

# Gender-Based Communication Strategy

*by* Tanzil Huda

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### **Title**

Gender-Based Communication Strategy

### **Author**

Tanzil Huda

*Muhammadiyah Jember University*

### **Bio-Profile:**

**Tanzil Huda** is an English lecturer at Muhammadiyah Jember University, East Java, Indonesia. He got his Doctor in English teaching from State University of Malang, Indonesia in 2013. His major interest is the curriculum development of English education. He also conducts research on TESOL. His current academic position is the Chair of Center for the Studies and Development of Education, Muhammadiyah Jember University.

### **Abstract**

The issue on gender differences has become one of the research topics for a few decades and considered as one of the important factors in second or foreign language acquisition. This study is aimed at investigating the communication strategies of male and female EFL learners which specifically analyzes the following issues i.e., how male and female EFL learners performed their communication strategies; what kinds of communication strategies which were established by male and female EFL learners. The study is expected to give significance information about communication strategies performed by male and female EFL learners in non-English mainstream. This study may also give a valuable contribution to the area of language teaching for it will give the other perspective about the gender issue in language acquisition and learning. This study was conducted by employing a qualitative approach. While the design of this study was descriptive as it tried to describe data represented in the form of spoken utterances which transcribed in written form. The subjects of the study who also became the source of data were the fourth and fifth semester undergraduate students of English Education Program. Based on the findings of this study, the conclusion of the research is drawn as the followings. English language learners

overcome their communication problems by using communication strategies. Generally, the subjects resorted to using some kinds of strategy while communicating to overcome their communicative problems. Strategies adopted by the learners were determined by knowledge of the language they possessed. The results of the study also indicated that the majority of the English language learners used achievement strategies to cope with problems.

**Keywords :** *Gender-based, Communication strategy.*

**Affiliation Address:** Muhammadiyah Jember University is on Jl. Karimata 49 Jember 68121, East Java, Indonesia

### **Introduction**

Interlanguage is a learning stage which must exist in every foreign or second language learning before the learners achieve the native speaker alike performance. In such stage, the learners of EFL, taken as an example, often experience a discrepancy between what they would like to say (i.e., their communication intention) and what they know about what to say it in English (i.e., their interlanguage knowledge). In order to bridge the gap between communicative needs and limited communicative resources or competence, the learners may make use of communication strategies.

Communication strategy is one of the areas in the study of second language acquisition (SLA) and its language phenomena become the interest of Sociolinguistics. There exists a number of the studies of communication strategies which also exhibit categorization of them. Bialystok (1983) categorizes communication strategies into 1) first language (L1) based strategies, which include language switch, foreignizing, and transliteration; 2) second language (L2) based strategies, which include semantic contiguity, description, and word coinage. Meanwhile, Corder (1978) in Faerch and Casper (1983) proposes two main types of strategies that are totally based on interlanguage use applied by second language learners when they find problems in performing communication, which are commonly called as message adjustment strategies and resource expansion strategies.

In message adjustment strategies, the learners can tailor a message to the available resources, that is, they adjust the end to their means. Corder in Faerch and Casper (1983) divides the message adjustment strategies in four sub-types: topic avoidance, message abandonment, semantic avoidance, and message reduction. The learners apply the topic

avoidance strategy when they avoid topics which pose language difficulties. The learners may also decide not to continue a discourse within the same topic. The message abandonment strategy is conducted when the learners leave a message unfinished because of language difficulties. The semantic avoidance strategy is implemented by the learners by saying something slightly different from what the interlocutor intends. The message reduction strategy is conducted by saying less than what the speaker intends to say.

The second type is resource expansion strategies. The learners can attempt to increase their resources by one way or another in order to their communication intention. Corder (1978) in Faerch and Casper (1983) classifies the resource expansion strategies into three types: borrowing, switching, and paraphrasing or circumlocation. The borrowing strategies are implemented when the learners attempt to use invented or borrowed items. When the learners switch to another language, they implement the switching strategy. The paraphrase or circumlocation strategies are conducted by describing and exemplifying the target object or action.

Meanwhile, communication between men and women or communication across sex can be considered cross cultural communication. This kind of communication is supposed to be one of the aspects of language convergence and similarized as culture. Some studies in sociolinguistics show that people from different cultures speak various dialects. This phenomenon should also exist in men and women communication which appears to vary (Nasution, 2010).

There are numerous general differences that characterize gender communication. Compared to women, men are more likely to interrupt the speaking of other people (Fasold, 1990:9). A study of faculty meetings reveals that women are more likely to be interrupted than men. Some of the interruptions that women experience come from other women (women, when they do interrupt, are more likely to interrupt other women than they are to interrupt men) Women are more likely than men to allow an interruption of their talk to be successful (they do not resist the interruption as much as men do). In meetings, men gain the "floor" more often, and keep the floor for longer period of time, regardless of their status in the organization (Fasold, 1990:91). In professional conferences, women take a less active part in responding to papers. When women do ask a question, they take less time in asking it than men. In addition, they employ much less pre-question prediction; they are less likely to ask multiple questions; and they are more likely than men to rephrase their questions in personal terms.

The differences of men and women in communication are claimed by Tannen (1990), Baalen (2001), and Catalaan (2003) who state that men and women express themselves in different ways and for different reasons. Men use communication to maintain independence, while women talk to maintain intimacy. Whether conscious or unconscious, men often talk to establish status from others. Women use words to connect themselves emotionally, to express feelings, or to build rapport. Men often share acts and figures as in report. These communicative differences then are labelled as “rapport-talk” and report-talk.”

Tannen (1990) also notes that body language is also used differently by men and women. Women typically use nonverbal communication directly but men use it indirectly. Women stand in close proximity of each other and maintain eye contact and gesture more frequently. Men hold their distance, rarely establish eye contact and gesture less dramatically. Men and women also handle conflict directly. Women avoid conflict in order to insure closeness, while men use conflict to gain status.

Further, Tannen (1990) claims that men and women express communication differences in content, style, and structure. In particular, men often talk about sports, money, and business. They often express themselves to fix a problem, converse for competition, and talk to resolve problems. They typically use precise word, without descriptive details. On the other hand, women most often discuss about people, feeling, and relationship. They most often express themselves to understand, converse to support, and talk to connect. When talking, women are more detailed, apologetic, and vague.

Various studies on communication strategies have been done and successfully in analyzing and predicting communication needs. Those studies vary in terms of theoretical framework, methods, analysis, and the subjects used in. Bialystock (1983) studied the use of L1-based strategies and L2-based strategies to solve vocabulary problems in communication. He found that the most efficient strategies were those which were L2-based strategies and took account of specific features of the intended concepts. The study showed that adults used a greater variation of strategies, which meant they were mre flexible in their ability to adopt their strategic attempts to meet the need of specific concepts.

A compare and contrast study of L1 and L2 referential communication was done by Bongarts and Poulisse (1989). The study tried to confronted Dutch learners of English with a set of unfamiliar abstract shapes which they had to describe both in Dutch and English. The study found that when a methodology which was adopted confronted native and non-native

speaker with essentially the same problem, L1 speakers and L2 learners handled their referential problems in much the same way.

Some other studies with different focus had been done by some researchers. A study by Chen (1990) found that the frequency, type and effectiveness of communication strategies employed by the learners varied according to their proficiency level. A study about the communication strategies used by “good” versus “poor” speaking partners of individuals with aphasia was done by Mackie and Kagan (1999). Different study about male and female languages which was done by Baalen investigated the hedging devices in male and female conversations. A study which focused on how English language learners could make use of communication strategies to overcome limitations in receptive and productive languages (Williams, 2006). The study also presented steps for carrying out active in-class training and practice for strategies. The studies by Liberman (2008) and Nasution (2010) emphasized the practical differences in male and female styles of communication.

On the basis of the rationale and previous studies on communication strategies, the researcher was interested in conducting a study of communication strategies. The recent study focused on the communication strategies which were established by the students of English as foreign language related to their sex.

Therefore, the study was carried out which aimed to:

- ┘ investigate the strategy the students in performing their communication;
- ┘ classify the types of strategies the students used in relation to their sexes;
- ┘ find out the similarities and the differences of strategies among the different sexes;
- ┘ point out the strategy/ies the students most frequently used.

### **Method**

This study was conducted by using a qualitative approach. While the design of this study was descriptive as it tried to describe data represented in the form of spoken utterance which transcribed in written form. Specifically, this study used content analysis (Holsti, 1968:42-43) that aimed at analyzing the corpus of spoken-transcribed discourse. Content analysis was appropriate in this study for it described the characteristics of content and made inferences about the cause of content and the effect of content. This technique was used to determine rhetoric and linguistic features of the essays (Krippendorff, K, 1980; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The objective analysis of the essays was accomplished by means of explicit rules

called criteria of selection which must be formally established before the actual analysis of data (Berg, 1989). This concept conforms with the principle and the nature of this study.

The descriptive design was applied because it was relevant to the aim of the study. It was to describe spoken-transcribed discourse taken from students utterances, in which the researcher set out the study by posing himself as the key instrument, working out by analyzing the data himself until drawing the inferences to substantiate theory.

While the procedure of the research performed in this study were 1) selecting spoken-transcribed discourse taken from students utterances; 2) investigating the style used by the male and female students as their strategy in communication; 3) drawing inferences about types of strategy performed by male and female students in their communication. However, the researcher did those steps repeatedly or by several re-checks before cross-checking with other colleagues who were experts in that matter.

The subjects of the study were the fourth semester undergraduate students of English Education Program at Muhammadiyah Jember University. So, the students became the source of data of this study who uttered spoken discourses during the conversation among them taken place. The discourses chosen were mainly in the form of utterances appeared during the conversation among the students.

In this study, the data were the constituents used in the discourse such as words, phrases, and sentences of the discourse. The data also comprised the threads of discourse in the form of expression or utterance patterns used by the students in delivering the idea or information to their counterparts during the conversation.

Considering that this study was qualitative, the key instrument of the research, as Bogdan and Biklen (1992:29) proposed was the researcher himself with his knowledge of Discourse Analysis, text Analysis, Sociolinguistics, and Pragmatics. The instrument was employed because the source of the data was merely in the form of discourse properties. Therefore, this study might be categorized into textual one. While the main focus of this investigation was the utterances mode and types or other language expression behavior.

There were two techniques applied in collecting the data of this study, namely, documentation in the form of recording instrument and text analysis (Silverman, 1993). The use of these methods was described in the following steps. First, all the expression or utterances made by the students were collected by using recorder. Second, the collection of the utterances were transcribed into written form. Third, the utterances were selected by classifying those produced by male and female students.

Data analysis in this study was conducted in two phases. First, the data analysis was done during the activities of data collection. Second, data analysis was conducted after collecting data. Data analysis during the activities of data collection was aimed at anticipating the possibilities of data exaggeration. This analysis also helped the researcher to analyze the data step by step. Furthermore, data analysis during and after collecting data was conducted in three stages: reducing data, displaying the data, and drawing conclusion or verifying the data (Miles and Huberman, 1992).

## **Findings**

### **Language Switch**

According to Bialystok (1983), language switch refers to the insertion of a word or a phrase in a language other than the target language, usually in the learners' native language without bothering to translate. The strategy found in the following examples.

- (1) Can give them to ... go ... *apa luar negeri* ... to foreign *ya* ..... (F1)
- (2) President's policy in *kenaikan bahan bakar minyak*. (M1)
- (3) To pay the *biaya telepon, listrik*. (M1)
- (4) The ... *kekayaan* ... wealthy ... wealthy is under the level *di bawah rata-rata*. (M1)

This strategy occurred 5 times in the data. There were some reasons why the subjects used Indonesian words in their speech production. First, the subjects were unaware of the English equivalents for such Indonesian words or expressions. Second, they had limited vocabulary which prevented them from using the intended words. Third, when the subjects faced difficulties in communicating their ideas, they used their mother tongue to achieve their communication goals.

### **Foreignizing.**

Foreignizing is the strategy to use a word from the native language with phonological and morphological adaptation to the target language. The strategy can be seen in the following examples.

- (5) President's policy in *kenaikan BBM*. (M1)
- (6) The decision of the increase of *BBM*. (M2)

This strategy was employed 7 times. The subjects used foreignizing since they did not know the equivalent words in English. Therefore, they foreignized their phonological system



as it was in English. For instance, the subjects pronounced “BBM” as */bi-bi-em/* and not */be-be-em/*.

### **Transliteration.**

Transliteration involves the use of L2 lexicon to create literally L1 phrase. The subjects tended to translate word-for-word from their native language as exhibited in the following examples.

- (7) “I think it’s not bad until they can get a high good enough education to develop their resources and we can see ... ee ... develop our country may be from that” (By having enough experts, we can exploit our natural resources). (F2)
- (8) “From their fund can ... ee ... can give ... ee ... the good ... ee ... can give them ... to go ... ee ... apa luar negeri ... to foreign ya ...” (Therefore, President can take some of the people’s representatives’ salary from the funding of education for the potential people). (F2)
- (9) “So many people can get a new job and get a good high ... high ... economic to do that is not directly may be ... long time” (Although it takes much time, the results will increase job employment). (F1)
- (10) “I think it’s better than only for static without develop” (It’s better than only speaking without action). (F1)
- (11) “Politician of Indonesia ... always ... always against with him” (however, some Indonesian politicians always against him to do that). (M2)
- (12) “Nothing politic” (non political aspects). (M1)

This strategy was the most commonly employed by the students (52 times). The main reason was that the students tended to think in Indonesian style of expression when they attempted to speak and, as the consequence, interference of Indonesian rule and style occurred. The expressions or utterances used by the subjects always sounded strange and even, sometimes they did not make sense. The expression or utterances did not convey the intended meaning in the target language. The data also revealed that the subjects first did their thinking and formulation in Indonesian before coming up with a literal equivalence in English. These data indicated that “transliteration” had taken place.

The L2-based communication strategies found included semantic contiguity, word coinage, repetition, and self-improvisation. In addition, there was also a non linguistic strategy i.e., non verbal language.

### **Semantic Contiguity.**

Semantic contiguity involves the use of lexical items to cover the meaning of a certain word which the learners do not know. The strategy can be seen in the following examples.

- (13) During Jokowi as a President (Jokowi's presidential). (F2)
- (14) Because its old tradition (previous tradition). (F1)
- (15) Make our country better the exception (except). (F1)
- (16) *I think like that* (I think so). (F2)
- (17) That so she (he). (F1)
- (18) Indonesian needed (needs). (F2)
- (19) *Her* (his). (M1)
- (20) She had nothing (he had nothing). (M1)
- (21) *Advantage with* (profit from). (M2)

Semantic contiguity appeared only 13 times. The subjects adopted this strategy when they faced difficulties in finding the appropriate word for a particular context. As shown in the examples above, the subject used pronoun *she* instead of *he* because in Indonesia there is only one third personal pronoun (*dia*).

### **Word Coinage.**

Word coinage is a strategy which creates L2 lexical item by selecting a conceptual feature of the target language item. It usually produces items which do not exist in the target language, or if they do, they are contextually incorporated. The strategy can be found in the following examples.

- (22) We can actually no many develop (development). (F1)
- (23) Pain (people being suffered). (F2)
- (24) I mean there are still ... reinforce (worse). (M2)
- (25) Dark side (drawbacks). (M2)
- (26) The trade side (trade aspects). (M1)

The strategy was employed 5 times by the subjects. The data revealed that the subjects had problems in selecting and using the selected words in appropriate contexts. They used the

words which existed in English irrelevantly to the intended meaning, for instance, the word “reinforce” existed and was used by the subject, but it was unacceptable or irrelevant in this particular context. The subject adopted this strategy because they had limited vocabulary. As a result, they used lexical items which were contextually inappropriate.

### **Repetition.**

Repetition is a communication strategy in which the subjects repeat the same word or phrase of a clause twice or more. The purpose is to search other utterances to say further; therefore, it is better for the subject to repeat the same utterances as he or she seeks another utterance in their minds. The examples of the strategy are as follows.

- (27) President especially to think ... to think. (F1)
- (28) President should ... should ... (F1)
- (29) He ... he ... (F2)
- (30) Wealthy ... wealthy ... (F2)
- (31) Our ... ee ... our ... (F2)
- (32) More measurable ... more measurable. (F1)
- (33) He had nothing ... he had nothing ... ee. (F2)
- (34) I agree with him to change the situation ... so ... I agree with him to change. (M1)
- (35) If President ... ee ... if President ... (M1)
- (36) Many Indonesian people ... ee ... many Indonesian people ... (M2)
- (37) If we ... ee ... if we ... (M2)

The repetition strategy was employed 34 times in this study. This indicated that before they continued their further utterances, they had to think, unfortunately, because of limited vocabulary and ideas, they repeated their previous utterances to avoid being silent.

### **Self-Improvisation.**

Self-improvisation is a communication strategy employed by the subjects to improve their previous utterances. It is a mean of self-correction or clarification on what the subjects intend to say. The example of the strategy can be seen in the following data.

- (38) There is no ... there are no much. (F1)
- (39) His government I mean ... Jokowi government. (F1)
- (40) Become ... ee ... they had tried to ... (F1)
- (41) They try to ... ee ... they had tried to ... (F1)

- (42) But we can ... ee ... we have (F2)
- (43) The only ... he only (F2)
- (44) He needs to ... to take ... ee ... he needs to concern. (F2)
- (45) Not any parties ... party. (M1)
- (46) We must ... ee ... we have to. (M1)
- (47) Sometimes we can said ... we can say ... (M2)
- (48) The Jokowi' people ... the Jokowi's policy (M2)
- (49) Some people of Indonesian ... ee ... politician of Indonesia. (M2)

In this study, the self-improvisation strategy occurred 30 times. As displayed in the examples, the subjects tried to improve their previous utterances because they realized that their previous utterances were wrong.

### **Nonverbal Language.**

The other interesting finding of the study is the exploration of nonverbal language which was exhibited by the students in attempt to clarify their utterances. It appears that the intensity of the use nonverbal language were different between male and female students. The study reveals that female students exhibited more nonverbal language than male students. The female students made use of their hand and arms to explain their utterances they thought were hard to be understood by the hearers.

The distribution of communication strategies used by male and female students is described in Table I.

**Table I. Distribution of Communication Strategies.**

Strategies	Basis	Sex	Total	%	Total for each Strategy
Language Switch	L1	Male	4	80	5
		Female	1	20	
Foreignizing	L1	Male	7	100	7
		Female	0	0	
Transliteration	L1	Male	21	40.4	52
		Female	31	59.6	
Semantic Contiguity	L2	Male	3	23.1	13
		Female	10	76.9	
Word Coinage	L2	Male	3	60	5
		Female	2	40	
Repetition	L2	Male	18	53	34
		Female	16	47	
Self-improvisation	L2	Male	12	40	30
		Female	18	60	
Nonverbal language	L2	Male	1	10	4
		Female	3	40	
		Total			150

Table I indicates that the subjects used language switch strategies 5 times or 3.42 % from the whole strategies. Whereas 4 out of 5 or 80 % strategies were employed by male learners and 1 out of 5 or 20 % were employed by female learners. It proved that most learners preferred to switch their production from L2 into L1 when they did not understand the expression in L2. There were 7 times or 4.80 % foreignizing strategy appeared and all were employed by male learners. There were 52 times or 35.6 % strategy of transliteration appeared and used by the learners. Out of 52 times, 21 times or 40.4 % were employed by male learners, whereas 31 times or 59.6 % were employed by female learners. The strategy was most dominantly employed by the learners.

Semantic contiguity strategy took place 13 times or 8.90 % from the whole strategies. Out of 13 times or 23.1 % were employed by male learners and 10 times or 76.9 % were

employed by female learners. There were 5 times or 3.42 % strategy of word coinage appeared in the data. Out of 5 times or 60 % were employed by male learners and 2 times or 40 % were employed by females learners. There were 34 times Or 23.3 % strategies employed by female learners. There were 34 times or 23.3 % strategies employed by the learners which were concerned with the repetition strategy. Here 18 times or 53 % were employed by male learners and 16 times or 47 % were employed by female learners. The strategy was the second dominant strategy employed by the learners. There were 30 times or 20.5 % strategy of self-improvisation occurred in the recent study. Out of 30 times, 12 times or 40 % were employed by male learners while 18 times or 60 % were employed by female learners. The last strategy, nonverbal language was dominantly performed by the female learners. Form 5 or 50 % occurrences of the strategy, 4 (40 %) was exhibited by female learners. There existed only 1 or 10 % of the strategy was applied by male learner.

### **Discussion**

The findings presented in the table and elaborated earlier show that all types of L1-based and L2-based communication strategies were used by the subjects. This phenomenon could be explained that most of subjects' problems dealt with the limited vocabulary to express their ideas. Therefore, when they wanted to express it, they tended to express it inappropriately.

Male learners dominantly used L1-based strategies rather than female learners. In contrast, female learners dominantly used L2-based strategies. That was due to the fact that the topic discussed in the present study was about the political system in Indonesia and male learners were assumed to know more than the female learners. Therefore, female learners did not face many troubles to express it in L2. Their troubles were mostly caused by their limited knowledge about the subject matters being discussed in the process of collecting the data.

The findings also showed that male learners tended to switch their language into Indonesian. This indicated that male learners faced troubles in expressing their ideas in English. Meanwhile, they knew more than female about the subject matters. Male learners also tended to foreignize L1 utterances as it was like in L2. They pretended to be clever so that when to be seen as having troubles in vocabulary mastery.

The findings also indicated that female learners mostly faced troubles to express their own ideas in English appropriately, so they expressed their ideas in English using the system of Indonesian language, while male learners did not face many troubles to express their ideas

compared to the females. The data showed that transliteration was the most dominant strategy employed by the learners in overcoming their communication problems. Moreover, female learners dominantly used semantic contiguity than male learners did; therefore, it was summed up that female learners dominantly expressed the inappropriate utterances to overcome their communication problems. Table 1 showed that male learners mostly repeated their previous utterances as a bridge before they uttered their further utterances. It means that male learners tended to repeat their previous utterances rather than to keep silent.

The findings above are relevant with the belief that communication strategies deal with the use of linguistic knowledge. Tarone (1981, cited in Faerch & Casper, 1983) says that communication strategies are used to compensate for some lacks in the linguistic system, and focus on exploring alternate ways of using what one does know for the transmission of a message without necessarily situational appropriateness. The subjects used transliteration as an L1-based strategy because they did not know the appropriate lexicons to produce. However, their lexical limitation did not result in their halting. They used a wide range of strategies to achieve their communicative goal.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, the conclusion of the research is drawn as the followings. English language learners overcome their communication problems by using communication strategies. Generally, the subjects resorted to using some kinds of strategy while communicating to overcome their communicative problems. They were aware of the existence of their deficiency in the target language as was demonstrated by their adoption of different strategies in this communicative production. Strategies adopted by the learners were determined by knowledge of the language they possessed. The less knowledge of the language they have, the more strategies they adopted.

The results of the study showed that the majority of the English language learners used achievement strategies to cope with problems. The subjects resorted to strategies when they faced with the problems, concepts or things and which there was no word in their native language. To solve these problems, the learners expanded their communicative resources by using a wide range of achievement strategies of which the most common ones were “transliteration”, “repetition”, and “self improvisation”. The learners had a strong drive to communicate so they used “language switch” and “semantic contiguity”. To communicate effectively, the learners required strategies which were relevant to their knowledge.

**Recommendations**

Based on the result of the research, the following recommendations are offered due to EFL lecturers and other researchers. The EFL lecturers or teachers should be aware of the communication strategy difference between male and female learners. Then they should be aware of the difference as the important factors in teaching English as a foreign language. This effort helps them in finding the appropriate method and strategy for teaching English to Indonesian students. To other researchers who interested in the topic are suggested to employ larger and wider data to explore the issue.

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# Gender-Based Communication Strategy

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