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Communication strategies employed by low-proficiency users: Possibilities for ELF-informed pedagogy

初級レベル英語話者が使用するコミュニケーション方略：ELFから得られる教授法の可能性

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Abstract: ELF research has demonstrated that English users employ various communication strategies (CSs) to achieve mutual understanding and deal with uncertainty in ELF conversations. Thus, implementing various CSs is said to be important for learners in ELF interactions. Although a list of CSs might indicate which strategies English learners may ultimately need, it is not necessarily helpful for low-proficiency English learners as they may not be able to use many CSs due to a lack of English language resources. This study attempts to identify CSs that 20 Japanese low-proficiency English users employ in talk-in-interaction with English language instructors. CSs investigated in this study were not restricted to those examined from second language acquisition perspectives but included pragmatic and collaborative strategies identified in various ELF studies. Investigating CSs from the perspective of ELF helps to form a more sensitive analysis of how low-proficiency English users work to achieve successful L2 communication with interlocutors. Results revealed that the students, who were not given prior instruction in strategies, collaboratively employed various CSs to cope with communication breakdown, promote message conveyance, and co-construct a meaningful interaction with their interlocutors. These findings provide insights into how low-proficiency users might manage to achieve successful communication in various ELF settings. Analysis of the data helps to inform teachers which CSs low-proficiency learners may utilize more easily and those for which they may require more intensive practice.

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論文概要: 本研究では２０人の日本人大学生（初級レベル英語話者）が英語母語話者とのやりとりで使用したコミュニケーション方略を会話分析で明らかにした。学習者はさまざまな方略を協力的に使用することで、コミュニケーション上の問題を修復しながら意思疎通を促進し、相手とお互いに意味のある交流を作り上げていた。この分析により、英語学習初級者が容易に使用できるものと、より集中的な訓練を要するものを特定した。

キーワード: 国際語としての英語、 コミュニケーション方略、 初級レベル英語話者、 プロジェクトベース学習、 協力的インタラクション

1 Introduction

In English as a lingua franca (ELF) interactions, where English is used as a medium of communication among speakers of different first languages, the conformity to native English speaker norms is not as crucial for successful communication as teachers have traditionally thought (Seidlhofer 2011). Many ELF researchers have instead underscored the importance of communication strategies (CSs) as studies have shown that ELF users employ various strategies to achieve mutual understanding and deal with uncertainty in ELF conversations (e.g. Cogo and Dewey 2012; Mauranen 2012; Seidlhofer 2011). Analysis of ELF interactions indicates that the use of CSs appears to facilitate interaction, contribute to negotiation for meaning, and pre-empt communication breakdown. Thus, it has been recommended that teachers actively teach various CSs in their classes.

However, such pedagogical suggestions regarding CSs are not necessarily helpful for language teachers who teach low-proficiency learners because ELF research has so far tended to focus on high-proficiency language users' use of CSs and rarely examined which strategies might be useful to learners for eventual use of English in intercultural communication (e.g. Georgieva 2009). Information on the effective use of various CSs may be helpful to teachers in order for them to teach more systematically and efficiently. This study therefore investigates which CSs low-proficiency English users employ for mutual understanding. Such empirical descriptions may lead to pedagogically realistic and appropriate objectives for English language teaching in local contexts.

2 Communication strategies: Conceptualizations and pedagogy

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), CSs have been regarded as production phenomena consciously used by learners to resolve communication problems. According to Ellis, CSs have been described as "cognitive processes involved in the use of the L2 in reception and production" (Ellis 2008: 502) as well as "discourse strategies that are evident in social interactions involving learners" (Ellis 2008: 502). ELF research has extended these notions of CSs and regards them as pragmatic strategies that speakers apply to negotiate non-understanding and achieve understanding (Cogo and Dewey 2012). In the next sections, we discuss the different research perspectives of CSs and what they entail for teaching these strategies.

2.1 Communication strategies from the perspective of SLA

SLA researchers began to pay attention to CSs in the 1970s as part of the process of interlanguage development (Ellis 2008). CS research was considered important as strategic competence – knowledge of how to cope with communication breakdown – was regarded as an essential component of communicative competence (Nakatani and Goh 2007: 207). The main purpose of CSs was purportedly to work through communicative problems, that is, CSs were thought to be consciously deployed when interactants realized that communication was being interrupted (Dörnyei and Scott 1997: 182–185). SLA researchers have defined CSs from two perspectives: the psycholinguistic and the interactional.

Researchers from the psycholinguistic perspective generally regard the use of CSs as indicating that a speaker is having difficulty expressing his or her intended meaning in a second language (Færch and Kasper 1983). In particular, lexical-compensatory strategies have been extensively investigated (Nakatani and Goh 2007). Færch and Kasper (1983) identified two types of CSs: reduction strategies that a speaker uses to escape from a problem and achievement strategies that a speaker uses to tackle a problem. The former includes topic avoidance, message abandonment, and meaning replacement, and the latter includes code switching, interlingual transfer, generalization, paraphrasing, word coinage, restructuring, cooperative strategies, and non-linguistic strategies.

CSs from the interactional perspective are strategies used to negotiate meaning to achieve a communicative goal (Tarone 1980). Thus, researchers are

concerned with strategic behavior to overcome communication problems which occur during interactions with an interlocutor. This perspective on CSs focuses not only on a speaker's problem-solving behavior but also on strategies to enhance communicative effectiveness (Nakatani and Goh 2007). From this perspective, Tarone (1980: 429) provides some examples of CSs, including approximation, word coinage, circumlocution, literal translation, language switch, appealing for assistance, mime, and avoidance. Although SLA researchers have viewed CSs from different perspectives, the CSs themselves appear to be similar (Ellis 2008: 506) and complementary (Georgieva 2009: 299).

This early SLA research drew upon cognitive models of learning and employed the mainstream SLA concept of interlanguage. Under such a paradigm, distinctions were made between language learners and language users, and a deficit view of language learning was maintained, whereby competence is measured by how well learners reach a native speaker standard. Later, CS research took on a sociolinguistic perspective which posits that language should be studied in reference to the situation or context in which it occurs (Ellis 2008: 502). With the sociocultural turn in SLA (Block 2003), studies involving CSs focused on how conversation is accomplished (Ellis 2008: 513) rather than perhaps what role CSs might play in language development.

2.2 Communication strategies from the perspective of ELF

Similarly, ELF researchers have paid attention to CSs not only as L2 speakers' coping or compensatory strategies, but as essential strategies to achieve successful communication in interactions. Many studies investigating intercultural communication show that CSs facilitate effective communication among individuals with different language and cultural backgrounds. For example, proficient ELF users employ various strategies to increase clarity and explicitness, preempt communicative problems, and jointly create an interaction with their interlocutors (e.g. Cogo and Dewey 2012; Georgieva 2009; Kaur 2016b). Therefore, CSs have been considered not as strategies that only low-proficiency English learners use to deal with their own lack of proficiency, but as those that all English users utilize to achieve mutual understanding.

Many CSs explored and addressed by ELF research overlap those identified by SLA research. Table 1 shows the correspondence between CSs addressed by ELF studies and Dörnyei and Scott's (1997: 188–194) inventory of CSs. The strategies utilized by ELF users for successful communication are similar to those employed by English learners to compensate for a lack of linguistic knowledge and resolve communicative problems. For example, SLA research

Table 1: CS inventory (Dörnyei and Scott 1997) and CSs addressed by ELF studies.

Dörnyei and Scott (1997)	Examples of ELF studies addressing the CS
Literal translation	Cogo and Dewey (2012); Pitzl (2009)
Code switching	Cogo (2009); Cogo and Dewey (2012); Cogo and House (2018), *Multilingual resources*; Franceschi (2017), *Plurilingual practices*; House (2010); Klimpfinger (2009)
Self-repair	Björkman (2014), *Self-initiated word replacement*; House (2010); Mauranen (2006)
Other-repair	Björkman (2014); Kirkpatrick (2010), *Lexical correction*
Self-rephrasing	Björkman (2014), *Simplification*; Kaur (2016b), *Self-paraphrase, Self-reformulation*; Kennedy (2017)
Over-explicitness	Kaur (2016b), *Enhancing communicative clarity*; Kecskes (2007); Kirkpatrick (2010), *Be explicit*
Mime (non-linguistic strategies)	Cogo and Dewey (2012), *Non-verbal strategy*; Kennedy (2017); Toomaneejinda and Harding (2018)
Use of fillers	House (2010)
Self-repetition	Björkman (2014); Kaur (2016b); Kennedy (2017); Kirkpatrick (2010), *Repeating the phrase*; Lichtkoppler (2007)
Asking for repetition	Cogo and Dewey (2012); Kirkpatrick (2010); Mauranen (2006)
Asking for clarification	Björkman (2014); Cogo and Dewey (2012); Kennedy (2017); Kirkpatrick (2010)
Asking for confirmation	Björkman (2014), *Overt question*; Kennedy (2017)
Guessing	Cogo and Dewey (2012), *Hypothesis forming*
Comprehension check	Björkman (2014); Kennedy (2017)
Response: repeat	Cogo and Dewey (2012), *Exact repetition*; Matsumoto (2011)
Response: repair	Björkman (2014), *Other-initiated word replacement*; Matsumoto (2011), *Phonological negotiation*
Response: rephrase	Kirkpatrick (2010), *Speaker paraphrase*
Response: expand	Matsumoto (2011), *Use of contextual cues*

Note. The italicized are terms used by the researchers.

regards literal translation as a compensatory strategy used when a learner cannot access the requisite English knowledge (Ellis 2008). A similar strategy is observed in an interaction where an ELF user uttered an idiom translated from a Dutch idiom in order to signal cultural affiliation with other participants (Pitzl 2009). However, as Björkman (2014: 124) claims, although CSs studied from the SLA and ELF perspectives are not necessarily distinct categories, some CSs are used more often than others in ELF interactions. More specifically, ELF CSs are associated more with achievement strategies, such as code switching and mime, than with reduction strategies, including message abandonment and topic avoidance.

At the same time, ELF research has explored various CSs that the SLA frameworks have not acknowledged. Table 2 shows some collaborative strategies that ELF research recognizes but Dörnyei and Scott (1997) inventory of CSs does not include. It should be noted that these strategies are not used to compensate for lack of English proficiency or to transmit an individual's intended meaning. Instead, they are used to co-construct an interaction by supporting one's interlocutors, signaling affiliation as a member, or keeping the interaction going. Furthermore, ELF research emphasizes the importance of accommodation, which involves individuals' adaptation to their interlocutors' language forms and speech patterns (see e.g. Dewey 2011; Seidlhofer 2009), and also the use of cooperative strategies including backchanneling, echoing, and self-initiated repair (e.g. Cogo 2009; House 2010; Mauranen 2012).

Table 2: Collaborative CSs explored by ELF studies.

Strategy	Description	Studies
Echoing/ Represent	Repeating what an interlocutor has just said	Cogo (2009), House (2010, House 2012), Lichtkoppler (2007), Mackenzie (2014), Mauranen (2012)
Lexical anticipation/ Lexical suggestion	Anticipating what an interlocutor wants to say and providing words to complete his or her utterance	Björkman (2014), Georgieva (2009), House (2010), Kirkpatrick (2010), Mauranen (2012)
Participant paraphrase	Paraphrasing what an interlocutor has said to help another interlocutor who cannot understand the first interlocutor	Georgieva (2009), Kirkpatrick (2010)
Listener support	Using backchannels or confirming comprehension	Bjørge (2010), Cogo and Dewey (2012)
Joint achievement for keeping the talk going	Supporting an interlocutor's standpoint or providing the intention of an interlocutor's message	Georgieva (2009), Mauranen (2006)
Let it pass	Letting unknown utterance pass and normalizing potential trouble sources	Firth (1996)
Online idiomatizing	Co-constructing pro-tem idiomatic expressions with interlocutors	Seidlhofer (2009)
Receptive and productive convergence	Accepting the interlocutor's non-standard forms and adopting them in utterances	Cogo and Dewey (2012), Dewey (2011)

2.3 Teaching communication strategies

ELF researchers have regarded various communicative practices that facilitate intercultural communication as CSs, and emphasized their importance for all English users. In this sense, the range of CSs from the ELF framework is broader than that of the SLA framework. In fact, ELF-informed CS research has largely relied on interactional data elicited from highly proficient English speakers only; most CSs identified by ELF studies reflect these speakers' communicative practices when they attempt to achieve mutual understanding in intercultural settings (e.g. Björkman 2014; Kaur 2016b; Matsumoto 2011). Researchers suggest that language teachers should focus on CSs used by such proficient ELF users. Seidlhofer (2011) argues,

> The analyses of ELF interactions [...] indicate the high functional load that various strategies and processes have for achieving understanding. A particular focus in teacher education would therefore need to be put on appreciating these aspects and on encouraging teachers to actively teach them. (Seidlhofer 2011: 205)

Although a list of CSs (e.g. Tables 1 and 2) might indicate which CSs English learners need to learn, it is not necessarily helpful for low-proficiency English learners because they may not be able to use many CSs due to lack of English language resources. Lam and Wong (2000), for example, demonstrated that participants in their study were not able to effectively clarify themselves even after intensive strategy training because of their limited linguistic knowledge. This indicates that certain CSs may require higher linguistic proficiency, and simply instructing learners how to adopt them in communication may not be successful. For effective strategy instruction, it might be beneficial for teachers to be informed of which CSs may be suitable for low-proficiency learners based on empirical data.

3 The study

This study focuses on which CSs low-proficiency English users are able to use and examines them from an ELF perspective. CSs examined in this study are not restricted to those from the psycholinguistic and interactional perspectives (Dörnyei and Scott 1997) but include the collaborative strategies listed in Table 2. The research question in this study is

– What CSs do low-proficiency English users employ in group discussions without prior in-class explicit instruction?

This study investigates low-proficiency English users' application of CSs in interactions with instructors in a classroom setting. Thus, the interactions examined are not naturally occurring talks among non-native English speakers that ELF studies have primarily focused on (see Cogo and House 2018), but can be considered an ELF situation based on the conceptualization of ELF as a contact language among speakers when at least one member utilizes it as their second language (Mauranen 2018: 8). CSs found in this study may differ from those used in many ELF settings and might not provide direct implications for ELF-aware classrooms where English is taught as a means of communication among multilingual speakers. However, investigating CSs from the perspective of ELF as described above may reveal strategies that SLA studies have not touched upon, thereby enabling an expanded view of how low-proficiency English users achieve successful L2 communication using the limited resources at their disposal. Arguably, this study's findings serve to provide insights into how low-proficiency users might manage to communicate in some non-instructional ELF settings. This study may help to identify CSs that low-proficiency learners might easily manage to use or those that may not require intensive instruction.

4 Method

This study focused on low-proficiency English users' strategic behavior in talk-in-interaction using an approach based on conversation analysis (CA). We decided to apply a CA-based approach because, it "provides ELF researchers with reliable means to identify the communication strategies and practices that speakers in ELF settings employ to arrive at shared understanding" (Kaur 2016a: 163). Although stimulated recall can touch upon learners' internal state during communicative performance (Kennedy 2017), our analytic approach was considered appropriate for this study since micro-analytically examining participants' action allows researchers to see how participants collaboratively resolve interactional difficulty and achieve mutual understanding (Burch 2014).

4.1 Participants

The participants were 20 first-year students, 11 males and 9 females, ranging in age from 18 to 19 in a private Japanese university. The students were education majors enrolled in two required general English classes instructed by two of the authors. Based on the results of a TOEIC Bridge placement test administered at the start of the school year, the students were assessed as basic users (CEFR A2

level) and placed in lower-proficiency level English classes. They did not receive explicit instruction in CSs in the classes.

Japanese students of this age have studied English for six years in junior and senior high school, and may have studied from one to six years in elementary school, or in private after-school classes. In Japanese school education, English is treated as a subject that often aims to develop grammatical knowledge and reading ability for entrance examinations (Ishikawa 2017: 239–240), which is one of the reasons why some Japanese university students' oral English ability is often underdeveloped even after six years of English instruction.

4.2 Project-based learning project

Project-based learning (PBL) is as an instructional approach using authentic, real-world projects based on a highly motivating and engaging question or task in which students work cooperatively toward a solution (Bender 2012). The theme for our PBL was natural disasters, and the students were asked to develop a new and unique product that provides assistance to people during a catastrophe.

For the PBL project the two classes met individually for three 100-minute classes, and were combined for two 100-minute classes. Each class was divided into five groups consisting of four to five students. Each member of a group assumed the role of president, vice president, quality control manager, or creative advertisement manager(s). The first part of the PBL task was to introduce the driving question after students studied about natural disasters and watched videos on innovative temporary housing ideas developed in the United States after a hurricane. The topic was considered relevant and meaningful as Japan has experienced many natural disasters including the devastating 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. The two leaders of each group led their members in discussions in developing a unique product idea and listing its five main features. The second part of the PBL was a consulting session, in which the presidents and vice presidents from each group were pulled out to meet and consult with a language instructor. The PBL task ended with a formal group presentation to a mixed audience from the two combined classes. The authors acted as group facilitators.

4.3 Data collection procedure

Data were collected from each group during the consulting sessions. The instructors were three language teachers working at the university but who had not previously

taught the participants. The three teachers, who used English as their L1 (an American female, an Irish female, and a British male), were informed that the aim of the study was not to correct mistakes but to play the role of a consultant who provides advice on the group's product. They were provided with a list of questions to ask the students and told to model different CSs in a natural manner during the sessions. In each session, the students were asked to state their names, the name of their group, their roles, how the product was developed, and the five product features. Finally, the students were instructed to repeat the advice they received. Thus, the type of interaction was *transactional*, the purpose of which was the transmission of information among the interactants. The sessions were approximately 8 to 17 minutes in length and were audio and video recorded (see Table 3). Written consent to use the data for research purposes was obtained from each participant.

Table 3: Participants in the tutor sessions.

Session	Tutor	President (TOEIC score)	Vice president (TOEIC score)	Time (min:sec)
1	Female (Ireland)	Male (375)	Female (410)	09:07
2	Female (Ireland)	Female (320)	Female (305)	07:48
3	Female (Ireland)	Female (290)	Female (300)	10:14
4	Female (the US)	Male (305)	Male (275)	12:59
5	Female (the US)	Male (260)	Female (340)	11:22
6	Female (the US)	Male (245)	Female (365)	14:35
7	Female (the US)	Male (290)	Male (N/A)	16:47
8	Male (the UK)	Male (320)	Male (375)	09:34
9	Male (the UK)	Female (420)	Female (315)	08:58
10	Male (the UK)	Male (355)	Male (365)	09:30

Note. Students' TOEIC scores show the results of a TOEIC Listening & Reading Institutional Program test administered two weeks after the data collection. The CEFR A2 level corresponds to a TOEIC score of 225 to 545. A male student in Session 7 did not take the test.

4.4 Data analysis

Audio- and video-recorded data of the 10 sessions were analyzed. The data were transcribed following CA conventions (Atkinson and Heritage 1984), which are detailed in the appendix. We closely examined the transcripts focusing on students' observable behavior. First, we identified any non-understandings and misunderstandings between students and the instructor, which

were located using four indicators of communication trouble: echo, explicit statement of non-understanding, no verbal response, and inappropriate response (Varonis and Gass 1985: 76). We also examined indicators of lexical problems due to a lack of the students' linguistic knowledge, focusing on their inquiries regarding English expressions, such as "How do I say xxx in English?". Subsequently, the CSs utilized to help solve these troubles were examined. Finally, we identified students' use of strategies to clarify a message and prevent a possible non-understanding where there is no explicit signal of trouble in communication.

5 Results and discussion

This section discusses three types of CSs identified in participants' utterances: (a) CSs to resolve a prior non-understanding and misunderstanding between participants, (b) CSs to overcome a lack of their own linguistic resources, and (c) CSs to clarify a message and prevent a possible non-understanding. The first type of CS is used to negotiate meaning when the students did not understand the instructors' utterance and vice versa, as well as when they misunderstood the instructor's message. The second type of CS is applied when students had difficulty expressing what they wanted to say in English and did not know the word or expression to convey an intended message. The third type of CS is employed when there is no explicit indicator of non-understanding and difficulty in expressing an intended message but is used to achieve successful message conveyance.

5.1 Communication strategies to resolve a prior non-understanding and misunderstanding between participants

In all the sessions, there were cases where students did not understand the instructors' utterances and questions. When students failed to understand the intended message or were not sure about what the instructor said, they asked their partner what the instructor said, remained silent and abandoned the message, or showed that they did not understand. Among the three strategies, students most frequently asked each other in Japanese what the instructor said and attempted to collaboratively overcome the difficulty. Excerpt (1) shows a successful example (I = Instructor; S = Student).

(1) (Session 10)
1 I: Nice to meet you. What is your position. (1.0) President. (.5) Vice
2 president.
3 S1: %President tte nani?%
4 *What is it?*
5 S2: Eh dakara Shacho xxx.
6 *so president*.
7 S1: Shacho desu. Pre- presi- president.
8 *I'm a president*.
9 I: Oka:y.

Excerpt (1) starts with an instructor's greeting and inquiry about the students' positions (line 1). However, S1 does not comprehend what "president" means in the instructor's utterance. Thus, in line 3, he asks his partner "What is President?" in Japanese and immediately elicits the appropriate answer (line 5). Consequently, S1 reiterates his position in English correctly in line 7. Although this strategy appears effective in this case, students in other sessions could not adequately overcome the problem of non-understanding since both students did not understand the instructor's request.

There were a few cases where students used the "let-it-pass" strategy (Firth 1996) in order to carry on the conversation. However, this strategy did not lead to successful communication in the interactions. In these cases, directly negotiating meaning by asking for repetition, clarification, or confirmation (Dörnyei and Scott 1997) might have resolved the problem.

In other cases, students expressed non-understanding signaling the problem by giving a minimal query (e.g. "mm?" or "eh?") or reprising the non-understood part. Minimal queries and reprising may be regarded as requests for repetition and clarification, but the interpretation of these strategies depends on the interlocutor and speakers do not necessarily obtain the information they demanded (Mauranen 2006: 132–133). In this study, there were only three cases in which students explicitly asked for repetition by saying "One more?" (Sessions 3 and 10) or "One more times?" (Session 8). Furthermore, there were no cases where students explicitly asked for clarification. Their strategies of showing non-understanding appear more limited than those used by high-proficiency English users, who can reformulate the non-understood part to check comprehension or form a hypothesis to pinpoint the location of the non-understood part (Cogo and Dewey 2012).

Although non-understanding in the interactions was resolved by the CSs described above, misunderstanding where students understood something different from what the instructor said (Cogo and Dewey 2012) was not successfully resolved. In nine sessions, students misunderstood the instructor's questions or

requests and gave responses that the instructor did not ask for. Excerpt (2) shows a typical example in which a student misunderstood the instructor's request.

(2) (Session 1)
1 I: Okay. So. Can you tell me: what's your name? a:nd you know what do
2 you do in the company.
3 (1.0)
4 S1: Mm.
5 I: What position do you have in the company.
6 S2: Ah. My name is Hanako [Tanaka.
7 I: [Mm.
8 S2: Uh: We: company make (.) uh: helmet.
9 I: Oka:y?
10 S2: Lighting helmet.

In lines 1, 2, and 5, the instructor asks the students' names and positions in their group. However, after stating her name (pseudonym: line 6), S2 gives an explanation about the product her group has designed (line 8). Although the instructor did not obtain the appropriate answer, she accepts S2's response by saying "okay" in line 9. The rising intonation indicates that she invites S2 to continue, and the student continues explaining the product (line 10). In other cases of misunderstanding, the instructors did not immediately and explicitly correct students' misunderstanding but continued the interaction. Therefore, in most cases, students did not notice that they misunderstood the instructor's intended message nor did they apply any CSs to deal with the misunderstanding. However, this finding may have been influenced by the instructor-directed interactional setting where students were simply required to answer instructors' inquiries and provide the information requested by them.

There were a number of cases where instructors indicated non-understanding of students' utterances, confirmed students' intended message, and requested further explanation. In these cases, students collaboratively responded to the instructor's question or request, or repeated the trigger (words or expressions that caused non-understanding). Excerpt (3) illustrates how students responded to an instructor's question collaboratively.

(3) (Session 9)
1 S1: Okay Jaa. One. Light. (1.5) Two. Warm. (.5) Three. Useful. Four. Safety:
2 head. (.5) Five. Hand baggage.
3 (4.0)
4 I: I don't understand hand baggage. What do you mean. (.) [Hand baggage.
5 S1: [Hoo. Mm:::
6 S2: %nandakke.%

7 *What was it?*
8 S1: Eh:: (.5) It's (.) can carry.
9 I: Mm-hmm. (2.0) Uh: you can make it into a ba:g? (.5) to carry
10 (.5)
11 S1: Ah:
12 S2: Nanka. Chicchakunaru tte iitaine. [xxx
13 *Well. We want to say it becomes compact.*
14 S1: [Ah. Com- compact
15 [size.
16 S2: [compact
17 I: Oh it's Oh I understand.

Excerpt (3) starts with S1's explanation about the five features of the product (lines 1 and 2). The instructor expresses non-understanding and requests clarification regarding "hand baggage". The students think about how to explain it, and S1 provides an explanation in line 8. Then, the instructor confirms his understanding by paraphrasing what S1 has said (line 9). Subsequently, S2 provides S1 with what they wish to say in Japanese (line 12), and S1 utters a word that expresses the feature in lines 14 and 15.

However, although repeating the original trigger was another popular strategy, it did not always resolve the problem effectively. Excerpt (4) presents such a case.

(4) (Session 6)
1 S1: Akakute: (2.0) Burokku de: Mm:=
2 *It's red* *It's a block*
3 I: =Broken? Broken. (1.0) Broke? Broken?
4 S2: burokku.=
5 *Block.*
6 S1: =burokku.
7 *Block.*
8 I: Broke. (.) Broke? (.) [Block?
9 S2: [Bla-
10 S1: Burokku.
11 *Block.*
12 I: Block! (.) Block. (1.0) Block? (1.5) From where?

Excerpt (4) starts with S1's attempt to explain the word "rubble" since the instructor recommended the use of a different word in previous turns. He lists some features of rubble, one of which is block but pronounces it with a heavy Japanese accent, "burokku", in line 1. The instructor then confirms her

understanding of the word by trying to guess the word (line 3). However, the students repeat the word with the same pronunciation in lines 4 and 6. In the subsequent turn, the instructor makes a good guess and correctly comprehends the word. Similarly, in other sessions, repeating the trigger in the same manner was observed even though it caused non-understanding on the part of the instructors. The students did not employ other strategies to respond to an interlocutor's non-understanding, such as rephrasing the trigger, explaining the trigger in a larger context, or adjusting pronunciation (Dörnyei and Scott 1997; Kirkpatrick 2010; Matsumoto 2011).

5.2 Communication strategies to overcome lack of linguistic resources

Trouble with expressing thoughts was frequently observed. Students had difficulty expressing what they wanted to say in English due to their limited linguistic knowledge. Thus, non-understanding or misunderstanding is not a concern here. Although there was considerable individual difference in how to cope with such lexical difficulty, students most frequently attempted to overcome the problem by using Japanese and asking their partner how to say certain words in English. If they could not elicit the answer, they attempted to express the word in their own way or by paraphrasing, and/or used gestures or paralinguistic cues to express the word. Excerpts (5) and (6) show successful and unsuccessful strategies employed by students, respectively.

(5) (Session 5)
1 I: And you are?
2 S: Fuku Shacho.
3 *Vice president*.
4 I: Oh:! What is that.
5 S: Ah: (1.0) Na-nan daroo. Fuku shacho tte nante iun dakke.
6 *What was it? How do we say vice president?*
7 (2.0)
8 I: Okay we'll just=
9 S: =Number two.
10 I: Number two. [You're number two.
11 S: [Number two.
12 I: Oh:! [Okay. You are number two.
13 S: [Number two.

Excerpt (5) starts with the instructor's question about S's position in the group. S employs a code-switching strategy providing her position in Japanese (line 2), and the instructor asks what it means (line 4). Code switching in this case was not successful since the instructor does not understand Japanese and cognates, which differs from a situation where the strategy can be effective (House 2010; Mackenzie 2014). In fact, although the use of Japanese was observed frequently (e.g. Excerpts [1] and [3]), students did not seem to use it as a strategy to enhance comprehension or show their bilingual identity, as identified by previous ELF studies (e.g. Cogo 2009; Cogo and House 2018; Franceschi 2017; Klimpfinger 2009). Then, S asks herself and her partner how to say the English equivalent of "Fuku Shacho" which means vice-president in line 5. After a two-second silence, the instructor is about to move on to a different topic (line 8). However, S comes up with the term "number two" to express her position as a vice president in line 9. This circumlocution expresses a property of "vice president" and thus the instructor indicates understanding. In general, interactions were eventually successful when students came up with an effective paraphrase or circumlocution or their partner helped to express the word they said.

(6) (Session 5)

1 I: Why are the wings wild?
2 (2.0)
3 S1: Kakkoiihouga iikara.
4 *It is better to be cool.*
5 S2: Hhh. ((laughs))
6 S1: Mm. (.5) Eigo de nani?
7 *what is it in English?*
8 I: What- What is the purpose of wild.
9 S2: Hah.
10 (5.0)
11 S2: Design.
12 S1: Ninki ga aru te nan dakke. (.5) Famous.
13 *How do we say popular?*
14 S2: Famous? (2.0) hhh. Mm::
15 S1: All (.) people? (.5) i:s (.5) famous?
16 I: %All people is [famous.% Huhhuh.
17 S1: [Famous
18 I: Huhhuh. [Oka:y?
19 S1: [Mm:: Famous tte nani? Ninki aru ja nakattake.
20 *What is famous? Isn't it popular?*

21 S2: Ninki aru wa: (1.0) Eh? Sou ja nai?
22 *Popular is* *Isn't it so?*
23 (1.0)
24 I: Okay. Again. The sa:me. (.) with cute. Yeah?

In Excerpt (6), the instructor asks why the product the students designed looks wild (line 1). S2 provides the answer in Japanese (line 3) and asks his partner how to explain it in English (line 6). The instructor repeats the question again (line 8), and S1 asks how to say the English equivalent of "ninki aru", which means "popular", in line 12. Immediately after that, he says the word "famous" (line 12) and "all people is famous" (line 15). Probably, he intended to say "the wild design is popular among all people". However, the instructor does not appear to understand his message correctly in lines 16 and 18. Unlike Excerpt (5), the instructor did not indicate understanding since the student failed to provide an appropriate paraphrase and his partner was not able to help.

Another frequently used strategy when students had trouble coming up with appropriate English words was the use of gestures and paralinguistic cues. Excerpt (7) shows a successful use of such cues.

(7) (Session 8)
1 S1: Yeah. Rope.
2 S2: Ah.
3 S1: Uh: A:nd ro- Hipparutte nani? Hhh. Rope.
4 *How do we say "pull"?*
5 ((uses body language/non-verbal hand gestures to show a rope pulled))
6 I: Rope.=
7 S1: =Uh:: hukuramu hukuramu. (4.0) %nanteiunda?%
8 *Inflate Inflate How do we say that?*
9 I: What is the rope for? To: (.) for a rescuer to:
10 S2: Ah: Yes. A:nd (.5) uh:
11 S1: Chigau chigau chigau. Hipparu tamejanaiyo. Umide ukutameno.
12 *No No No. It's not to pull. It's to float in the sea.*
13 S2: Ah.
14 S1: Uh.
15 S2: Uh: Rope?
16 I: Yeah.=
17 S2: =Uh: Life jacket.
18 I: Yeah.
19 S2: ps ps ps ps [ps ps ps ((makes sound of inflating jacket and shows non-

20 verbal cues of blowing into the tube))
21 I: [Ah: inflate.

In Excerpt (7), students attempt to explain how the rope attached to the life jacket works. In fact, they wanted to say that the rope is pulled to inflate the jacket and float in the sea. However, S1 struggles to express "pull" (line 3) and "inflate" (line 7). When he has a difficulty expressing "pull" in English, he makes a gesture to show a rope pulled. S1 corrects himself and confirms the accurate information with S2 in line 11. After listening to S1's confirmation of the content, S2 makes the sound of putting air into the jacket and uses mime to show the jacket inflating in line 19. The instructor then correctly understands his message (line 21). In this case, the non-linguistic strategies served mainly as coping strategies to compensate for the lack of linguistic resources. In many cases, *iconic gestures*, which "present images of concrete entities and/or actions" (McNeill 2005: 39), were accompanied by the use of paraphrase to strengthen the meaning.

Students often helped each other explain their products by translating the instructor's expressions into Japanese, translating the partner's Japanese expressions into English, and telling the partner what to say. A frequently used strategy was lexical anticipation; students anticipated what their partner wanted to say and uttered the word for him or her (House 2010; Kirkpatrick 2010). Excerpt (8) includes some cases where students provided help to each other.

(8) (Session 7)
1 I: =On the balloon. (.) Really. (2.0) Ah: why.
2 S1: Uh: ((clears throat))
3 (2.0)
4 S2: People: (.) can (.) realize (.) anyway any (.)
5 S1: xxx. any people.
6 S2: any people.
7 I: Mm. I see. Oka:y. Alright. (4.0) %people can realize.% (2.0) Mm. okay?
8 Feature number five?
9 (2.0)
10 S2: Doozo.
11 *Please*.
12 S1: Mm. Eh. It is possible to: (.) put (.) put food. in the (.) middle of the
13 (2.5)
14 S2: %Chair.%
15 S1: Chair. Chair.
16 I: Chair. (.) On the balloon?
17 S1: Yes. Chair.

Excerpt (8) starts with an instructor's question about the reason why people write their names on the balloon (line 1). S2 provides an answer but struggles to explain the reasons (line 4). He stops his utterance after saying "any". It appears he wanted to say that anyone, or everyone, would be able to see the name easily if it is written on the balloon. In line 5, S1 helps his partner by providing a word to complete his utterance "any people." S2 then acknowledges the help and repeats the phrase (line 6). Subsequently, the instructor asks students to explain the fifth feature of their product (line 8), and S2 asks his partner to explain (line 10). S1 starts to explain but cannot complete his sentence (line 12). After a 2.5-second silence, S2 helps by providing the word "chair" to complete S1's sentence in line 14, and S1 acknowledges by repeating the word. This lexical anticipation suggests that the students were on the same wavelength (Kirkpatrick 2010: 127) and collaboratively attempted to achieve the communicative goal. This type of co-constructive behavior, which often occurs in ELF communication (Mauranen 2006: 137–138), was also observable in the interactions between the low-proficiency English users and their instructors.

5.3 Communication strategies to clarify a message and prevent a possible non-understanding

The students used various CSs to clarify their message, preempt communication breakdown, and co-construct discourse with their interlocutors, as proficient English users also do. The most frequently used CSs for effective message conveyance was a non-linguistic strategy including use of gestures and onomatopoeic words (see Excerpt [7]). Non-verbal strategies were also used as a coping strategy when students had some difficulty coming up with an appropriate English word or expression. As shown in Excerpt (9), students used gestures when they were able to say an appropriate word.

(9) (Session 2)
1 I: Okay. (1.0) so. What type of you know is it [tele-
2 S: [cap? ((puts her hand around her
3 head))
4 I: Oh it's a cap.=
5 S: =And mask? ((puts her hands at her mouth)) And shoes.
6 I: Cap mask and shoes.

The instructor asks the students what their product is (line 1). S responds by saying "cap" and putting her hands around her head simultaneously in line 2. In line 5, she adds more information by saying "and mask" and puts her hands

over her mouth. Although the student did not have difficulty saying these words, she tried to ensure message conveyance both verbally and non-verbally. The students used iconic gestures not only for expressing objects but also for actions such as *walk, see, open, eat*, and *push* in several of the sessions (Sessions 3, 4, 6, and 7). Students' verbal speech and gestures are co-expressive in that they express the same concept in different ways (cf. McNeill 2005).

In all the sessions, students frequently repeated words or phrases uttered by their partner and instructor. Excerpts (3) (line 16) and (4) (line 6) show that a student repeated his or her partner's word (*compact, burokku*). More frequently, students repeated the instructor's words during the interactions (see Excerpt [10]).

(10) (Session 4)
1 I: Where is the GPS?
2 (2.0)
3 S1: Oh::
4 I: The GPS?
5 S1: Where is
6 S2: Sunglass
7 S1: Sunglass
8 S2: In (.) [the
9 I: [In the sunglasses.
10 S2: [In the sunglass.
11 S1: [In the sunglass.=
12 I: =Okay. The GPS is IN (.5) the sunglass.
13 S2: [Sunglass.
14 S1: [Sunglass.
15 I: Now it's a sunglass? (.) Glasses? Sunglass?
16 S1: Uh: (.) Sunglass.=

In Excerpt (10), the instructor asks the students where the GPS is located in the product (line 1). S2 provides an answer in line 6 (*sunglass*), and S1 repeats the word. Subsequently, S2 attempts to provide a more precise answer (line 8). The instructor then correctly interprets S2's message and says "in the sunglasses" (line 9). This is considered as the instructor's lexical anticipation to complete S2's utterance and confirm her comprehension of the student's message. The instructor's phrase is repeated by both students simultaneously in lines 10 and 11. As Mauranen (2012: 220–222) argues, repeating a word or phrase works to maintain the clarity of a concept and shows alignment with the interlocutor. It emphasizes the speaker's agreement with interlocutors more strongly than just saying *yes* or *yeah* (Mackenzie 2014; Mauranen 2012). Moreover, this strategy may be considered

an accommodation strategy that demonstrates students' attempt to actively adopt the instructor's phrases (Cogo and Dewey 2012). In so doing, students tried to co-construct an interaction and facilitate successful communication.

5.4 Summary of the findings

Table 4 summarizes the observed CSs in student–instructor interactions. The first five CSs (message abandonment, let it pass, direct appeal for help to the peer, asking for repetition, and repeating the trigger) were used to overcome interactional problems. The next four CSs (code switching, circumlocution, paralinguistic strategies, and lexical anticipation) were used by students to cope with their lack of linguistic resources. The last two CSs (paralinguistic

Table 4: Observed CSs, their frequency, and effectiveness.

Observed CS	Excerpt #	Frequency	To be practiced or discouraged	Alternative CS to be learned
Message abandonment		Sometimes	Discouraged	Don't give up
Let it pass		Sometimes	Discouraged	Asking for repetition, clarification, or confirmation
Direct appeal for help	(1), (5), (6), (7)	Very frequently	Practiced (not always effective)	Circumlocution
Asking for repetition		Sometimes	Practiced	
Response: repeat	(4)	Frequently	Practiced (not always effective)	Asking for confirmation; Modifying response
Code switching (use of L1)	(1), (2), (5), (6), (7), (8)	Very frequently	Discouraged	Don't give up; Circumlocution
Circumlocution	(5)	Sometimes	Practiced	
Lexical anticipation	(8)	Frequently	Practiced	
Non-linguistic strategies	(7), (9)	Very frequently	Practiced	
Echoing	(3), (4), (10)	Very frequently	Practiced	

Note. Message abandonment, let it pass, and asking for repetition are not found in the excerpts quoted but are discussed in the text as CSs observed sometimes in interactions (see 5.1).

strategies and echoing) served to ascertain message conveyance and prevent a possible non-understanding.

6 Conclusion

Using insights from ELF research on CSs, we analyzed low-proficiency English users' application of CSs in 10 sessions. Analysis of the transcription revealed that students, who had not received any prior in-class instruction in CSs, used various CSs to overcome communicative difficulties and achieve successful message conveyance.

The study's findings suggest educational implications regarding what CSs might be readily learned by low-proficiency English learners. First, it can be argued that they do not have to spend much time on CSs which were shown to have been applied frequently and effectively. Such CSs include direct appeal for help to the peer, repeating the trigger, paralinguistic strategies, echoing, and lexical anticipation. Instead, learners might be advised to actively deploy these CSs since these are what they prefer to use and do not appear to demand high linguistic proficiency. However, students also need to be aware that some CSs (direct appeal for help to the peer and repeating the trigger) are not always effective. Learners can recognize the relative effectiveness of the CSs by examining transcriptions of interactions in which CSs are successfully and unsuccessfully applied (see Lopriore and Vettorel 2015: 26).

Second, the use of ineffective CSs should be discouraged. The CSs that appear to be ineffective are message abandonment, let it pass, and switching into Japanese. When low-proficiency learners, including Japanese speakers, have difficulty conveying their intended message in L2, they tend to remain silent and resort to their L1 hoping that interlocutors understand it (e.g. Poulisse 1997). In general, they should be taught not to give up conveying their intended message (Kirkpatrick 2010: 128–129) and avoid feigning understanding and relying on their L1. It must be noted that participants' use of L1 when they had difficulty is labelled as code switching in this paper following Dörnyei and Scott's definition, "including L1/L3 words with L1/L3 pronunciation in L2 speech; this may involve stretches of discourse ranging from single words to whole chunks and even complete turns" (Dörnyei and Scott 1997: 189). This is not to suggest that using multilingual resources as discussed in ELF research (e.g. Cogo and House 2018; Franceschi 2017; Klimpfinger 2009) is ineffective and should be avoided. In fact, the let-it-pass strategy and code switching are frequently observed in ELF interactions (Firth 1996; House 2010). However, the current study showed that these

strategies used by Japanese low-proficiency English users tended not to make interaction smoother, and often resulted in communication breakdown. It may be better for learners to avoid using these tactics until they are able to recognize where and when to use them.

Third, learners should focus on learning and practicing CSs that they are able to occasionally apply successfully: asking for repetition and circumlocution. By practicing these CSs, learners may be able to overcome non-understanding and clarify unknown lexis. Some empirical studies have shown that it is possible for low to low-intermediate English learners to learn these CSs and may benefit from learning them. For example, Maleki (2007) taught low-intermediate learners various CSs (approximation, circumlocution, word coinage, appeal for assistance, foreignizing, and time-stalling devices). As a result, the learners used interactional strategies such as appeal for assistance effectively and extensively.

Finally, learners need to learn how to ask for confirmation and modify their response (Björkman 2014; Kirkpatrick 2010; Matsumoto 2011). This study demonstrated that students frequently misunderstood the instructor's questions and requests. In addition, they tended to repeat the trigger even though it caused intelligibility problems. These kinds of CSs could help to resolve the communicative problems often observed in this study. However, the participants did not apply these CSs in the interactions. Further studies are recommended to investigate the extent to which low-proficiency English users are able to use them effectively when it is necessary.

It is important to note that the current study's findings are intertwined with communicative contexts and tasks. This study examined CSs in interactions between two low-proficiency students with the same L1 and an instructor. The findings of this study thus may not be applicable to contexts where a single learner interacts with another interactant. More specifically, although participants in this study often relied on their partner when they had interactional and lexical problems, they might have applied a CS had there been no partner to rely on. Furthermore, it might be that participants focused more on explaining the product they had designed than understanding the instructor's suggestions. If the students were more strongly motivated to correctly understand the instructor's suggestions or if an understanding of the interlocutor is crucial, they might have used a wider variety of CSs or applied CSs differently.

More studies from an ELF perspective should be conducted to reveal low-proficiency users' application of CSs in different communicative settings. Furthermore, studies need to explore CSs used by those with different language competence. Such further studies can contribute to effective selection of CSs to be taught and lead other researchers to conduct more studies on efficient CSs in an ELF-informed pedagogy.

Appendix: Conversation analysis transcription conventions

.	falling intonation
?	rising intonation
!	animated intonation
(.5)	periods of silence, timed in tenths of a second
(.)	micropause shorter than 0.2 seconds
%words%	quiet talk
:	a lengthened sound, more colons prolong the stretch
italics	English translation of the utterance above
[	overlap
=	latching, no interval between utterances
((words))	non-vocal action, details of scene
xxx	inaudible sound or utterance
hhh	exhalation
wor-	a cut-off, a word is not produced in its entirety
CAPS	a word or sound that is emphasized

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