Scope of the Study

As mentioned earlier, the current study is set to identify the types of CS employed by L2 speakers in Malaysia and to examine whether CLT approach adopted in Malaysian schools has been effective in producing competent speakers of English in this country. Driven by this purpose, the focus of the study is on the candidates' use of CS during their interactions with the interview panelists. Although the latter might also employ various types of CS, they are not included in the analysis since the study is more concerned about the candidates' performance in real job interviews after long exposure to the English language in schools using CLT approach.

2.4 Research Design

This qualitative research involves observations on oral interactions between candidates and the panelists of academic staff recruitment interviews conducted in English. Since the study is concerned about the effects of CLT approach in the teaching of English in this country, it focuses on the candidates' use of CS for two main reasons. First, the candidates are the products of CLT approach and second, CS are employed to help conveyance of intended messages which is the main emphasis of CLT approach.

2.5 Data Collection Procedures

Prior to data collection, approvals were firstly obtained from the Research Ethics Committee and the campus Rector of UiTM Kelantan. Arrangements were then made to conduct observations on the interview sessions, focusing on the use of CS by the interview candidates. The interview sessions were video-recorded in order to help the researchers in their data analysis. In total, there were eight video recordings for the 19 candidates with various numbers of candidates in each video. Out of this number, video 6 contains no interview sessions but only interactions among the panelists. Hence, it was excluded, leaving only 8 video recordings for data analysis.

2.6 Data Analysis

The main focus of data analysis was to identify the types of CS employed by candidates of real job interviews and relate the findings with the effectiveness of CLT approach in English language teaching adopted in Malaysian schools. The analysis on the video recordings was done with the help of NVivo software (version 12). Although the software did not analyse the data for the researchers, it helped them in managing the data efficiently, including allowing systematic categorizing of the types of CS according to Dörnyei and Scott (1997) and Clennell (1995).

The data analysis started by importing the video recording into the NVivo software (version 12) before the transcriptions for the utterances involving the use of CS were made. At this phase, the identified types of CS were grouped under the subcategories of CS as stipulated in Dörnyei and Scott's (1997) taxonomy (see Table 1). While doing this, the researchers also observed the occurrence of any other types of CS that help to enhance effectiveness of communication (Clennell, 1995). Next, the research findings on the classification of CS were verified by two inter-raters which, according to Liao et al. (2010) is sufficient for data obtained from 19 candidates.

For data confidentiality, all 19 candidates examined in this study were given pseudo names. For example, "Respondent 1 (R1)" was identified as the first candidate up until the last candidate which was "Respondent 19 (R19)". Similarly, the first interview panelist involved was identified as 'IP1' and the number follows until 'IP8' for the eighth panelist.

3. Results

The following table shows the number of occurrences of CS employed by the candidates based on the observations on the interview sessions.

Table 3. The use of CS based on Dörnyei and Scott (1997) and Clennell (1995)

Rank order	Types of CS	Frequency	Examples
1	Use of fillers	388	R7: **Okay**, so assalamualaikum warahmatullahi taala wabarakatuh and very good afternoon. **Aaa...**first of all
2	Self-repetition	186	R16: **I would like err...I would like** to seat in the chair of our KPP Acis
3	Self-repair	71	R11: I am looking for opportunity or chance to working as a lecturer **here...there.**
4	Literal translation	55	R2: One of my publication which is I need err...**to put book** for my study.
5	Mime	31	R3: okay we need to set up aaa...base **(while her hand is illustrating the word "base")**
6	Code switching	27	R1: So, for MOA, we already in **perancang.**
7	Direct appeal for help	23	R7: To back home aaa...back **apa?** back for good at aaa...Kota Bharu
8	Restructuring	15	R1: So, I think aaa that's heavy for me as part time lecturer to cope with the three different subjects. **So, for the next time**, **basically I'm teaching for** studio project, studio project one and studio project two which is teaching for final year students.
9	Asking for repetition	6	IP5: Can you share the numbers of aaa...collaborators that you have from industry? R8: **Pardon** Dr?
10	Asking for confirmation	5	R6: **Skills that we already have. Am correct?** IP3: You already have R6: Okay.
11	Message replacement	5	R1: I want to them aaa to **explore the new**...aaa the **explore the knowledge** and apply aaa their artwork in the international level.
12	Response (confirm)	4	IP1: Okay err do you have err joining any aaa competition globally or internationally? R3: **Yes, I do.**
13	Omission	4	R4: My contract **is…*cough*...**July 2021.
14	Message abandonment	3	R7: This is aaa...aaa part of monograph. **One of the...(silent)…**this is my artwork.
15*	Tonicity	3	R7: Aaa...I think this is my opportunity to share **my experience...a ten years' experience background** and then a two years plus academic experience with aaa...coordinator of the programme.
16	Word coinage	2	R4: Before this, I create a youtube content...**content youtube social** for my students which is, they can have some of the presentation and then, they have...they can make their own video presentation with their...with their creativity.
17	Self-rephrasing	2	R2: I will always be there for them, in case err...**they need me for their designing. If they have problems with their designing.**

18	Asking for clarification	1	IP1: What is the free foundation you have to have an…an individual show? R1: **Meaning?**
19	Guessing	1	So, what is your...what is your plan yaa as one of the aaa apa nama faculty members yaa towards err encouraging or err... R1: **To get the members?**

Table 3 shows that there were 19 types of CS used. Among all types of CS, the most frequently CS used was the use of fillers, which occurred 388 times followed by self-repetition with 186 occurrences. The least employed CS were asking for clarification and guessing with the frequency of one (1) time each. On the use of fillers, it was found that hesitation gambits occurred in 299 utterances while lexicalized pause fillers occurred in 23 utterances. Additionally, the data also showed that both types of fillers occurred in 66 utterances, hence giving a total of 388 occurrences of fillers.

These findings, particularly on high frequency of the use of fillers were consistent with the study by Gusti Komang Permana et al. (2019) which discovered that, despite the students' high competency in using a language, they still required time to think and recall the next words to utter the sentences. On this, Dörnyei (1995) stated that the use of fillers as a time gaining strategy differs from other types of strategies as it is not used to compensate for linguistic deficiency, but to acquire time and to preserve the communication channel open at times of trouble.

Meanwhile, the types of CS employed by the candidates based on Clennell's (1995) perspective of CS i.e. tonicity was marked with a superscripted asterisk symbol (*) in Table 3. In this study, tonicity occurred 3 times. The strategy was used when learners emphasized the utterances to mark information (Clennell, 1995). In the study by Kuen et al. (2017), they reported that learners who were more proficient used tonicity as a message-enhancing communication approach.

4. Discussion

In general, the candidates employed various types of CS during their interactions with the interview panelists. Among all the types of strategies employed, fillers which, according to Dörnyei and Scott (1997), are used to fill pauses, to stall, and to gain time in keeping the interactions going despite facing difficulties in communication, occur in the highest frequency count (388) compared to other types of CS. Dörnyei and Scott (1997) divided fillers into two: lexicalised pause fillers which come in the form of short structures such as "well", "actually", and "okay" and hesitation gambits which refer to sounds such as "aaa", "erm", and "emm"; all functions to gain time in the course of interactions. The examples of both types could be seen in the table above.

Self-repetition strategy, being the second most employed type of CS (186) in this study involved repetition of words or sentences immediately after they were uttered. The overwhelming use of this strategy after the use of fillers was already expected since this strategy occurred in many past studies in at least moderate amount such reported by Ugla et al. (2019). Self-repair appeared as the third most frequent strategy followed by literal translation and mime as a fifth mostly frequently employed strategy. According to Manzano (2018), gestures ("mime" as termed in this study) that emerged while the speakers were conversing, showed that they were able to send a message and use gestures at the same time, hence allowing them to continue talking despite their verbal errors, if any. Code switching and appeal for help appeared as the sixth and seventh most frequently employed strategies.

Apart from the above-mentioned strategies, other types of CS occurred in low frequency with fewer than 20 occurrences. These include restructuring, asking for repetition, asking for confirmation, message replacement, omission and message abandonment, word coinage, self-rephrasing, asking for clarification and guessing.

4.1 (In)effectiveness of CLT Approach in Malaysia

The present study attempted to identify the types of CS employed by L2 speakers and discuss how effective CLT approach is in English language teaching in Malaysia. Ideally, this teaching approach promotes L2 speakers' competency in using the target language and emphasizes on conveyance of intended messages. In order to communicate competently, one must possess both knowledge about the language and the ability to use it appropriately in accordance with the context of interactions (Hymes, 1972). When facing communication problems rooted from inadequate linguistic knowledge, CS helps the speakers to tackle such problems as well as enhancing the effectiveness of communication.

Based on the results of the study, this section discusses the effectiveness of CLT approach in the teaching of English in Malaysia. Being the products of such approach, which emphasizes the conveyance of intended messages, the candidates were expected to make efforts in expressing themselves during interactions with the panelists. Apparently, this expectation was met as the findings show the use of various types of CS by the candidates in their interactions with the panelists. Looking at candidates' efforts, it can be concluded that, to a certain extent, communicative English language teaching approach in this country has achieved its objective of getting the speakers to convey their intended messages despite the various communication problems they might face. This is evident from the occurrences of strategies such as self-repair, literal translation, mime, restructuring and guessing which reflect the candidates' efforts in expressing themselves.

Despite the above findings however, it was found that among tens of CS types proposed by Dörnyei and Scott (1997) (see Table 1), there were excessive use of fillers (both lexicalised fillers or hesitation gambits) aside from 18 other types of CS. The high frequency use of fillers should not be taken lightly as it can be problematic and 'dispreferred' by the interlocutors (Seto, 2021), and hence, affecting the outcome of communication. As asserted by Lomotey (2021), there are times when overuse of fillers attracts negativity as it tends to reduce fluency. Additionally, unlike other types of CS which promote L2 learning among the speakers (e.g. self-repair and restructuring), fillers are used merely as time-gaining strategies to keep the communication channel open and maintain discourse at times of difficulty (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). Although their use is considered a common characteristic in natural speech, too much use of fillers could disrupt communication and reflect negatively on the speakers, hence leading to a question of whether CLT approach has been effective in producing competent ESL speakers in this country. Despite its aim to increase learners' abilities to communicate in the target language competently (Savignon, 2001), CLT approach which has been adopted in ESL teaching in Malaysian schools since 1982 (Abu Bakar et al., 2021) does not lead to the desired outcome, as indicated in this study. The fact that CS is mostly used to compensate for inadequate L2 linguistic knowledge and appeared in vast amount show that many L2 speakers are still struggling when communicating in English although they had been exposed to the language for more than 11 years in school before continuing learning the language at tertiary level. This phenomenon, therefore, should be addressed by people of authority so that intervention measures could be made to ensure that CLT approach in ESL teaching in this country meets its objective.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the current study, it can be concluded that CLT approach in English language teaching in Malaysia has not met its objectives. As CS is commonly employed to compensate for inadequate L2 linguistic knowledge, its high occurrences in this study reflect the speakers' lack of linguistic competence, hence causing them to employ various types of CS in conveying their messages. The wide use of hesitation gambits is also worrying as it can affect the speakers' speech flow and at times, 'dispreferred' by the interlocutors.

Considering that CLT has been adopted in Malaysia for decades, it is now high time that some intervention measures are taken by the authority to improve the current situation if they decide to retain this teaching approach in Malaysian schools. Research is needed to investigate the root problems that cause continuous struggle among ESL speakers in this country and further, revised the current English language teaching practice in order meet the objective of CLT approach. This concerted effort is in line with the move made by the country to attain the status of a developed nation by year 2025 in which Malaysia is inspired to improve its graduates' quality across intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical dimensions, to enable them to thrive in today's complex global economy and contribute to the betterment of the society (Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025). This, however, can only be realized when the citizens are equipped with the necessary skills and competency, including competency in the English language.

6. Recommendation for Future Research

Since the scope of the current study is limited to the context of academic staff recruitment interviewers involving only 19 Malay ESL speakers at one public university in the east coast of Malaysia, the findings should not be overgeneralized to a larger population. Another limitation of study relates to assessing candidates' ability in using the English language. Since the researchers' access to the candidates was only during the interview sessions, no other measurements on the candidates' ability in using the language was possible. Thus, the researchers had to rely on the oral interactions obtained in this study.

To address the issue of overgeneralization, future research is therefore recommended to include more respondents and consider other real communication contexts. Additionally, retrospective data from L2 learners would be valuable for researchers to understand what is inside their minds at the moment when they employ CS.

Following this, findings from future research will shed light on how to improve CLT approach in the teaching of English language in this country.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the Ministry of Higher Education (Malaysia) for its financial support in research project funded by Fundamental Research Grant Schemes (FRGS) (ref no: FRGS/1/2019/SS09/UITM/02/11).

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