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Communication Breakdown among Indonesian EFL Learners: Barriers and Strategies

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ABSTRACT

English learners in Indonesia often find difficulties to express their ideas in spoken language. These difficulties are not only caused by some language rules differences between English and their mother tongue but also due to limited English vocabulary. Moreover, the difficulties have led the students into communication breakdown in class. This study aimed at analyzing the factors that cause the students get stuck in expressing their ideas as well as the strategies they use to overcome the communication breakdown. The subjects of this study were students at International Class Program in Indonesia Private Higher Education. The data come in the form of oral discussion from English for Professional Purposes subject. Before the discussion, the students had prepared the topic to be discussed. Then, they had to present the material in front of the class. The data was then recorded, transcribed and analyzed. The results of the study reveal that the main factor of English communication breakdown is the lack of linguistic competence (41.70%). Other factors that cause communication breakdown among students are sociolinguistics, strategic, and discourse. Whereas, the most frequently used strategy to overcome communication breakdown is literal translation (29.26%). It proves that the different language rules in Indonesia and English language is the main problem to convey the message communicatively.

Keywords: *Communication Breakdown, Communicative Competence, Communication Strategy, English as Medium Instruction*

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1. Introduction

Communication can be simply defined as a process of delivering and receiving information. It can be done through various ways, both verbal and nonverbal. However, the most easily understood communication is communication through language. English as the language of instruction in the international arena is still a language that can be used by people from various places to communicate. Therefore, there are a lot of institutions that encourage the development of English, including educational institutions.

Higher education Institutions in Indonesia generally support the development of English programs so that their graduates can have added value to compete in the global level. One of the efforts to encourage student English is by listing English as a part of the curriculum, which includes English courses for specific purposes, such as English for Economics, English for Business, English for Academic Purposes, and English for Professional Purposes. In addition, these educational institutions also open international class programs that

require lecturers and students to use English while interacting in the classroom.

This research was conducted in English for Professional subject at International Class Program in Indonesia Private College. Although the students are required to use English in daily activities, they still find difficulties in expressing their ideas using English. Moreover, there are several problems that occur in the implementation, such as students are unable to understand what their lecturer are describing and how to express their ideas in English.

Based on the explanation, the problems of this study can be stated as follow.

1. What are the causes of Communication breakdown among English Learners in Indonesia?
2. What communication strategies are used by English Learners in Indonesia students to overcome communication breakdown in class?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Communication

Communication is the process of transmitting ideas, information, and so on



between two or more people. There some parties known in communication which are the sender / speaker, receiver, and message (Richard and Schmidt, 2002). Therefore, communication will work if it fulfills three things: namely the presence of sender, receiver, and information to be delivered or message.

In addition to the above three things, communication will work smoothly if all group members have the same tool (language) used. The lack of understanding of group members of the language they use will affect on the acquisition of the information they receive. The lack of understanding in using language can also lead to communication breakdown.

Keyton (2011) defined communication as the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another. While (Cheney, 2011) explained that elements of the communication process are the sender, encoding the message, transmitting the message through a medium, receiving the message, decoding the message, feedback, and noise.

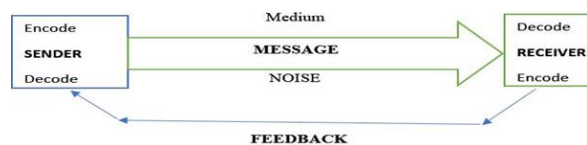


Figure 1: Communication Process (Cheney, 2011)

Richard and Schmidt (1983), propose some characteristics of communication as follow: (1) Communication is a form of interaction, therefore normally acquired and used in social interaction; (2) It involves a high degree of unpredictability and creativity in form and message; (3) It takes place in discourse and sociocultural context which provides constraints of appropriate language use and also clues as to correct interpretation of utterances; (4) It is carried out under limiting psychological and other conditions such as memory constrains, fatigue, and distractions; (5) It always has a purpose (for example to establish social relation, to persuade, to promise); (6) Involve authentic, as oppose to textbook-contrived language; and (7) It is judged as successful or not on the basic of actual outcomes.

A person’s ability to communicate depends on the communicative competence s/he has. Hymes (1972) states that communicative competence refers to the knowledge of language users that refers to grammatical, syntactic, phonological, and

appropriate use in a particular context. This theory is the basis of the formation of the theory of Ethnography Communications.

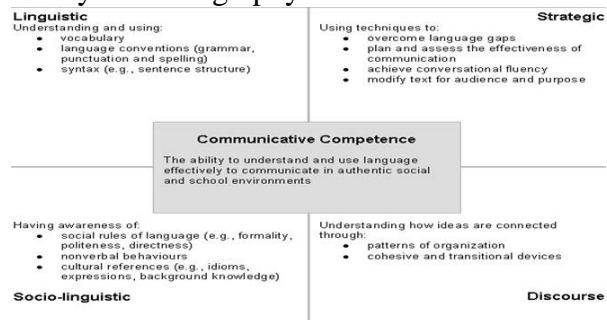


Figure 2: Canale & Swain Communicative Competence Model (1980)

Lunenburg (2010) underlined that effective communication is a two way process that requires effort and skill by the sender and receiver. It implies that both sender and receiver should be at the same level of understanding to make the process of communication goes smoothly.

From the above explanation, it can be underlined that communication is the process of delivering the message, which involves two or more parties. Communication is used in social interaction, so that social norms play a very important role. Therefore, communication is authentic and highly depends on the social context.

2.2 Communication Breakdown

The communication process is a major component of social interaction. The common language used is expected to keep this interaction stable so that messages in communication can be captured correctly by all parties involved. However, not infrequently there are group members who fail to understand the meaning in a communication process.

Sufficient language proficiency for communication is clearly an important preparation for international students as it plays an important role in their success in the learning experience. Jones (1999) argues both communication skills and miscommunication are problems when a group of people having communication.

Failure to understand the meaning in communicating is referred to as communication breakdown. Avval (2011) suggests that communication breakdown is a person's inability to receive information, express what they mean and understand. Communication breakdown often occurs when a person communicates in a language they do not use as a colloquial language.

Communication breakdown is often experienced by learners who use English as the language of instruction in non-English speaking countries. This can be due to a lack

of grammatical knowledge or the speaker's vocabulary. Consequently messages cannot be received well by the parties involved in the communication process.

For Verma (2013) communication is a pragmatics problem, in which the message is not transmitted exactly the same as it is the mind of communicator. It causes the message sent by encoder is not similar to that received by decoder. Communication breakdown is something that is difficult to avoid. Therefore, there must be certain strategies that can cope with the communication breakdown in the classroom, so the learning process using English can work well.

2.3 Communication Strategies

The Communication Strategy for Faerch and Kasper (1983) is "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal". This means that communication strategy is something that is well planned so that problems in communicating can be overcome.

Tarone, in Bialystok (1990) classifies the strategies of communicating into five groups, namely avoidance, paraphrasing, conscious transfer, appeal for assistance, and mime. These five strategies are often used as a reference to classify communication strategies today.

Avoidance is a strategy performed by speakers by avoiding conversation because of limited knowledge. The Avoidance strategy is specifically divided into two categories, namely, topic avoidance and message abandonment. Topic avoidance is usually done because the speaker does not have enough vocabulary on a particular topic, so they have trouble when it comes to discussing it. Message abandonment occurs when the speaker has started discussing a topic, but fails to continue because it is difficult to find the exact words related to the topic, so the conversation stops.

Paraphrasing is the way a speaker expresses a meaning with his vocabulary. This includes approximation, word coinage, and circumlocution. Approximation is the way a speaker expresses a speech by saying something that he / she thinks has a proximity meaning, such as "pipe" to call "water pipe". Word coinage is the way a speaker expresses his meaning by creating another word using his vocabulary, such as "red melon" to call "water melon". Circumlocution is the way the speaker explains what he wants to express by

explaining, for example, "the big reptile live in rivers" for "crocodile".

Conscious Transfer is involving native language element into the language being studied or used. Conscious transfer is divided into two, namely literal translation and language switch. Literal translation occurs when the speaker uses the equivalent in the mother tongue when they use English, for example "they drink together" for "they toast one another". Language switch occurs when speakers find it is difficult to find words in English, and include a word in the mother tongue between English sentences, such as "there are about twenty *peserta* in that event".

Appeal for assistance occurs when the speaker asks the other party involved in the communication process to help him find the right words, sentences, or structures. Usually they directly ask the interlocutor, for example "what is that?", "What do you call ... in English?"

Mime is a non-verbal strategy used by the speaker to replace verbal strategies, such as thumb up for agreeing.

3. Research Methodology

The type of this research is descriptive qualitative. Qualitative approach is used to analyze the causes of English communication breakdown and strategies used to address English communication breakdown among international class students. Respondents in this study were 11 students majoring in accounting in international class program; 3 students were male and 8 were female. These students were students who attended regular classes at first and second semester, then move to international class program. As students of International Class Program, they must have a minimum GPA of 3.25, the minimum score of English for Economics and English for Business are B, the minimum ITP TOEFL score of 500. The data gathered by using observation in International Class Program while the students were having class. Observations made were participatory observation, which were conducted in the researcher's class. The instruments used in the observation were anecdotal record (note made by the researcher on respondent's behavior) and mechanical device (using mechanical device used to photograph or record certain events displayed by the respondent). The data then analyzed to find out the reason of communication breakdown in class as well as how the students deal with it.



The data was taken from the Class of English for Professional Purposes, recorded several times while the students having presentation, during April - June 2018. The data from the observation had been transcribed first, before it was grouped and analyzed using theories of communication breakdown and strategies to overcome it. Canale and Swain Theory are used to find out the barriers or the causes of communication breakdown. Furthermore, Tarone's typology is used to analyze communication strategies used by the respondents to overcome communication breakdown in class.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1 The Causes of Communication Breakdown

The students problems associated with communicative competence are the main cause of communication breakdown. Communicative competence is not only knowing about the rules of language used during the communication process, but also implementing other knowledge such as the appropriateness of certain utterances, the use of social rules, the use of nonverbal behaviors, and the use of cohesive as well as transitional as transitional devices.

As for Canale and Swain (1980), there are four competences that create communicative competence, which are linguistics, socio-linguistic, strategic, and discourse; this research classified the data into those four competences. The lack of one or more competence(s) is the main problems that cause communication breakdown among respondents. The following table shows the distribution of students' difficulties in dealing with the four competences.

Table 1: Distribution of Students' Difficulties

Competence	Frequency	Percentage
Linguistic	60	41.7
Sociolinguistic	12	8.3
Strategic	52	36.1
Discourse	20	13.9
Total	144	100

The table above shows the main factor which causes communication breakdown is linguistic competence. Almost half of the students faced difficulties in linguistic area. The research also reveals that other three competences (sociolinguistics, strategic, and discourse) also have influence on students' communication performance.

4.2 Strategies Used to Overcome Communication Breakdown

The data was transcribed, then analyzed using Tarone's Typology on communication strategies. From the analysis of it, some strategies were noted. These strategies are divided into five categories (avoidance, paraphrase, conscious transfer, appeal for assistance, and mime. The data grouping based on Tarone's typology can be described as follows.

Table 2: Communication Strategy Used by English Learners in Indonesia

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage	
Avoidance	Topic Avoidance	24	16.67
	Message Abandonment	0	0
	Message Replacement	32	22.22
Paraphrasing	Approximation	6	4.17
	Word Coinage	12	8.33
	Circumlocation	6	4.14
Conscious Transfer	Literal Translation	43	29.86
	Language Switch	0	0
Appeal for Assistance	21	14.58	
Mime	0	0	
Total	144	100	

We can see from the data that the most used strategies by the students are literal translation (29.86%) and message replacement (22.22%). Topic Avoidance and appeal for assistance are surprisingly used a by the students (16.67% and 14.58%) next to them. On the other hand, there are three strategies that were not used by the students (message abandonment, language switch, mime).

4.3 Discussion

As we can see on table 1, the main cause that makes communication breakdown in the class is the lack of linguistic competence. 41.7% of the utterances produced by the students showed that they faced difficulties in linguistic area. These difficulties included- finding right vocabulary to express their ideas; using language convention such as grammar and spelling; and creating correct sentences. The following examples are the utterances produced by the students which reveal their lack of linguistic competence.

1. In Indonesia more have good facilities in public transport.
2. Most of the students who answer my questions is from accounting students.
3. Safety and comfort is... e... one of factor priority of public service
4. Effectiveness in the my perceive is....
5. It's mean when I left the campus I use online transport can make I to the campus on time in the morning.
6. That they are..... e..... there is a lot that they have to e.... consider about to join ICP because e.... they think.... if they join the ICP their time will waste to

- study..... all of their time.... while they still want....
e.... to play or having good time with friends.
7. Social media is help them to communicate with others, so..... it e..... it e.... will help the respondents to keep in touch with others.
 8. In the.... I..... my experience..... I use online transport because the effectiveness.
 9. Mine..... e..... so.... my paper is about the....
 10. The my.... the method is....

There are many students who fail to use correct grammatical rules when they produce sentences. In the first example, “In Indonesia more have good facilities in public transport”, as the answer for the question “What do you think about public transfer in Indonesia compared to those in Brunai?”, the students, who is originally from Brunai, just transferring grammatical rules in Bahasa melayu (which is the national language of Brunai) into her English sentence. Another example is in example number 2 “Most of the students who answer my questions is from accounting students”. The student used “is” instead of “are” for the subject “most of my respondents”. Other problems that can be found out in students utterances related to linguistic competence are the use of incorrect verb, incorrect class of words, and unclear sentences. Often, they use very long sentences, which have two or more unclear subjects and verbs.

8.3% of the utterances produced by the students show the lack of socio-linguistic competence. In some sentences, the students misused cultural references, such as idioms and knowledge background of the topic they discuss. Some examples of utterances that show difficulties in sociolinguistic area are as follow.

1. The..... the.... the.... I think the cost of..... may be the cost of.... to buy internet.... e may be quota is too expensive.
2. It is normally if emmmmm, I don't know exactly..... why the students choose online transport because e..... cheap.
3. My research see e..... the students have problems with the application, just because the application error while applicated.
4. The government give the facilities for TransJakarta and Commuterline is.... they already improved the facilities.
5. There are 70% that are capable to learn using English, but they still won't to join the ICP because they still afraid would.... they're not.... e... capable.... e.... they not understand the lecturer.

The first utterance “The..... the.... the.... I think the cost of..... may be the cost of.... to buy internet.... may be quota is too expensive” shows that the student used inappropriate phrase. She said “the cost of.... to buy the internet” instead of saying the cost of internet service. Another examples (such as the utterances in number 2 and 3)

show that they are not confident about what they are discussing. The word “see” in the phrase “my research see” shows that she misused the word when creating sentences.

36.1% the utterances of the respondents show difficulties in dealing with strategic competence. Strategic competence is the process of synthesizing the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication to enhance the efficiency of communication. In the process of communication, strategic competence can be seen on how the students overcome language gaps, achieve conversation fluency, plan and assess the effectiveness of communication and modify text to make the audience understand. Here are some examples of utterances that show students difficulties dealing with strategic competence.

1. Mine..... e..... so.... my paper is about the....
2. The reasons why students e..... use public transportation are....
3. There are 70% that are capable to learn using English, but they still won't to join the ICP because they still afraid would.... they're not.... e... capable.... e.... they not understand the lecturer.
4. In the.... I..... my experience..... I use online transport because the effectiveness.
5. Fifth.... e.... 95% respondents.... e.....

This study also found out that 13.9% of the utterances used by the respondents showed difficulties in discourse competence. The inappropriate patterns as well as the organization of utterances are the signals of problems in discourse competence. Moreover, some students also do not use transitional devices in their utterances. Here are some expressions that show lack of discourse competence.

1. Students join the ICP, but they interest by ICP scholarship.
2. If e.... people.... so.... e.... people don't pay attention to our emotion (she used hand/body language)..... so it decrease the quality of friendship.
3. Social media is help them to communicate with others, so..... it e..... it e.... will help the respondents to keep in touch with others.
4. And if e..... if have a.... if you want to post something, make sure the post is..... before you hurt others, you will reduce the possibility of hurting friends.
5. E.... most..... e.... most of the students e.... (pause about 20 second)..... they want to keep up to date.

From table 2, we can see the highest frequency of communication strategy used by the students is literal translation. 29.86% of utterances produced by the students used literal translation. This study also reveals that some students use English vocabulary and Indonesian grammar at the same time. It is quite unique since English grammar is different to those of Indonesian language. In some utterances, the students used the vocabulary they knew to replace certain



English words that are hard to find. The following utterances are the example of literal translation used by the students.

1. In Indonesia more have good facilities in Public transport.
2. If any questions, you can ask me.
3. Effectiveness in the my perceive is.....
4. It's mean when I left the campus I use online transport can make I to the campuss on time in the morning.
5. Students join the ICP, but they interest by ICP scholarship.

Message replacement is the second most frequently used strategy. 22.22% of the utterances used by the students to overcome communication breakdown can be categorized as message replacement. It occurs when the students begin to talk something, but they make mistakes. They, then repeat the words or sentences using different vocabulary. The following utterances are the examples of message replacement strategy used by the students.

1. Do you have e..... Is there any questions?
2. The government give the facilities for TransJakarta and Commuterline is..... they already improved the facilities.
3. The..... the.... the.... I think the cost of..... may be the cost of.... to buy internet.... e may be quota is too expensive.
4. That they are..... e..... there is a lot that they have to e.... consider about to join ICP because e.... they think.... if they join the ICP their time will waste to study..... all of their time.... while they still want.... e.... to play or having good time with friends.
5. There are 70% that are capable to learn using English, but they still won't to join the ICP because they still afraid would.... they're not.... e... capable.... e.... they not understand the lecturer.

This study also found out that the number of utterances using topic avoidance strategy to overcome communication breakdown is quite high, that is 16.67%. Students try to avoid discussing many topics in several ways. The following utterances are the example of topic avoidance strategy used by the students.

1. Mmmmm.... I don't ask my respondent about it.
2. Sorry, it is out of topic.
3. Your question is not in the topic area.
4. I focus on negative effect of social media on human interaction, I don't discuss its impact on mental health.
5. Sorry I don't discuss about it.
6. The purpose of my presentation is the reasons of students joining ICP, not about the way to increase the number of ICP students.

Some students tend to appeal for assistance when they are not sure about what to say. 14.58% of the utterances expressed by the students showed that they needed assistance. Mostly, the expressions are in the form of interrogative sentences. Here are some examples of appeal for assistance strategy used by the students.

1. What we call it in English?

2. What is it in English?
3. What is the correct word for it?
4. How do you call it?
5. What is the word?
6. Is it effectiveness or effectivity?

Word coinage strategy was also used by the students to minimize communication breakdown. In this case, some students try to choose or use words that they thing can substitute certain words in target language. The numbers of utterances using word coinage are 8.33%. The following examples show word coinage strategy used by the students.

1. It's more.... eh... sorry..... it has features.... then you can download the **materials**.
2. It is normally if emmmmmm, I don't know exactly.... why the students want online transport because e..... cheap.
3. My research **see** e..... the students have problems with the application.
4. It means that this..... that **asking others in social media** become a habit.
5. If e.... people.... so.... e.... **people don't pay attention to our emotion**.... so it decrease the quality of friendship.

Approximation is also used by the students as way of overcoming communication breakdown in class. The data shows that 4.17% of the utterances expressed by the students used approximation.

1. It just because the application error while **applicated**.
2. And if e..... if have a.... if you want to post something, make sure the post is..... before you hurt others, you will **reduce** the possibility of hurting friends.

Circumlocution is also used by some students. In some utterances, they paraphrase the word they want to say or give explanation to the words they want to use. The use of circumlocution is a spontaneous action of the students when they feel difficult to find certain vocabulary which is relevant to the topic. There are 4.14% of utterances expressed by the students indicate circumlocution. Here are some examples of utterances using circumlocution.

1. Most of **the students who answer my questions** is from accounting students.
2. Most of the students e.... **most of the students I asked** say that.....
3. In the.... I..... my experience..... I use online transport because **its' on time**.

Moreover, this study reveals that no student used message abandonment, language switch, and mime to overcome communication breakdown in class. Since all the students had prepared the topic that they had to discuss in class, they were confident enough to discuss the topic they had chosen.

5. Conclusion

Some International Class Program (ICP) students still find it difficult to express their ideas in English. The difficulties are caused by the lack of linguistic, sociolinguistic, strategic, and discourse competences. This study reveals that during the communication process, the most difficult problem faced by the students was linguistic competence. 41.7% utterances expressed by the students showed the lack of linguistic competence. Choosing appropriate words and constructing correct sentence were the biggest problem that students found in linguistic area. In addition, the lack of strategic competence also gave big contribution to students of not being able to communicate effectively. However, the students' lack of competence in sociolinguistic area was not as big as in other competences. It means that their knowledge about socio-culture is adequate to support the communication process.

Meanwhile, the most frequently used strategy used by the students to overcome communication breakdown was literal translation. The different language rules (especially in sentence construction) between the native language (Indonesian) and English have become the main reasons of the students to use such strategy. They often mismatch the two languages at the same time to make the communication run smoothly.

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