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Influence of Use and Disuse of Speaking Strategies on L1 and L2 'Talk as Performance': A Case Study with Undergraduate Learners

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Introduction

ESL learners encounter many difficulties in the process of learning and using the target language. In the case of students in India, English is considered as the determinant of their academic and career success. It is the language, which people perceive as mandatory in pursuing research, academics or to achieve professional success. However, even though children learn English from a very young age, most of them cannot use this language effectively for communication when they reach the tertiary level. From the experiences as an ESL teacher to undergraduate students and from similar anecdotes from ESL teachers in India, it was found that the majority of students encounter problems in academic speaking tasks.

Speech or "talk" as Richards (2006) termed it requires linguistic knowledge and a certain skill set. Speakers need to manage difficulties that arise due to the time factor and associated problems of planning, and memory production under pressure. While speech or talk as interaction and transaction are also problematic for second language learners, talk as performance is more challenging as there is no opportunity for speakers to get any contextual cues/clues. In other words, in an informal scenario or when two or more interlocutors are present in a communication loop, oral communication is not very strenuous as the speaker gets occasional assistance and linguistic and paralinguistic reinforcement from the interlocutors. When one has to perform on one's own, that is talk as performance, it becomes a challenge as talk as performance is a cognitively demanding and context reduced task if we use the nomenclature of Cummins (1980).

This report briefly documents the results of a study that aimed to understand the nature of speaking strategy use of undergraduate learners in talk as performance in their L1 and L2. They study was designed to find how these learners use speaking strategies in their Malayalam and English speeches and established certain patterns of their strategy use.

Literature Review

Strategies enable speakers to plan, execute and monitor the intended language content (Bygate, 1987: 7). When speech takes the form of talk as performance, it may demand the use of strategies, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating. These are classified as language learning strategies for speaking. At

the same time, it may demand the use of some features which are highlighted in the oral communication strategy classification, namely reduction strategies. Incorporating terms from a range of classification models the term 'speaking strategy' has been preferred in this study.

Studies in the field of strategies proved that strategy use enhances language proficiency (Cohen, Weaver, & Li, 1996; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Many such studies which have examined the development of speaking skills through strategy instruction (Altan, 2005; Cohen, Olshtain, & Rosenstein, 1986; Lengkanawati, 2004) did not focus on the possibility of taking the learners' first language into consideration as a source of strategies that are internalised by the learners. In multilingual contexts, L1 can be used as a resource and there are possibilities of transferring strategies from the more enabled language to English through awareness raising (Karthika, 2017). It is possible to assume that if learners successfully transfer strategies from one language to another, they might also be able to reflect on the nature of their strategy use. It is necessary to investigate the nature of individual strategy use and its impact on their speaking proficiency. Investigating whether the language growth is constituted only by the use of strategies or if proficiency is enhanced by not using certain strategies is important as it has great pedagogic implications.

Method

Aim of the Study

This study attempted to understand if speaking strategy use positively correlates with improvement of proficiency in talk as performance and it was based on the assumptions that learners use speaking strategies in talk as performance both in their L1 and English and such strategy use results in improved speaking proficiency.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

  ➢ What is the nature of strategy use of learners in their Malayalam and English speeches?
  ➢ How does strategy use correlate with speaking proficiency?

Participants

The present study followed a case study approach with three undergraduate learners, aged between 19 to 21 years, who were undertaking spoken English classes in a private learning academy. All of them had done their schooling in Malayalam medium schools up to class 10, and then transferred to English medium, where, given the option to write their answers in either English or Malayalam, they had opted for the former. In spite of this, all of them were unhappy with their English proficiency. The participants were given pseudonyms such as Cressida, David and Dianne which were coded as Cr., Da., and Di. respectively for qualitative analysis.

Setting

The study was conducted in a private learning academy, which enrols students who want to improve their English in short term (two months) and long term (six months to one year) courses. The participants had enrolled into the two months' vacation classes for English proficiency development, where grammar and vocabulary were taught, along with skill development. The academy has different levels of classes.

The three learners in this study have been drawn from the 'third level', which focused on teaching the skills and matched, to some extent, undergraduate level expectations.

Instruments

The study made use of the following instruments.

- ➢ Five rounds of speeches, with the first in English and the second in Malayalam in each round (video recorded and transcribed)
- ➢ One-on-one feedback session after every round (video recorded, and coded)
- ➢ Final discussion (one-on-one) (audio-recorded, coded)

Procedure

This case study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse the data. A case study approach was taken up because the problem addressed in this study is universal and since the universe cannot be addressed the case study approach was the best option and representative samples were chosen for the study. A thick ethnographic data analysis was carried out for each of the three participants and the important episodes are presented in this report.

This investigation, which was a part of my doctoral study, in which the possibilities of strategy transfer from Malayalam to English was focussed on was conducted over a period of two months. In this report, the nature of language growth in terms of speaking strategy use and disuse will be foregrounded and discussed.

Speaking tasks used in this study was modelled on the Part 2 segment of IELTS Speaking. Participants were given cue cards with a topic written on it and they were supposed to prepare a 2-minute speech. Questions were selected from British Council's IELTS question bank and were modified with the help of an IELTS examiner. Parallel questions were identified and translated into Malayalam and were verified by the IELTS expert and a Malayalam language expert. In total, 10 questions, five for English cue cards and five for Malayalam cue cards were identified. The participants were given 30 minutes as preparation time for English speeches and 10 minutes for Malayalam speeches, as this was obviously their more enabled language.

Based on the speeches, an individual feedback discussion was held and during these discussions the participants were asked questions on their strategic behaviour as evident from the video recorded speeches. Prompting questions and discussion were the modes by which awareness raising was carried out. The participants were allowed to use their first language or to mix the codes if they wanted. This was to ensure that they were not pressurised to talk about their language behaviour in a language which they were still learning and were not confident in.

The following coding scheme was used for the qualitative analysis of data. The five rounds of speeches are coded as R1, R2, R3, R4, and R5.

TABLE 1
Coding Scheme for Data Collection Instruments

No.	Instrument	Code
1.	Video Recorded English Speech	ES
2.	Video Recorded Malayalam Speech	MS
3.	Video Recorded Feedback Discussion	FS
4.	Final Discussion	FD
5.	Researcher's Diary	RD

Data Analysis

Using the transcripts of important episodes of the feedback sessions and the transcripts of the speeches, taking Nakatani's (2005) strategy inventory as a referring point, the strategies were identified. A qualitative analysis of the data (Karthika, 2017) delineated strategies which were transferred from Malayalam to English. Planning, sequential organisation, using topic sentences, giving examples and monitoring were the major strategies used by the participants in their English and Malayalam speeches. In addition to these strategies, all of them used 'wh' questions to organise their Malayalam speeches. This was the only strategy transferred from English to Malayalam through awareness raising.

To understand their individual growth in language, an analysis of their first and final round speeches was carried out based on a modified scale used by Luoma (2004). Fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary and task response were the five categories on which the speeches were assessed. To establish inter-rater reliability, Spearman Rank-order Correlation was carried out. The speeches, feedback discussions and final discussions were qualitatively analysed to understand the nature of strategy use and how it influences speaking proficiency.

Qualitative analysis of the speeches

Analysis of the English speeches provided insights into the use of certain strategies as enablers of proficiency whereas the disuse of certain other strategies led to better proficiency. A similar trend was visible in Malayalam speeches too. Therefore, strategies that improve speaking proficiency and strategies that negatively affect proficiency are two categories within which the data was analysed. Participants' responses in Malayalam are translated and given in italics.

Strategies that positively correlated with improvement in speaking proficiency. In their English speech, once they were aware of the positive impact of using a topic sentence, using comparisons, examples and substantiation, they were able to speak more effectively than in the first round. Cressida's first round English speech did not carry a topic sentence. She began her speech as:

> I was going to buy vegetables and erm ahm that was the first time I am. I was going alone. It was 11 in the morning but it was sun erm very sunny. (Cr. ES. R1)

The topic given to her was a kind deed she has done which was not clear from the first part of her speech at all. However, in her Malayalam speech she used a topic sentence by which she clearly introduced the topic. When this trend was pointed out in the feedback session, she noticed the effect it brought to the speech. From the second round onwards she was careful enough to begin with a topic sentence. Her final round of speech began with a clear statement of purpose.

> I would like to talk about something that I got through my hardwork and it is a red colour birthday dress to wear which I had to reduce weight. (Cr. ES. R5)

She stated in the final discussion:

> When I realised how important this main … major topic..theme line is I started to use it. I realised that it give a good beginning. Well begun is ... begun is you know almost nicely done. (sic. Cr. FD.)

> This learner had also mentioned that her Malayalam speech was "benefitted through   continuously being conscious throughout speech … and using 'wh' questions as prompts" (sic. Cr. FD.).

After raising awareness of the importance of giving examples in speeches, David was able to use it in his English speeches. Giving examples was one strategy he used in his Malayalam speeches. When he transferred this strategy into English, he stated in one of the feedback sessions that:

> I was consciously using the planning time for finding accurate examples so that I can support my statements. So I planned my speeches after the second round speech so that every statement that make is supported by examples wherever it is possible. When I listened to my speeches, though there were some mistakes, I felt satisfied because some kind of a shape was there for my speech. It was clear. There will be no confusion for the listeners. I see it as a strength of my speech. (Da. FS. R5)

Dianne identified planning and organisation as strategies that helped her to improve her speeches. She specified that her Malayalam speeches were "better planned than the English speeches" and when she began to plan her English speeches "they sounded better organised and had a beginning, middle and end" (Di. FD). She further stated that as she planned the "skeleton of the speeches, these speeches did not have many ahms, ehms" (sic. Di. FS. R5).

From the scores given to the speeches by these participants and a close look at the assessment criteria clearly indicated language growth. Some comments made by one of the assessors also substantiated the point that the growth in proficiency could be attributed to the use of strategies the participants employed in their speeches. All three learners used strategies such as planning, organising, using topic sentences, giving examples and monitoring.

Participants had clear purposes delineated for the use of strategies. They relied upon planning and sequential organisation to have "a proper beginning, middle and end" (Di. FS. R2) for the speech and to "link ideas and sentences properly" (Da. FS. R3). Participants mentioned that the use of topic sentence enabled them to "have confidence" and to be "brief and make precise statements" (Di. FS. R3). Giving examples was used as "an evidence to the sentences and ideas and to showcase the knowledge of the world" (Cr. FS R4). Monitoring was used by them to "keep a track of the ideas" articulated (Da. FS. R3) and it helped to "correct mistakes in grammar and vocabulary" (Di. FS. R2).

Strategies that inversely correlated to speaking proficiency. It was observed from the speech analysis that the participants reduced the use of certain strategies such as repetition, fillers, and hesitation devices. A careful analysis of the scores of their speeches juxtaposed with the assessment criteria also emulated the same.

David's response to the use of repetition is a representative sample for the responses others made. He mentioned that:

> When I listened to the speeches, I understood that both in English and Malayalam, I was repeating many things. First I noticed certain words being repeated. This was actually to get time to think about the next word or sometimes the next statement. But I also noticed later during the feedback session that I was repeating ideas as well. I mean, the things that I said, I said again. So I decided to …

> ... well be careful about it. I decided to not repeat words. So found synonyms or said it in a round-about way. I planned so well so I don't repeat points I already said" (sic. Da. FD).

Cressida made a clear statement about her use of fillers such as "you know" and "I mean":

> … something that really made the speech sound bad. I was listening to me repeating it so many times. It really did not mean anything. My speeches were filled with them. When I realised it I tried to be alert and I tried to avoid them in the later speeches (Cr. FD.)

Regarding the use of hesitation devices Dianne's statement is representative of the statements made by Cressida and David. Dianne identifies her English and Malayalam speeches as:

> … flooded with ehm er ahm ah and such things. I was not confident. I wanted time. To think about next sentence. And no flow in the talk … After the feedback, I understood that these ehm and ahms are not helping me. It was difficult but if you listen my fourth and fifth speeches, I did not used many ehm and ahm and all. I was trying my best to control them. I feel happy that I did it (sic. Di. FD)

One of the assessors of their English speeches commented that "there was a remarkable reduction in the use of hesitation markers and fillers in the speeches". From the qualitative analysis of the speeches, feedback sessions and the final discussions, it has been established that the reduction or elimination in the use of repetition, fillers and hesitation devices resulted in better speaking proficiency. This result corroborates with the scores given by the assessors.

The qualitative analysis also shed light into the purposes of the learners' strategy use. The use of strategies varied individually. When David and Dianne used fillers to buy time Cressida used it as a hesitation device. Repetition of phrases and statements was used by all of them when they encountered difficulty in framing the next sentence. David stated that he used repetition at times when he "attempted to give clarity to the statement" (Da. FS. R2).

Quantitative analysis of the speeches

The analysis of their first and final round speeches was carried out based on a modified scale used by Luoma (2004). Fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary and task response were the five categories on which the speeches were assessed. To establish inter-rater reliability, Spearman Rank Order Correlation was carried out.

The analysis of the scores showed that all aspects of their speeches which were examined using the criteria improved. Compared to their first round speeches all of their final round speeches were better. Language growth was more evident in their Malayalam speeches, although it was not a major focus of the study. The purpose of using L1 speeches was to identify if there are differences in strategy use in L1 and L2 and whether any strategies get transferred from L1 to L2.

TABLE 2
Scores of English Speeches Rounds 1 and 5 by Assessors 1 and 2

Participant's Name	Assessor 1 (R1)	Assessor2 (R1)	Assessor 1 (R5)	Assessor 2 (R5)
Cressida	7.5	7.5	9	9
David	6.5	6.5	8	8
Dianne	4.5	5	5.5	5

TABLE 3
Scores of Malayalam Speeches Rounds 1 and 5 by Assessors 1 and 2

Participant's Name	Assessor 1 (R1)	Assessor2 (R1)	Assessor 1 (R5)	Assessor 2 (R5)
Cressida	5.5	5.5	7.5	7.5
David	7.5	7.5	9	9
Dianne	4	4	7	6.5

Since this is a case study, and there were only three students who participated, a Spearman-Row rank order correlation was carried out. The results are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Spearman Rank Order Correlation

Round 1 English	Round 5 English	Round 1 Malayalam	Round 5 Malayalam
.99	.99	1	.99

Looking at Table 4, it is clear that the two sets of assessors have evaluated in a similar manner, thus establishing reliability in scoring. An average of the marks given by the two assessors for each of the students is given in Table 5.

TABLE 5
Average Marks Given for English and Malayalam Round 1 and Round 5 Speeches

Participant's Name	English (R1)	English (R5)	Growth in English	Malayalam R1	Malayalam R5	Growth in Malayalam
Cressida	7.5	9	1.5	5.5	7.5	2
David	6.5	8	1.5	7.5	9	1.5
Dianne	4.75	5.25	.50	4	6.75	2.75

A quick look at the table, particularly the columns that capture the growth of the students (as reflected in their performance), shows that in English, they have shown an increase in marks from .5 to 1.5 across the 5 rounds. Their growth in their more enabled language, interestingly, is more. The growth in marks is from 1.5 to 2.75. This growth in Malayalam proficiency is not the focus of the study but one would assume that awareness raising of strategies is likely to be reflected earlier in the more enabled language. The students have exhibited some growth in their English proficiency although less than in Malayalam.

Results

The findings of this study revealed the individual strategy use of all participants. The Table 6 illustrates the strategies, the purposes of employing these strategies and their impact on the speech as perceived by the participants.

TABLE 6
Strategies, Purposes and their Positive Impact as Perceived by Participants

Strategy	Purposes of strategy use	Effects of use
Planning	To have a beginning, middle and end to the speech	The speech had an organized and systematic structure, ideas were presented in a compact manner
Sequential organisation	To link ideas with each other To have the correct order of ideas and evidence in place	Ideas were presented with coherence and examples were organized well.
Using topic sentences	To introduce the content of the speech with brevity and precision	Provides focus on the speech and gives confidence
Giving examples	To provide evidence or clarity to the statements made	Prolongs the speech Gives clarity Helps to "showcase knowledge of the world" (Cr.FS.R4)
Monitoring	To enable self-correction of mistakes in terms of grammar and vocabulary To "keep a track of the ideas" articulated (Da. FS. R3)	Corrects mistakes immediately When encountered problems rely on rephrasing or sometimes paraphrasing if the statements are vague

From this table, it is evident that the participants' purpose of strategy use varied. By employing these strategies, the participants expected to improve their speaking proficiency as they perceived these as enabling strategies. It is found from the analysis that these strategies by effecting a positive impact on vocabulary, fluency, accuracy and task response contributed to the enhancement of speaking proficiency.

Table 7 depicts the participants' perceptions of the strategies the disuse of which resulted in better speaking proficiency.

TABLE 7
Strategies, Purposes and their Negative Impact as Perceived by Participants

Strategy	Purposes of strategy use	Effects of use
Fillers	To get time As a hesitation device	Fluency gets affected "Lagging in speech" (Da. FD)
Hesitation devices	To get time to think about the next statement	Fluency gets negatively affected "Boring for the listeners" (Di. FS. R3) "shows lack of preparation and knowledge" (Cr. FD)
Repetition	To get time to remember the next statement or word To find another word/phrase To give clarity to the statement already made	Impedes fluency Limits lexical range If used in a controlled way, it may give clarity to complex ideas

A conscious attempt to avoid fillers, hesitation devices and repetition from their speeches resulted in better proficiency and this was reiterated by the learners in the final discussion.

Discussion

This study aimed to find out the nature of speaking strategy use of learners in their Malayalam and English speeches. It is found from the study that if they are aware of the positive impact strategy use can have on their speeches, the learners tend to employ them and this is a conscious attempt though their initial strategy use might have been an incidental attempt to mitigate the issues encountered in communication. Once this strategy use and its positive impact became reinforced by the teacher/trainer through the feedback session, these learners were able to cognitively process them and began to use them in their speeches. Such strategy use resulted in better proficiency because some of such strategies enabled them to increase the lexical range, provide examples, increase fluency and make the speech content specific. In this context, strategy use resulted in better proficiency. However, the learners, through awareness raising, were able to identify certain strategies which they perceived as reasons for diminishing the quality of their speeches. In other words, such strategies negatively correlated with their proficiency.

As Nakatani (2005) points out in his study, this study also proves that certain strategies like message abandonment and reduction strategies though sometimes assists the speakers to continue speaking, they may not contribute to the various features of speaking such as lexical range, accuracy, task response or fluency. In a scenario where interlocutors are present and the context is that of "talk as interaction" the use of message reduction and abandonment strategies may be tolerable. However, in the context of talk as performance which is a cognitively demanding task, disuse of certain strategies will be more effective in contributing to the enhancement of proficiency and the effect of the speech.

The results of the study imply that raising awareness of strategies can actually result in learners being selective in the use of strategies in their speeches. They have to be informed about the positive effect of use and disuse of strategies on various aspects of speeches so that they can consciously use strategies that positively influences their speech or avoid strategies that negatively affects their speech.

Conclusion

This case study has implications for teachers as they can use the time they have for feedback to raise awareness of strategies. Students may use their own idiosyncratic strategies and fine-tuning through teacher feedback can enable better speaking proficiency if the teachers highlight the potential of certain strategies and their possible functions. A possible problem that teachers might face in the classrooms will be that of restrictions in terms of time. However, this can be resolved to a great extend if ICT tools are incorporated into the teaching and learning context whereby the learners can record their speeches and upload it on a suitable platform for both the teacher and learners and the teacher can use the same or a similar medium to offer feedback. To suggest larger pedagogical implications, there should be a longitudinal study addressing the issues encountered by teachers in embedding awareness raising of strategies into the curriculum.

Acknowledgements

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