

# Negotiation in Conversations between Native Instructors and Non-native Students of English

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## 영어원어민 강사와 비원어민 학생 간의 대화에서 의사소통을 위한 협상

차미양

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**Abstract** Journal of Convergence for Information Technology. This study explores how native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs) of English negotiate meanings during conversational interactions to achieve successful communication. This study involved 40 participants: 20 native English speakers and 20 Korean university students. The participants were divided into 20 pairs, with each pair consisting of one NS and one NNS. Tasks for conversation were given and the execution recorded in order to collect data. 37 recorded conversations were transcribed and used for analysis, including statistical analyses. Results showed that both NSs and NNSs mutually put in effort for successful communication. While NSs mostly played the role of leading the natural flow of the conversation, encouraging their non-native interlocutors to speak, NNSs used various strategies to compensate for their lack of linguistic competence in the target language. NNSs employed a wide range of communicative strategies to keep the conversation going. The results of this study contribute to a better understanding of interactions between NSs and NNSs and yield pedagogical implications.

**Key Words** : Native speakers, Non-native speakers, Communication, Interaction, Strategies, Information gap task

**요약** 본 연구는 영어원어민과 비원어민이 영어로 대화할 때 의사소통을 위해 어떻게 상호 협상하는가를 조망하고자 하였다. 본 연구에는 영어원어민 20명과 한국 대학생 20명으로 총 40명이 참여하였다. 참여자들은 한 명의 영어원어민과 한 명의 비원어민으로 한 쌍을 이루는 식으로 해서 20쌍으로 나뉘었다. 데이터 수집을 위해서 참여자들에게 영어로 대화할 수 있는 과제들이 주어졌고 그들의 대화는 녹음되었다. 총 37개의 녹음된 대화가 전사되었고 전사된 대화는 분석에 사용되었으며 통계분석들을 실시하였다. 본 연구결과에 의하면, 영어원어민과 비원어민 모두 성공적인 의사소통을 위해 상호 노력한 것으로 나타났다. 특히 원어민들은 대체로 비원어민들이 말을 할 수 있도록 부추기며 대화의 자연스러운 흐름을 주도하는 역할을 한 반면에 비원어민들은 그들의 목표언어 능력의 부족으로 인하여 대화전략들을 많이 구사한 것으로 드러났다. 비원어민들은 대화를 지속하기 위해 광범위한 전략들을 활용하였다. 본 연구의 결과는 원어민과 비원어민 간의 상호작용에 대한 이해를 높이며 교육적인 시사점을 내포한다.

**주제어** : 원어민, 비원어민, 의사소통, 상호작용, 전략, 정보격차과업

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## 1. Introduction

The globalization of English as a lingua franca has put the development of spoken English skills high on the agenda in countries worldwide. English education in Korea is also subject to this trend. Despite Korea putting great emphasis on fostering English speaking skills in its English education policy, the results have not been very satisfactory so far. In fact, many face difficulty acquiring the adequate skills to engage in real-world verbal communication in the target language (TL), since they are taught English in a restricted and artificially modified language learning environment. Accordingly, many Korean students struggle when interacting in the TL due to language insufficiency. To compensate for this, students have been observed employing strategies to avoid conversational breakdowns and to accomplish the communicative purpose.

The notion of the learner as actively and creatively involved in communication processes has drawn researchers' attention to the devices learners utilize in acquiring and communicating in a second/foreign language (L2). These devices have been termed strategies[1]. The term 'communication strategies' (CS), emerged based on the observation of L2 learners' verbal performance, which indicates the gap between their linguistic resources and communicative intent.

CSs have been explained by two approaches. The socially inclined approach to CSs emphasizes the strategic competence of knowing what to do when, and/or being able to classify L2 situations as requiring particular repertoires of social behavior[2]. Another similar approach takes CSs as interactional and as evidence of the negotiation of meaning between individuals[3]. On the other hand, the cognitively inclined approach treats CSs as mental procedures. Here, CSs are devices that

make evident the participation of the learner's intentional, active mental involvement in the process of acquiring the L2[4]. CSs are useful tools for L2 learners in complementing their insufficient knowledge of the TL to sustain communication. It is therefore understood that L2 learners' insufficiency in linguistic resources is what motivates them to resort to a wide range of CSs with high frequency[5].

In an attempt to shed light on how the negotiation for meaning in a conversation takes places between NSs and NNSs, this study examines the use of CSs by Korean university students and their attempts to resolve communication breakdowns during conversations in English with NSs.

## 2. Literature Review

NNSs have a lower linguistic proficiency in the TL than NSs, which renders their language less reliable in conveying their intent[6]. This gap in the linguistic competence between NSs and NNSs may cause communication problems to occur during conversations since communication itself is an interactive activity. To compensate, NNSs may employ strategies to overcome these issues when interacting with NSs in the TL.

Studies on CSs have been conducted since the 1970s, and CSs have been defined from different perspectives. Earlier studies viewed CSs as the result of a speaker's inward problem-solving cognitive process in planning or actualizing utterances[7]. Thus, CS use was limited to the concept of personal problem-solving activities for which the interlocutor's help was not necessary. Later, CS use was regarded as mutual attempts for negotiating meaning when there is a lack of shared meaning or linguistic or sociolinguistic structure between NSs and NNSs engaging in the verbal exchanges[8]. Recently, the use of CSs has been recognized as a

conscious technique used for achieving communicative purposes. That is, the NNSs who utilize CSs are aware of the communication problems and are intentionally using CSs to negotiate a mutually understood meaning for a successful communication exchange[9].

The linguistic competency of the NNS influences their choice of strategy. The development of linguistic proficiency has been directly linked to the frequency and types of strategies employed by the NNS. Studies investigating the developmental stages of CS use by EFL and ESL learners found that as learners become more proficient, their reliance on strategies decreases[10]. It was found that L2 speakers adopt avoidance strategies more frequently in their earlier stages of language development, then increasingly turn to adopting achievement strategies [11-12]. In contrast, advanced speakers were found to make greater use of L2-based strategies than L1-based strategies[13]. Studies comparing the performance of L1 speakers with that of L2 speakers show that L1 speakers rely more on paraphrasing strategies while L2 speakers resort more to avoidance strategies[14].

As such, many studies support the positive role of CS use in the development of communicative competence. In this regard, this study, which examines the conversational negotiation tactics between NSs and NNSs, may contribute to a better understanding of CS use among NNSs.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Participants

20 native speakers (NSs) and 20 non-native speakers (NNSs) of English participated in this study. The NSs were university instructors and the NNSs were Korean university students. All

participants attended the same university and had volunteered to participate in this research. The NSs consisted of a total of 20 Caucasian participants - 16 men and 4 women from the United States, England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. They ranged from 31 to 57 years of age, and had lived for 3 to 10 years in Korea. The NSs were relatively similar in terms of language, culture, educational background. The NNSs consisted of 20 Korean participants-11 men and 9 women between the ages of 19 to 29, spread across various majors and years at the university. The NNSs had been learning English for 8 to 15 years, and their English proficiency levels were evaluated to intermediate.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

Conversation tasks and tape recordings were used for data collection. The participants were given two types of conversation tasks in order to elicit different types of conversational discourse: An information-gap task and an opinion-gap task[15]. The two tasks were prepared in consideration of the NNSs' English proficiency level based on teaching materials provided by the researcher. The 40 participants were divided into 20 pairs, with each pair consisting of one NS and one NNS to execute the tasks. Each pair carried out the two tasks in person. A total of 40 conversations took place at different locations and times and were recorded in real time. Out of the 40 conversations that were recorded, 3 were deemed unusable. Thus, a total of 37 conversation recordings were transcribed and used for analysis.

#### 3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out by the researcher. Since the recorded conversations

were of varying lengths, only the first three minutes were analyzed for all recordings in order to minimize the variables that could be caused by the differences in the duration of the conversation that might arise from varying levels of English competence by the NNSs or their rapport with their NS interlocutors. In addition, whole utterances were examined instead of segmented parts, as they were assessed to contain more information on content. In this way, the amount and types of strategies used by the NNSs in the 37 conversations were identified and classified. Next, statistical analyses were conducted using the SPSS 23 with the alpha level set at 0.05, to examine the means and standard deviations of CS categories and the frequency of CS types.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Use of Communication Strategies

While the NSs contributed much to the natural flow of the conversations by using connectives such as *oh*, *so*, *OK*, *etc.*, the NNSs employed a great number of CSs. They were observed to utilize a total of 24 types of strategies with 1574 occurrences. Based on Dornyei and Scott's classification system[9], the 24 strategies were classified into 15 types of direct strategies, 2 types of indirect strategies, and 7 types of interactional strategies as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1. Non-native Speakers' Use of Strategies**

Category	Types	Occurrences
Direct Strategies	15	727(46.19%)
Indirect Strategies	2	577(36.66%)
Interactional Strategies	7	270(17.15%)
Total	24	1574(100%)

Direct strategies were employed most frequently (727 occurrences), followed by

indirect strategies (577), while interactional strategies were used the least (270). Below are definitions of each type of strategy with excerpts from the corpus.

#### 4.1.1 Direct Strategies

1) **Retrieval:** Saying an incomplete or wrong word before reaching the correct word

NS: Oh, why do you prefer the train?

NNS: Because I think it's.. conve. ah.. convenient.

2) **Simplification:** Simplifying the sentence by omitting problematic structures

NS: If you take the train, how long will it take?

NNS: Use KTX, two hour? [If I take the KTX, it will take two hours.]

3) **Use of derivational words:** Using an incorrect word that is derived from the target word

NS: What was he like?

NNS: He is handsome and action is good. [he is good at acting]

4) **Self-rephrasing:** Repeating an utterance by adding a word or paraphrasing

NNS: Uhh.. where is she from? Hometown?

5) **Message abandonment:** Leaving the message unfinished due to the lack of linguistic competence

NS: So, why do you think it was love?

NNS: Uh.. at first he..said... he make me.. at first he make me... I don't know.

6) **Use of similar-sounding words:** Replacing a word with one that sounds like the target word

NNS: Uh, made or single? [married]

7) **Topic avoidance:** Avoiding topics or concepts that pose a linguist challenge

NS: Why did you split up?

NNS: Split? I don't know. Next question.

8) **Circumlocution:** Delineating the target

word

NS: So, why is it important for you to study English?

NNS: English is *the most common language I can use all around the world*. [a global language]

9) **Approximation**: Using a substitute or a related word that has similar meaning

NS: When you were together, what sort of things did you do together?

NNS: Umm, we liked to *go*. um.. *mart*. [shopping]

10) **Use of all-purpose words**: Using general, meaningless words instead of specific words

NNS: We used to go to see a movie, then.. usually go to Karaoke, and.. *something like that*.

11) **Restructuring**: Leaving the intended message incomplete and delivering an alternative

NS: Why do you prefer to travel by train?

NNS: I have a *..sore...ah, throw up...* when I take a bus. [a stomachache]

12) **Literal translation**: Translating a word, phrase, or sentence literally from the mother tongue

NS: Why do you like autumn best?

NNS: I hate *cold and hot*. [the cold and hot weather.]

13) **Omission**: Leaving out a word

NS: Ok. How long have you been dating?

NNS: Um.. *Maybe, six and eight months*. [between six to eight months]

14) **Word-coinage**: Making up a word that does not exist

NS: What is her ambition?

NNS: *she's* ambition is to buy a Rolls Royce. [her]

15) **Foreignizing**: Using a mother tongue word based on TL phonology or morphology

NS: What do you like to do in the evening?

NNS: I like to watch *terevi*. [television]

#### 4.1.2 Indirect Strategies

1) **Use of fillers**: Using gambits to fill pauses, delaying, and playing for time when experiencing difficulties

NNS: *Ohhhh... and... um..* did you go out together?

2) **Repetition**: Repeating an utterance immediately after it was said

NS: Did you hope to marry her?

NNS: No, um.., we were very young. *We were very young*.

#### 4.1.3 Interactional Strategies

1) **Response confirmation**: Confirming what the interlocutor has said

NS: What's the best birthday present you've ever received?

NNS: *Present...*

NS: Yeah, birthday.

2) **Appeal for help**: Turning to the interlocutor for help by expressing the lack of a needed phrase

NS: Ok, what's the question?

NNS: *How... long... ahhhhh...*

NS: How long has she been a pop singer?

NNS: Yeah...

3) **Asking for repetition**: Requesting a repetition of the phrase when one failed to understand it

NS: Ah, what sort of things did you do together?

NNS: *Sorry?*

NS: What sort of things did you do together?

4) **Own-accuracy check**: Checking whether what one has said is correct by asking a question or repeating the word with a rising intonation

NNS: Yeah, he... he was cadet. *Cadet?... cadet?*

NS: Yeah, a cadet, yeah.

5) **Asking for confirmation**: Requesting

confirmation on what one heard or understood

NS: What was she like?

NNS: *You, you mean the.. her shape?*

6) **Asking for clarification:** Requesting an explanation about an unfamiliar word

NS: You know what a Rolls Royce is?

NNS: *What's like a Rolls Royce?*

NS: It's a really, really expensive car.

7) **Comprehension check:** Asking questions to check if the interlocutor has understood

NNS: Um, we.. usually.. go.. together.. to PC bang.

NS: PC bang?

NNS: *Do you know that?*

NS: Yeah, yeah, I know PC bang.

Table 2 shows the results of the frequency analysis for strategy employment. Out of 24 strategies, 11.05 types were used per case on average, indicating that there was no even distribution of usage, NNSs preferring to repeat some strategies more than others.

**Table 2. Frequency of Strategies Used**

Category	Mean	SD
Number of Types used	11.05	1.56
Direct Strategies	19.62	6.62
Indirect Strategies	15.59	5.21
Interactional Strategies	7.24	5.59

On average, direct strategies were used 19.62 times per case, indirect strategies, 15.59 times, and interactional strategies, 7.24 times. This showed that on average, each type of 15 direct strategies was used 1.31 times, each of 2 indirect strategies was used 7.80 times, and each of 7 interactional strategies was used 1.03 times per case. That is, indirect strategies were used most repetitively and the interactional strategies were the least employed in every conversation. While the NNSs appeared to favor

indirect strategies when facing communication gaps to keep the communication going and/or to gain time, they lacked interactional skills to cooperate with the NSs in solving their communication problems to successfully reach the communicative purposes.

Following this, the frequency of each CS employed was examined, and the five most frequently used types were identified. *The use of fillers* constituted 29.3% (461/1574) of the total occurrences, showing the highest frequency among all 24 CS types. Following this, *retrieval* (211), *message reduction* (156), *the use of derivationally-related words* (152), and *self-rephrasing* (124) were found to be frequently employed, that is, used more than once in a conversation. The remaining CS types were found to be infrequently used, with each constituting less than 2% of the total occurrences.

Next, the causes for the frequently employed strategies were identified. Factors such as lack of linguistic knowledge, pressure due to time constraint, and performance issues displayed by the NNS or the NS were considered. It was observed that while *the use of fillers* was strongly linked to the time limit given for each conversation task, the majority of the CSs were linked to the NNSs' lack of linguistic knowledge. That is, the NNSs employed the most diverse types of CSs while struggling to express themselves due their lack of proficiency. In addition, it was observed that the NNSs used avoidance strategies such as *message abandonment* and *topic avoidance* more frequently than achievement strategies when facing difficulties. Many struggled to continue the verbal flow and chose to abandon what they were saying, or even refrain from talking about topics that they felt they would not be able to continue due to linguistic difficulty from the beginning.

## 5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how NS and NNS participants negotiated meanings during conversational interactions. It was revealed that mutual efforts were made by the NSs and NNSs to make the communication successful. While the NSs played a role in leading the natural flow of the conversation, encouraging the NNSs to speak, the NNSs used communicative strategies to compensate for their lack of linguistic competence in the TL. When interacting with the NSs, the NNSs appeared to frequently face communicative troubles, which they actively tried to overcome by employing a wide range of CSs.

In this study, the NNSs used 24 types of strategies with 1574 occurrences, and utilized the same strategies repetitively in every conversation. Direct strategies constituted the largest portion of strategies employed, while interactional strategies were used the least. This showed that the NNSs mostly tried to achieve their communicative purposes directly by delivering their intended message to the NSs with substitutes while they lacked the skills to accomplish effective communication by cooperating with the NSs.

The findings of this study yield some pedagogical implications for CSs training. Successful communication depends entirely on the strategic competence when one lacks the linguistic knowledge of the TL. In this respect, CSs are manifestations of strategic language use. It could be effective to heighten NNSs' awareness of the nature and communicative potential of strategies, which could prompt them to take more risks in real-world communication. This could help them emerge as more competent communicators. CS training in the L2 classroom may help them become aware of potential ways of deploying CSs to fill

in the gaps in their competence while facilitating autonomous L2 learning.

It should be noted that this study contains limitations in its findings. For one, the unsymmetrical relationship between the NSs and NNSs could be a factor that affected the pattern of CS use. That is, situations where the NS instructors largely led the conversation could have caused certain CS patterns to emerge among the NNS students. Studies investigating the strategic negotiation for communication between NSs and NNSs of symmetrical relationships would be needed to further support the findings of this study.

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