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Communication Strategy Use of EFL Students at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan

Sasina Cherkeaw[1,a], Kerdwipa Buapith[1,b], Aroonrut Puntasa[1,c] Surapa Somsai[1,d]

[1]Department of Liberal Arts, Faculty of Industry and Technology,
Rajamangala University of Technology Isan Sakon Nakhon Campus,
199 Village No. 3, Phungkon, Sakon Nakhon, Thailand

[a]<boomha123@gmail.com>, [b]<ggeedwipa1997@gmail.com>, [c]<aroonrut.pu@gmail.com>,
Corresponding Author: [d]<surapa.so@rmuti.ac.th>

Abstract

The objectives of the present study were to examine the frequency of the communication strategy (CS) use and investigate the relationships between CS use and exposure to oral communication in English of Electrical Engineering (EE) students. The participants of the study were 144 EE students obtained through the stratified random sampling method. They were studying in the Faculty of Industry and Technology at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan Sakon Nakhon Campus, the academic year 2019. The data were collected through the communication strategy questionnaires and the semi-structured interview. The data for this study were analyzed by the assistance of the SPSS program considering mean, standard deviation, and an independent samples t-test. The findings revealed that no significant differences were found in the frequency of CS use in any categories according to the exposure to oral communication in English of the students. That is students, whether limited in the classroom only or non-limited in the classroom only, did not report employing CSs for any purposes of the three main categories significantly differently.

Keywords: communication strategies, communication strategy use, Electrical Engineering students, exposure to oral communication in English

1. Introduction

English is the most commonly used language among foreign-language speakers. Throughout the world, when people from different nationalities need to communicate, they commonly use the English language. That is why English is known as "the language of communication". Moreover, speaking English will enable the speaker to contact people from all over the world and to travel more easily.

The English language has been taught as a compulsory subject in schools in Thailand since 1921 (Foley, 2005). Many educators in Thailand continue to raise concerns about the standards of English language education. Methithan & Chamcharatsri (2011) claim that Thai students lack both linguistic and communicative competence. Marukatat (2012) further suggests that entering into the ASEAN community of Thailand, Thai people need to be well-equipped with English language skills. A lack of English skills across the country will leave Thai people disadvantaged compared with other ASEAN members.

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Regarding language teaching, it is now commonplace to address that the communicative approach has played an important role. Language learners are expected to be able to express the message in the target language effectively and successfully. The ultimate goal of language teaching under the communicative approach is to improve the communicative competence of language learners (Richards, Platt, and Weber, 1985; DÖrnyei and Thurrel, 1991). According to Canale (1983), language learners can significantly improve their communicative competence by developing their ability to use communication strategies (CSs).

Some language learners are believed to be able to communicate in certain communication situations successfully with only one hundred words. This may be because they are relying entirely on their CSs (DÖrnyei and Thurrel, 1991). To put it simply, when native speakers and non-native speakers have interaction, they may use strategies including paraphrase, approximation, word coinage, literal translation, language switch, appeal for assistance, mime, and fillers or hesitation devices. The strategies could be used not only to solve any communication problems arising during an oral communication in English but also to enhance the effectiveness of the interaction. They can eventually overcome communication breakdowns and reach communicative goals. This success is believed to gradually develop the second-language learners' communicative competence and also make them become more confident and successful communicators ultimately.

Therefore, the present study is intended to focus on a crucial aspect of communicative language skills, namely communication strategies which language learners employ to cope with their oral communication problems. Through an extensive review of related literature and research on CSs, the researchers found that, to date, few research studies have been carried out to investigate CSs employed by students of Electrical Engineering (EE) at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan, Sakon Nakhon Campus (RMUTI SKC). Furthermore, only a few research examined learners' use of CSs in association with their exposure to oral communication in English. Hence, the researchers for the present investigation aimed to fill these gaps. This study may help shed some light on CS use for language teachers and learners.

2. Objectives of the Study

This study was conducted to investigate the relationships between CSs use and exposure to oral communication in English of Electrical Engineering students at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan, Sakon Nakhon Campus. The objectives are as follows:

- To examine the frequency of the CS use of Electrical Engineering students.
- To investigate the relationships between CSs use and exposure to oral communication in English of Electrical Engineering students.

3. Research Questions

The following two research questions were derived to serve the research objectives.

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- What is the frequency of the communication strategies employed by Electrical Engineering students?
- What are the relationships between CSs use and exposure to oral communication in English of Electrical Engineering students?

4. Literature Review

This section provides related literature to the research objectives. It includes a brief overview of the communicative competence and communication strategies.

4.1 Communicative competence

What follows are the discussions of the definitions of communicative competence, the components of communicative competence, and the importance of strategic competence.

4.1.1 Definitions of communicative competence

Generally, communicative competence has been seen as the knowledge which leads language learners to use a language for communication accurately and appropriately. Some scholars have defined the term 'communicative competence' interestingly. Hymes (1971, cited in Ellis, 1994, p.13) defined communicative competence as "the knowledge the speaker-hearer has of what constitutes appropriate as well as correct language behavior and also of what constitutes effective language behavior in relation to particular communicative goal". Later, in 1972 (cited in Brown, 2000, p.246), Hymes further defined communicative competence as "the aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts". Canale and Swain (1980) refer to communicative competence as "both knowledge and skill in using this knowledge when interacting in actual communication". We can see that communicative competence focuses on both linguistic and pragmatic knowledge that can be used in understanding and producing discourse. That is, in communicative competence, both linguistic knowledge and pragmatic knowledge are potential in oral communication. The former is what a speaker knows about the language and different aspects related to communicative language use, and the latter is how well a speaker can use the language in communication. The speaker can use both kinds of knowledge for conveying, interpreting the message, and negotiating the meaning with his/her interlocutors in a specific speech context effectively.

4.1.2 Components of communicative competence

The widely accepted theoretical framework of communicative competence has been explained in terms of three component competencies proposed by Canale and Swain (1980). These include grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Canale (1983) further divides the sociolinguistic competence into two separate components as sociolinguistic and discourse competence. What follows is a brief discussion of each of the four areas of communicative competence based on Canale (1983); Savignon (1997); and Brown (2000).

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1. *Grammatical competence* concerns the mastery of rules of second language (L2) phonology, word formation, and sentence formation, spelling, and linguistic semantics. This means that the knowledge and skill required to understand, interpret and express the literal meaning of utterances are the focal points for grammatical competence.

2. *Sociolinguistic competence* concerns the mastery of sociocultural rules of L2 language and of discourse, that is, utterances are suitably produced and understood in different sociolinguistic contexts. Understanding the roles of the participants, speech act conventions, the use of a language to signal social relationships, etc. are fully recognized.

3. *Discourse competence* concerns the mastery of rules of sentence connections, namely cohesion and coherence, of different kinds of discourse in L2. A whole series of utterances is produced meaningfully and understandably. This means that knowledge of language use of appropriate pronouns, synonyms, conjunctions, parallel structures, substitution, repetition, ellipsis, etc. is the central point in discourse competence.

4. *Strategic competence* concerns the mastery of verbal and non-verbal CSs that are probably used while communicating in the target language, whether to compensate for the communication breakdowns due to grammatical and sociolinguistic competence deficiencies or to enhance the effectiveness of communication.

Of the four components of communicative competence, the two components: grammatical and discourse competence, mainly reflect the aspects of linguistic knowledge and skill use, whereas the other two: sociolinguistic and strategic competence, deal with the language function. As communicative competence is believed to enable language learners to use a language effectively, especially in communication (Johnson & Johnson, 2001), language learners need to be equipped with the knowledge of communicative competence as it is the identification of successful communicator's characteristics.

Strategic competence definitely plays an important role in the development of communicative competence as it is one of the communicative competence's main components. The strategic competence is concerned with the ability to know how to make the most of the target language knowledge that the language learners have, especially when the target language is 'deficient' leading to communication problems. As strategic competence is related to CSs, based on the terms of strategic competence mentioned above, which are the focal points of the present investigation, and to have a greater understanding of strategic competence, it is worth discussing the importance of strategic competence.

4.1.3 Importance of strategic competence

Based on the communicative competence mentioned above, strategic competence has been considered as one of the crucial components of communicative competence. Canale and Swain (1980) define strategic competence as verbal and non-verbal strategies that may be called into action to compensate for communication breakdowns due to performance variables or to insufficient competence. Canale (1983, p.10) further defines strategic competence as "the mastery of verbal and non-verbal CSs that may be called into action for two main reasons: (a) to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to limiting conditions in actual communication (e.g. momentary inability to recall an idea or

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grammatical form) or to insufficient competence in one or more of the other areas of communicative competence; and (b) to enhance the effectiveness of communication". Besides, Yule and Tarone (1990, p.181) define strategic competence as "an ability to select an effective means of performing a communicative act that enables the listener/reader to identify the intended referent". Furthermore, DÖrnyei and Thurrel (1991, p.17) define strategic competence as "the ability to get one's meaning across successfully to communicative partners, especially when problems arise in the communication process".

Referring to the given definitions of strategic competence mentioned above, strategic competence seems to play an important role in developing communicative competence. If the language learners want to reach communicative goals, they need to master the strategic competence, so that they can employ CSs to get the message across to their interlocutors, solve communication breakdowns if any exists at all, and reach communicative goals eventually. As Si-Qing (1990, p.156) points out, "one can develop learners' communicative competence by building up their strategic competence. Their ability to use CSs allows them to cope with various communicative problems that they might encounter". Besides, Canale (1983, p.11) gives an example of strategic competence as "If a learner did not know the English term 'train station', he or she might try a paraphrase such as 'the place where trains go' or 'the place for trains'". This means that the learner is well-equipped with strategic competence; whenever he or she faces a communicative problem, he or she decides to use other alternative means, known as CSs, to manage the problem in order to meet the intended communicative goal.

4.2 Communication strategies

The study of communication strategies (CSs) has occupied a place in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) since the early 1970s. In order to get a clear picture of CSs, the definitions of CSs and the classification of CSs adopted in the present study are presented.

4.2.1 Definitions of CSs

Several definitions of CSs have been proposed by different researchers in the early studies of CSs. Tarone, Cohen & Dumas (1976, p.78) define CSs as "a systematic attempt by the learner to express or decode meaning in the target language, in situations where the appropriate systematic target language rules have not been formed". Bialystok (1983, p.102) defines CSs as "all attempts to manipulate a limited linguistic system in order to promote communication". Stern (1983, p.411) also propose the definition of CSs as "techniques of coping with difficulties in communicating in an imperfectly known second language". Moreover, Bygate (2000, p.115) defines CSs as "ways of achieving communication by using language in the most effective way". In addition, Somsai (2011) has referred CSs to "a systematic attempt made by students to cope with oral communication problems both to get the message across to the interlocutor and to understand the message due to their inadequate linguistic or sociocultural knowledge. The CSs may be also employed in order to maintain their conversation".

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In conclusion, through the observation on CS definitions, CSs can be defined as language means used by the second-language learners in an attempt either to manage problems in expressing their intended meaning to their interlocutors due to their linguistic deficiencies in oral communication or to promote and enhance the effectiveness of their oral communication.

4.2.2 Classifications of CSs

Over the years, typologies of CSs have been developed. The conceptual differences among CS researchers lead to the diversity of typologies and classifications of CSs resulting in various existing CS taxonomies, i.e. Tarone, Cohen & Dumas's (1976), Tarone's (1977), Bialystok's (1983, 1990), Færch and Kasper's (1983c), Paribakht's (1985), Poulisse's (1987, 1993), Willems's (1987), DÖrnyei's (1995), Nakatani's (2006), and Somsai's (2011).

Since the present investigation has adopted the classification of CSs proposed by Somsai (2011) to develop the questionnaire, the classification is presented below.

1.*Continuous Interaction Strategies for Conveying a Message to the Interlocutor (CSCM)*

CSCM1: Switching some unknown words or phrases into Thai
CSCM2: Correcting one's own pronunciation, grammar, and lexical mistakes
CSCM3: Using familiar words, phrases, or sentences
CSCM4: Using circumlocution
CSCM5: Using non-verbal expressions such as mime, gestures, and facial expressions
CSCM6: Referring to objects or materials
CSCM7: Drawing a picture
CSCM8: Repeating words, phrases, or sentences a few times
CSCM9: Spelling or writing out the intended words, phrases, or sentences
CSCM10: Using fillers
CSCM11: Appealing for assistance from the interlocutor
CSCM12: Making use of expressions which have been previously learned
CSCM13: Making use of expressions found in some sources of media (e.g. movies, songs, or TV)
CSCM14: Using synonym or antonym
CSCM15: Making up a new word in order to communicate the desired concept (word-coinage)
CSCM16: Translating literally from Thai into English

2.*Discontinuous Interaction Strategies for Conveying a Message to the Interlocutor (DSCM)*

DSCM1: Keeping quiet while thinking about how to get a message across to the interlocutor
DSCM2: Speaking more slowly to gain time to think
DSCM3: Talking about something else to gain time to think

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DSCM4: Appealing for assistance from other people around

DSCM5: Making a phone call to another person for assistance

DSCM6: Referring to a dictionary, a book, or another type of document

DSCM7: Thinking in Thai before speaking

3.*Strategies for Understanding the Message (SUM)*

SUM1: Trying to catch the interlocutor's main point

SUM2: Noticing the interlocutor's gestures and facial expression

SUM3: Asking the interlocutor for a repetition

SUM4: Asking the interlocutor to slow down

SUM5: Appealing for assistance from other people around to clarify the interlocutor's message

SUM6: Asking the interlocutor to simplify the language

SUM7: Making clear to the interlocutor when one cannot perfectly catch the message

SUM8: Paying attention to the first part of the sentence

SUM9: Paying attention to the interlocutor's intonation

SUM10: Asking the interlocutor to give an example

SUM11: Repeating what the interlocutor has said softly and trying to translate into Thai

SUM12: Guessing the meaning of what the interlocutor has said

4.*Strategies for Maintaining the Conversation (SMC)*

SMC1: Feeling all right about one's wrong pronunciation

SMC2: Trying to enjoy the conversation

SMC3: Feeling all right for taking risks while speaking

SMC4: Paying little attention to grammar and structure

SMC5: Feeling all right if the conversation does not go smoothly by keeping speaking

SMC6: Preparing the message by trying to anticipate what the interlocutor is going to say based on the context

SMC7: Speaking slowly to keep the conversation going smoothly

SMC8: Responding to the interlocutor despite an imperfect understanding of the message

SMC9: Trying to relax when one feels anxious

According to Somsai (2011), the CS classification comprises four main categories. The first category includes continuous interaction strategies for conveying a message to the interlocutor (CSCM). The purposes of employing these strategies are to convey the intended message to the interlocutor without a breakdown or a pause by using one of the strategies or a series of strategies under this category to achieve the communicative purpose. The second category includes discontinuous interaction strategies for conveying a message to the interlocutor (DSCM). These strategies are employed to discontinue the interaction with the interlocutor for a while in order to seek a way to convey the intended message to the interlocutor. Eventually, he/she could successfully get the message across to the

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interlocutor. The third category is strategies for understanding the message (SUM). The purposes of employing these strategies are to attempt to understand the interlocutor's message. These strategies could be employed either while the message was being transmitted or after the message had already been transmitted. The last category is strategies for maintaining the conversation (SMC). The strategies under this category are resorted to keeping the conversation going or to maintaining the conversation.

5 Research Methodology

5.1 Population and sample

The population of this study was the Electrical Engineering students at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan, Sakon Nakhon Campus, in the academic year 2019. One hundred and forty- four Electrical Engineering students studying in the Electrical Engineering Department at RMUTI SKC in the academic year 2018 were selected through the stratified random sampling method as the samples of the study.

5.2 Research instrument

To answer the research questions of the study, the researcher developed the following research instruments to collect data.

5.2.1 The communication strategy questionnaire

The communication strategy questionnaire was used as the main instrument to collect data in the present investigation. It was used to gather data from EE students who were studying in the Faculty of Industry and Technology at RMUTI SKC in order to examine the frequency of the communication strategy use for coping with oral communication problems arising during the oral communication in English of the students.

The questionnaire for the present study was taken from that of Somsai's (2011). The questionnaire consists of two parts: Part 1 is the respondent's personal background and Part 2 is the communication strategies. In part 2, there were altogether 44 CS items. These strategies were under the four main categories: CSCM, DSCM, SUM, and SMC. The communication strategy questionnaire was a 4-point rating scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (always).

In order to interpret the data, the mean frequency score of vocabulary learning strategy use of each category or item is valued based on Intaraprasert (2000). That is the mean scores 1.00-1.99 indicate as low use, 2.00-2.99 as medium use, and 3.00 – 4.00 as high use.

5.3 Data collection

The data collection procedure was conducted on July 2019 at the Faculty of Industry and Technology, Rajamagala University of Technology Isan, Sakon Nakhon Campus. First,

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all the 144 EE students were required to respond to the communication strategy questionnaires for 10 minutes.

5.4 Data analysis

The present investigation was quantitative research. For data analysis and interpretation, the data obtained through the communication strategy questionnaires were statistically analyzed with the assistance of the SPSS program.

5.4.1.1 Descriptive statistics. To answer RQ1, descriptive statistics: mean ($\bar{X}$) and standard deviation (SD) were used to describe the underlying patterns in the data in terms of the frequency distributions of student-reported communication strategy use in general.

5.4.1.2 Independent samples t-test. To answer RQ2, an independent samples t-test was applied to compare and test the significant difference between the frequency of communication strategy use and exposure to oral communication in English of students.

6 Results

6.1 The frequency of communication strategy use of the students

In this section, the researchers presented the frequency of communication strategy use of EE students at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan, Sakon Nakhon Campus. The results of the data analysis of the frequency of CS use were presented at three different layers of CS use. These include overall CS use, use of CSs under the four main categories, and use of 44 individual CSs. The mean frequency scores of students' reported CS use in different layers were the focal point of description and discussion. The frequency of students' choices of CSs had been categorized into 'high', 'medium', and 'low' use. This was determined by responses to the CS questionnaire. The frequency of CS use was indicated on a four-point rating scale, rating from 'Never' valued as 1, 'Sometimes' valued as 2, 'Often' valued as 3, 'Always' valued as 4. Therefore, the possible average value of the frequency of CS use can be valued from 1.00 to 4.00. The mid-point of the minimum and maximum valued was 2.50. The mean frequency score of CS use of each category or item valued from 1.00 to 1.99 was determined as 'low use', from 2.00 to 2.99 as 'medium use', from 3.00 to 4.00 as 'high use' (Intaraprasert, 2000: p.167).

6.1.1 Frequency of students' overall strategy use

The result of the holistic mean frequency score across the CS questionnaire responded by 144 EE students were illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Frequency of Students' Overall Communication Strategy Use

Students' Overall	No. of Students	Mean Frequency Score ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation	Frequency

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Strategy Use			(S.D)	
Overall CS Use	144	2.57	.19	Medium use

As shown in Table 1, the mean frequency score of students' reported overall CS use was 2.57 (SD = 0.19). It indicated that these 144 EE students in the Faculty of Industry and Technology at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan, Sakon Nakhon Campus, as a whole, reported employing CSs at the medium frequency level.

6.1.2 Frequency of students' communication strategy use under the four main categories
The CSs for the present investigation had been classified under the four main categories: CSCM, DSCM, SUM, and SMC (Somsai, 2011). Table 2 presented the mean frequency score of reported CS use under the five categories.

Table 2 Frequency of Students' Communication Strategy Use under the Four Main Categories
(n = 144)

Strategy Category	Mean Frequency Score ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation (S.D)	Frequency
CSCM	2.59	.33	Medium use
DSCM	2.62	.19	Medium use
SUM	2.64	.13	Medium use
SMC	2.44	.09	Medium use

Table 2 revealed that 144 EE students in the Faculty of Industry and Technology at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan, Sakon Nakhon Campus who had involved in the present study reported employing CSs at the medium frequency level in all the four main categories. Considering the mean frequency scores of the four categories, we found that the most frequent use of students' reported CSs were in the SUM category (mean=2.64, SD=0.13) followed by the DSCM category (mean=2.62, SD=0.19), the CSCM category (mean=2.59, SD=0.33), and the SMC category (mean=2.44, SD=0.09), respectively.

6.1.3 Frequency of students' individual communication strategy use
This section provided more information on students' reported CS use in a more detailed manner. That was, the frequency of reported CS use was presented and described in an individual strategy use layer. Table 3 presented the frequency of reported individual strategy use of the students.

Table 3 Frequency of Students' Individual Communication Strategy Use (n = 144)

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Individual Communication Strategies	Mean	S.D	Frequency of Use
SUM2 Noticing the interlocutor's gestures and facial expression	2.87	.63	Medium
CSCM5 Using non-verbal expressions such as mime, gestures, and facial expressions	2.84	.74	Medium
SUM1 Trying to catch the interlocutor's main point	2.81	.62	Medium
DSCM4 Appealing for assistance from other people around	2.76	.75	Medium
SUM5 Appealing for assistance from other people around to clarify the interlocutor's message	2.74	.67	Medium
DSCM7 Thinking in Thai before speaking	2.73	.81	Medium
SUM3 Asking the interlocutor for a repetition	2.72	.70	Medium
CSCM6 Referring to objects or materials	2.72	.68	Medium
SUM12 Guessing the meaning of what the interlocutor has said	2.71	.74	Medium
DSCM6 Referring to a dictionary, a book, or another type of document	2.70	.83	Medium
CSCM1 Switching some unknown words or phrases into Thai	2.69	.72	Medium
SUM4 Asking the interlocutor to slow down	2.67	.69	Medium
CSCM12 Making use of expressions which have been previously learnt	2.65	.75	Medium
DSCM2 Speaking more slowly to gain time to think	2.64	.70	Medium
SCM3 Using familiar words, phrases, or sentences	2.61	.81	Medium
SUM10 Asking the interlocutor to give an example	2.61	.82	Medium
CSCM13 Making use of expressions found in some sources of media (e.g. movies, songs, or T.V.)	2.59	.66	Medium
DSCM1 Keeping quiet while thinking about how to get a message across to the interlocutor	2.59	.70	Medium

Table 3 Frequency of Students' Individual Communication Strategy Use (Cont.)

Individual Communication Strategies	Mean	S.D	Frequency of Use
SUM6 Asking the interlocutor to simplify the language	2.59	.73	Medium
SMM7 Speaking slowly to keep the conversation going smoothly	2.59	.85	Medium
DSCM7 Keeping quiet while thinking about how to get a message across to the interlocutor	2.59	.70	Medium

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Individual Communication Strategies	Mean	S.D	Frequency of Use
SUM5 Appealing for assistance from other people around to clarify the interlocutor's message to understand the message	2.59	.73	Medium
SMM7 Speaking slowly to keep the conversation going smoothly	2.59	.85	Medium
CSCM11 Appealing for assistance from the interlocutor	2.56	.70	Medium
SUM7 Making clear to the interlocutor when one cannot perfectly catch the message	2.56	.70	Medium
SMM9 Trying to relax when one feels anxious	2.55	.85	Medium
CSCM8 Repeating words, phrases, or sentences a few times	2.54	.64	Medium
CSCM4 Using circumlocution	2.54	.71	Medium
SUM11 Repeating what the interlocutor has said softly and trying to translate into Thai	2.54	.80	Medium
SMM3 Feeling all right for taking risks while speaking	2.54	.84	Medium
CSCM14 Using synonym or antonym	2.53	.69	Medium
CSCM9 Spelling or writing out the intended words, phrases, or sentences	2.47	.70	Medium
SUM8 Paying attention to the first part of the sentence	2.46	.81	Medium
SMM2 Trying to enjoy the conversation	2.43	.91	Medium
SMM6 Preparing the message by trying to anticipate what the interlocutor is going to say based on the context	2.41	.89	Medium
DSCM3 Talking about something else to gain time to think	2.40	.75	Medium
CSCM 10 Using fillers	2.40	.72	Medium
SUM 9 Paying attention to the interlocutor's intonation	2.40	.83	Medium
SMM1 Feeling all right about one's wrong pronunciation	2.39	.83	Medium
SMM4 Paying little attention to grammar and structure	2.39	.82	Medium
CSCM7 Drawing a picture	2.38	.87	Medium
SMM5 Feeling all right if the conversation does not go smoothly by keeping speaking	2.36	.85	Medium
SMM8 Responding to the interlocutor despite an imperfect understanding of the message	2.35	.80	Medium
CSCM16 Translating literally from Thai into English	2.34	.82	Medium
CSCM2 Correcting one's own pronunciation, grammar, and lexical mistakes	2.29	.69	Medium
DSCM5 Making a phone call to another person for assistance	2.22	.91	Medium

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Individual Communication Strategies	Mean	S.D	Frequency of Use
CSCM15 Making up a new word in order to communicate the desired concept (word-coinage)	2.04	.89	Medium

Table 3 showed, based on the mean frequency scores, All 144 individual CSs were reported with a medium frequency of use. The most frequently used strategy was: *"SUM 2 Noticing the interlocutor's gestures and facial expression"* (mean=2.87, SD=0.63). Meanwhile, *"CSCM 15 Making up a new word in order to communicate the desired concept (word-coinage)"* (mean=2.04, SD= 0.89) was reportedly employed with the least frequency of strategy use.

6.2 The relationships between communication strategy use and exposure to oral communication in English of students

This section examines variation in the frequency of students' reported CS use according to their exposure to oral communication in English based on an independent samples t-test. The results of the data analysis were described at three different layers of CS use. These include overall CS use, use of CSs under the four main categories, and use of 44 individual CSs. Table 4-6 contains the independent variable hypothesized to influence students' CS use, followed by mean frequency score of strategy use, standard deviation (SD), level of significance, and pattern of variation in the frequency of students' CS use if a significant variation exists.

6.2.1 Variation in frequency of students' overall reported CS use according to the exposure to oral communication in English of students

Table 4 summarized the variation in the frequency of students' reported CS use as a whole according to their exposure to oral communication in English based on the t-test results.

Table 4 A Summary of Variation in Frequency of Students' Overall Reported CS Use according to the Exposure to Oral Communication in English of Students

Exposure to Oral Communication in English	Limited to classroom only		Non-limited to classroom			Comment
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Sig.	Pattern of Variation
Overall CS Use	2.57	.18	2.60	.21	N.S	-

The t-test results shown in Table 4 revealed that there was no significant variation in the frequency of students' reported overall CS use according to exposure to oral

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communication in English. Although the students' overall use of CSs did not vary significantly according to their exposure to oral communication in English, the mean frequency scores of the overall use of CSs indicated that students with non-limited exposure to oral communication in English to classroom instructions generally reported employing CSs slightly greater than did those with limited exposure.

6.2.2 Variation in frequency of students' reported CS use under the four main categories according to the exposure to oral communication in English of students

Table 5 below demonstrated variation in the frequency of students' reported CS use under the four main categories according to their exposure to oral communication in English based on the t-test results.

Table 5 A Summary of Variation in Frequency of Students' Reported CS Use under the Four Main Categories according to the Exposure to Oral Communication in English of Students

Exposure to Oral Communication in English	Limited to classroom only		Non-limited to classroom			Comment
	Mean	**S.D**	**Mean**	**S.D**	**Sig.**	**Pattern of Variation**
CSCM	2.55	.15	2.57	.23	N.S	-
DSCM	2.59	.32	2.65	.31	N.S	-
SUM	2.62	.12	2.78	.19	N.S	-
SMC	2.52	.11	2.39	.10	N.S	-

In Table 5, the results from the t-test showed that no significant differences were found in the frequency of CS use for any purposes of the four main categories according to the exposure to oral communication in English of students. In other words, students whether with non-limited exposure to oral communication in English to classroom instructions or with limited exposure did not report employing CSs for any purposes of the four main categories significantly differently.

The t-test results showed no significant differences in either frequency of students' overall CS use, or frequency of CS use under the four main categories according to the students' exposure to oral communication in English. However, differences in the use of individual CSs were found to be related to this variable.

6.2.3 Variation in frequency of students' reported use of individual CSs according to the Exposure to Oral Communication in English of Students

Table 6 illustrated variation in the frequency of students' reported use of 44 individual CSs, according to their exposure to oral communication in English based on the results of the t-test.

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Table 6 Variation in Students' Reported Use of Individual CSs according to the Exposure to Oral Communication in English of Students

Exposure to Oral Communication in English	Limited to classroom only		Non-limited to classroom			Comment
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Sig.	Pattern of Variation
CSCM1 Switching some unknown words or phrases into Thai	2.60	.71	2.88	.71	N.S	-
CSCM2 Correcting one's own pronunciation, grammar and lexical mistakes	2.26	.72	2.35	.64	N.S	-
CSCM3 Using familiar words, phrases, or sentences	2.57	.85	2.71	.72	N.S	-
CSCM4 Using circumlocution	2.44	.70	2.75	.71	N.S	-
CSCM5 Using non-verbal expressions such as mime, gestures, and facial expressions	2.84	.73	2.82	.77	N.S	-
CSCM6 Referring to objects or materials	2.74	.67	2.66	.70	N.S	-
CSCM7 Drawing a picture	2.37	.87	2.42	.89	N.S	-
CSCM8 Repeating words, phrases, or sentences a few times	2.54	.65	2.55	.62	N.S	-
CSCM9 Spelling or writing out the intended words, phrases, or sentences	2.48	.71	2.46	.69	N.S	-
CSCM10 Using filler	2.41	.72	2.37	.71	N.S	-
CSCM11 Appealing for assistance from the interlocutor	2.51	.70	2.68	.70	N.S	-
CSCM 12 Making use of expressions which have been previously learnt	2.62	.77	2.71	.69	N.S	-
CSCM13 Making use of expressions found in some sources of media (e.g. movies, songs, or T.V.)	2.56	.65	2.66	.67	N.S	-
CSCM14 Using synonym or antonym	2.48	.71	2.64	.64	N.S	-
CSCM15 Making up a new word in order to communicate a desired concept (word-coinage)	2.00	.88	2.13	.91	N.S	-

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CSCM16 Translating literally from Thai into English	2.32	.84	2.40	.78	N.S	-
DSCM1 Keeping quiet while thinking about how to get a message across to the interlocutor	2.67	.80	2.77	.90	N.S	-
DSCM2 Speaking more slowly to gain time to think	2.64	.35	2.73	.57	N.S	-
DSCM3 Talking about something else to gain time to think	2.71	.84	2.77	.76	N.S	-
DSCM4 Appealing for assistance from other people around	2.58	.36	2.65	.47	N.S	-
DSCM5 Making a phone call to another person for assistance	2.74	.42	2.84	.68	N.S	-
DSCM6 Referring to a dictionary, a book, or another type of document	2.86	.52	2.91	.41	N.S	-
SUM1 Trying to catch the interlocutor's main point	2.12	.64	2.25	.47	N.S	-
SUM2 Noticing the interlocutor's gestures and facial expression	2.82	.62	2.97	.65	N.S	-

Table 6 Variation in Students' Reported Use of Individual CSs according to the Exposure to Oral Communication in English of Students (Cont.)

Exposure to Oral Communication in English	**Limited to classroom only**		**Non-limited to classroom**		**Comment**	
	Mean	**S.D**	**Mean**	**S.D**	**Sig.**	**Pattern of Variation**
SUM3 Asking the interlocutor for a repetition	2.67	.65	2.82	.80	N.S	-
SUM4 Asking the interlocutor to slow down	2.59	.66	2.84	.73	$p < 0.5$	(Non-limited>limited)
SUM5 Appealing for assistance from other people around to clarify the interlocutor's message to understand the message	2.51	.69	2.66	.70	N.S	-
SUM6 Asking the interlocutor to simplify the language	2.71	.65	2.84	.23	N.S	-
SUM7 Making clear to the interlocutor when one cannot perfectly catch the message	2.32	.21	2.41	.80	N.S	-
SUM8 Paying attention to the first part of the	2.42	.82	2.55	.78	N.	-

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Exposure to Oral Communication in English	Limited to classroom only		Non-limited to classroom			Comment
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Sig.	Pattern of Variation
sentence					S	
SUM9 Paying attention to the interlocutor's intonation	2.35	.84	253	.81	N.S	-
SUM10 Asking the interlocutor to give an example	2.54	.82	2.75	.80	N.S	-
SUM11 Repeating what the interlocutor has said softly and trying to translate into Thai	2.52	.76	2.57	.89	N.S	-
SUM12 Guessing the meaning of what the interlocutor has said	2.68	.72	2.77	.79	N.S	-
SMM1 Feeling all right about one's wrong pronunciation	2.33	.83	2.53	.84	N.S	-
SMM2 Trying to enjoy the conversation	2.39	.92	2.53	.89	N.S	-
SMM3 Feeling all right for taking risks while speaking	2.47	.84	2.71	.81	N.S	-
SMM4 Paying little attention to grammar and structure	2.31	.77	2.57	.89	N.S	-
SMM5 Feeling all right if the conversation does not go smoothly by keeping speaking	2.32	.84	2.44	.89	N.S	-
SMM6 Preparing the message by trying to anticipate what the interlocutor is going to say based on the context	2.67	.80	2.77	.90	N.S	-
SMM7 Speaking slowly to keep the conversation going smoothly	2.71	.84	2.77	.76	N.S	-
SMM8 Responding to the interlocutor despite an imperfect understanding of the message	2.80	.58	2.84	.70	N.S	-
SMM9 Trying to relax when one feels anxious	2.82	.62	2.97	.65	N.S	-

The results of the t-test in Table 6 showed significant variations in the frequency of students' use of one out of forty-four individual CSs to cope with their oral communication problems in English according to exposure to oral communication in English. It was *"SUM4 Asking the interlocutor to slow down"*.

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It indicated that students with non-limited exposure to oral communication in English to classroom instructions reported employing *"SUM4 Asking the interlocutor to slow down"* significantly more frequently than did those with limited exposure (Non-limited>limited).

7 Discussion

The main objectives of the present study were to examine the frequency of the CS use and find the relationships between CS use and exposure to oral communication in English of the Electrical Engineering students studying in the Faculty of Industry and Technology at RMUTI SKC, Thailand. The findings of the study showed that the students reported employing the CSs both as a whole and by the four main categories at the medium frequency level. Additionally, all of the individual CSs were reported with a medium frequency of use. In terms of variations in the frequency of CS use of students related to their exposure to oral communication in English, the results revealed no significant variation in the frequency of both overall CS use and use of CSs under the four main categories according to their exposure to oral communication in English. Despite this, a significant difference in the use of individual CSs was found to be contributed to this variable. What follows are the discussions of certain findings of the frequency and variations of CS use of students.

The success of good language learners, especially in communication, depends very much on the degree and quality of exposure to a variety of conversations in their communities (Norton and Toohey, 2001). In the field of CSs, to date, no research studies have demonstrated a direct relationship between students' use of CSs and their exposure to oral communication in English. In the present study, the two different types of exposure to oral communication in English of students have been categorized as limited to classroom instructions only and non-limited to classroom instructions.

The findings of the study revealed that there were no significant variations in the overall strategy use and use of CSs in the CSCM, DSCM, SUM, and SMC categories of students in association with their exposure to oral communication in English. However, considering the mean scores, the results illustrated that the frequency and variety of strategy use were greater for students who have had more extensive exposure to oral communication in English. Some factors hypothesized by the researchers to explain such findings are motivation for social interaction, CSs as a part of oral communication, and a variety of interlocutors.

In terms of motivation for social interaction, Ushioda (2008, p. 25) states, "…motivation develops through social participation and interaction." This means that the more exposure to oral communication in the foreign language of learners, the more opportunity for them to become motivated in language learning. Oxford and Nyikos (1989) have studied variables affecting language learners' choice of strategy use. They found that the more motivated students used learning strategies of all kinds, including functional practice strategies and conversational input elicitation strategies more often than did the less motivated students. They explain that learners who are highly motivated to learn a language

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are likely to use a variety of strategies. Therefore, it can be said that language learners who have more variety in their exposure to oral communication in English are likely to be more motivated to learn languages leading in turn to a high and wide range of strategy use in their oral communication.

Another possible explanation for higher frequency of CS use by students whose exposure to oral English communication was not limited to classroom instructions is that CSs were used as a part of oral communication. According to Mariani (2010), CSs are known as the ways and means speakers employ when they experience a problem in oral communication, either because they cannot say what they would like to say or because they cannot understand what is being said to them. She also states, "CSs are by no means an exclusive feature of communication in a foreign or second language– problems can and do occur in native-language communication too, and can be managed by using the same basic types of strategies…" (p. 8). This can be said that CSs, to a certain extent, could play a role as a part of oral communication in any language. That is to say, in any oral communication, even in the native language, CSs seem to be used to manage problems that may occur in the interaction in order to achieve particular communicative purposes. Thus, whenever language learners have any communicative practice opportunities, especially in natural or outside classroom settings, undoubtedly, they are likely to use a range of CSs.

A variety of interlocutors is also hypothesized to be a factor that may explain such significant differences. In this study, students with non-limited exposure to oral communication in English to classroom instructions reported that they have opportunities to use English to interact with various people in different places, such as with their foreign father or mother at home; tutors at tutoring institutes, tourists at tourist spots, or foreign friends via the Internet. In communicating with different kinds of people in different contexts, learners have different communicative goals and are likely to use different CSs. Huang and Andrews (2010) have studied the use of language learning strategies with 47 senior secondary students in Mainland China, the results indicate that the process of strategy development and use were mediated by various aspects including interpersonal interactions with their teachers, peers and family members. They further explain, "family members also contributed to the students' strategy development" (p. 28). These findings suggest that interlocutors also play a role in the strategy development and use of students.

In summary, the three hypothesized factors - motivation for social interaction, CSs as a part of oral communication, and variety of interlocutors - may contribute to the high use of CSs of students who have not limited their exposure to oral communication in English to classroom instructions.

8 Conclusion and Implications

The present study investigated the frequency of the CS use and examined the variations of CS use in relation to exposure to oral communication in English of the EE students. The findings of the study revealed that the overall CS use and CS use under the four main categories of the students were reported at the medium frequency level. However, the findings reveal that students who have not limited their exposure to oral communication in

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English to classroom instructions reported employing greater use of different CSs than did those who are limited their exposure to oral communication in English to classroom instructions only. This could argue for the creation of 'artificial' English-speaking environment through the use, for example, of an English corner, English speaking contest, English game show, short play performance, and so on outside classroom setting. These activities can help promote CS use of language learners, which can assist them in practicing the target language. According to Graham (1997), increasing participation in language activities is the key factor for CSs. Besides, by continual exposure to natural conversation students may learn both to hear more of the target language and to produce new utterances to test their knowledge (Wenden & Rubin, 1987).

In general, students from all categories reported a medium level of use of CSs. Therefore, it could be argued that language teachers need to raise learners' awareness of the value of CSs and introduce them to a wide range. For example, a mini-seminar on CSs should be held for learners in order to encourage and help them to become aware of the potential of CSs in their oral communication in English. During the seminar, the students should be provided with opportunities to use CSs, and then identify and discuss the CSs that they have used based on the CS classification adopted in the present study. They may also be asked to provide opinions on the CS classification adopted in the present study in terms of usefulness and workability as well as add to the list some CSs which they think are missing. In addition, informal talk with students about CSs should be held occasionally.

Furthermore, teachers should be encouraged to introduce CSs as part of classroom lessons and, at the same time, encourage the students to use CSs for situational classroom practice. This will provide the students with opportunities for practice in CS use. As DÖrnyei (1995, p. 64) points out, "providing opportunities for practice in strategy use appears to be necessary because CSs can only fulfill their function as immediate first aid devices if their use has reached an automatic stage".

Moreover, it is recommended to develop the curriculum focusing on strategy training in order to raise learners' awareness of a wide range of CS use. According to Nakatani (2005, p. 87), "…learners' strategic competence can be developed through raising their awareness of managing and supervising specific strategy use".

Furthermore, it could be that teachers themselves need to become aware of their use (or non-use) of communication strategies. One method of raising awareness could be to record staff conversations in English and then hold a mini-conference at which staff listen to and analyze the way they are using CSs, perhaps using the classification system adopted in the present study, and seeing how they promote fluent communication. This way, teachers should recognize that different CSs may have different benefits. This activity could be a starting-point then for discussion of CSs with students, as suggested above.

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Authors

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Sasina Cherkaew is an undergraduate student studying in the English for International Communication Program at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan Sakon Nakhon Campus (RMUTI SKC), Thailand. Her research interests include communication strategies and language learning strategies.

Kerdwipa Buapith is an undergraduate student studying in the English for International Communication Program at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan Sakon Nakhon Campus (RMUTI SKC), Thailand. Her research interests include communication strategies and language learning strategies.

Aroonrut Puntasa is an undergraduate student studying in the English for International Communication Program at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan Sakon Nakhon Campus (RMUTI SKC), Thailand. Her research interests include communication strategies and language learning strategies.

Surapa Somsai (Ph.D.) is an Assistant Professor. She has been working for twenty-two years as a university lecturer at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan Sakon Nakhon Campus (RMUTI SKC), Thailand. Her main research interests are language learning strategies, communication strategies, and English language teaching.