Communication Strategy Use of High and Low Proficiency Learners of English at a Thai University

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Abstract

The Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI) is a 62 item self-reporting questionnaire that has been used to assess communication strategy (CS) use across a number of different countries. The present study uses an adapted Thai translation of the OCSI to gather quantitative data regarding CS use from 104 first year undergraduate students at Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. Additional data was gathered regarding the oral fluency and general English proficiency of the participants in order to identify which CSs are commonly used by Thai students and examine the relationship between strategy use and proficiency levels. The results of the study showed that message reduction and alteration and negotiation for meaning whilst listening were, respectively, the most frequently reported speaking and listening strategies. Additionally, significant differences occurred the OCSI responses of high and low proficiency groups, with high proficiency learners reporting significantly higher use of social-affective, fluency-oriented, negotiation for meaning whilst speaking and circumlocution and low proficiency learners reporting significantly higher use of message abandonment and less active listener strategies. The differences in the reported strategy use of the two groups suggests that further research into the effects of strategy training for low proficiency learners would be beneficial.

Introduction

Historically, the teaching of English language in Thailand dates back to the time of King Rama III (1824-1851), with English becoming a compulsory subject in schools from 1921 (Foley, 2005). And yet, despite this long history and recent increases in government funding to education (Kirkpatrick, 2012), many educators in Thailand continue to raise concerns about the standards of English language education (Methithan & Chamcharatsri, 2011; Draper, 2012, Kirkpatrick, 2012), claiming that Thai students lack both linguistic and communicative competence (Foley, 2005). As Thailand moves towards entry into the ASEAN community in 2015, the importance of improving students' ability to communicate in English has become a focus of media attention, suggesting that a lack of English skills across the country will leave Thai people disadvantaged compared with other ASEAN members (Marukatat, 2011).

The reasons behind this lack of linguistic and communicative competence are wide ranging and complex. A number of factors including lack of teaching resources, negative wash back from the testing system (Foley, 2005) and lack of opportunity to practice spoken English both in and out of the classroom (Kirkpatrick, 2012) all seem to contribute to the problem. However, regardless of the cause it is clear that, as English teachers in Thailand, we need to find additional ways to help and encourage Thai learners to develop their communicative competence. As communication strategies represent a useful way in which to do this, this study aims to investigate the CS use of Thai undergraduate students and identify any relationship between English proficiency and CS use in order to identify useful strategic behaviours that may enable Thai learners to increase their communicative competence.

Conceptualising Communication Strategies

In his influential paper, Selinker (1972) highlights the fact that very few language learners ever achieve native-like language proficiency. In their attempts to communicate in meaningful situations, learners produce imperfect language which contains features of both their native and target languages, which Selinker termed *interlanguage*. The use of strategies for second language communication was included by Selinker (1972) as one of the five central processes of interlanguage, occurring when the learner attempts to communicate something in a target language without the necessary linguistic skills to achieve complete meaning. The importance of CS use was further reinforced by Canale and Swaine (1980), who included the use of "compensatory communication strategies" (p.27) as an essential feature of communicative competence.

As Candlin (1983) points out, when entering communication situations outside the classroom, many students encounter problems and difficulties in fully expressing their meaning as a result of deficiencies or gaps in their linguistic knowledge. Communication strategies (CS); therefore, represent an important tool to enable students to cope with these potential problems and develop their communicative competence (Canale & Swaine, 1980).

While there is general agreement that learners use CSs to overcome problems when communicating in a foreign language, there are a number of different theoretical approaches to conceptualising CS. Kasper and Kellerman (1997) contrast the distinction between the intra-individual and inter-individual approaches. Intra-individual approaches "locate CS in the model of speech production" (Kasper and Kellerman, 1997, p. 2). This includes both the traditionalist perspective, which focuses solely on speech production and psycholinguistic theories of CS, which focus specifically on the underlying cognitive processes of the speaker.

The interactionist perspective; therefore, represents the inter-individual approach with Tarone, Cohen and Dumas (1983) providing the following definition: "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" (p. 5). The present study also adopts an interactionist approach, based on the rationale that a significant amount of foreign language communication involves interaction with an interlocutor.

Central Features of CS

Regardless of the differences in conceptualising and defining CS, most theorists include main features of problem-orientedness and consciousness as defining criteria. To be classified as a communication strategy, Dornyei and Scott (1997) state that behaviour must be used in direct response to experiencing a *problem* during communication and that the strategy must be *consciously* used in an attempt to resolve this problem.

In addition, most taxonomies include a distinction between *reduction* and *achievement* strategies (Dornyei & Scott, 1997). This broad categorisation reflects the underlying behaviour of the learner when faced with a problem. When realising that they cannot achieve their communicative goal, the learner may choose to avoid the problem which leads to the use of reduction strategies. This behaviour involves changing or possibly abandoning the original communicative goal. Alternatively, the learner may choose to address the problem directly, resulting in achievement strategies. In doing so, the original communicative goal will remain the same but the learner will formulate a different plan with which to achieve it (Faerch & Kasper, 1983b).

Although different taxonomies of CS use different terms to describe the strategies within these two categories, there are many similarities between models. Dornyei and Scott (1997) present a full comparison of the strategies presented in nine of the main taxonomies of CS. Within the category of reduction strategies, Dornyei and Scott (1997) identify message abandonment, topic avoidance (or message reduction) and message replacement as occurring commonly across the main taxonomies. Achievement strategies include circumlocution (describing the characteristics of an object), approximation (using a word that has similar semantic features to an unknown target word), word coinage (creating a new word), restructuring (changing to an easier grammatical structure), literal translation, foreignising, code switching (switching to either native L1 or a third foreign L3 language), paralinguistic strategies (mime, gestures or facial expressions), direct appeal for help and indirect appeal for help.

The Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI) developed by Nakatani (2006) combines features from many of these major taxonomies of CS into a self-reporting questionnaire consisting of the following factors:

<u>Speaking strategies</u>

1. Social-affective*
2. Fluency-oriented*
3. Negotiation for meaning whilst speaking*
4. Accuracy oriented*
5. Message reduction and alteration**
6. Non-verbal strategies whilst speaking*
7. Message abandonment**
8. Attempt to think in English*

Listening strategies

1. Negotiation for meaning whilst listening*
2. Fluency-maintaining*
3. Scanning*
4. Getting the gist*
5. Non-verbal strategies whilst listening*
6. Less active listener**
7. Word-oriented*

(* = achievement strategy. ** = reduction strategy)

As can be seen, Nakatani (2006) retains the distinction between reduction and achievement strategies, whilst also separating strategies into speaking and listening factors, reflecting the interactive nature of foreign language communication.

CS Use and Proficiency

The OCSI (Nakatani, 2006) has been used to investigate CS use across different countries, with several studies focusing on the differences in CS use between high and low proficiency groups. A number of studies found that high proficiency learners were more likely to use social-affective strategies, such as overcoming anxiety and encouraging oneself to take risks (Nakatani, 2006; Chen, 2009, Chuanchaisit & Prapphal, 2009), fluency-oriented strategies, for example maintaining fluent speech and avoiding gaps in communication whilst speaking (Nakatani, 2006; Chen, 2009, Chuanchaisit & Prapphal, 2009; Chiang, 2011), negotiation for meaning whilst speaking, such as giving examples (Nakatani, 2006; Chen, 2009) and accuracy-oriented, for example paying attention to grammar and word order (Chen, 2009). Additionally, high proficiency learners have also been found to make significantly more use of help-seeking strategies, such as indicating non-comprehension to an interlocutor (Chuanchaisit & Prapphal, 2009) and lexical compensation strategies such as circumlocution, approximation and generalisation (Wannaruk, 2003; Mei & Nathalang, 2010; Chiang, 2011).

Studies also seem to suggest that low proficiency learners are more likely to use message abandonment, for example giving up on communicating a message (Wannaruk, 2003; Nakatani, 2006; Chen, 2009; Kavasoglu, 2011) or topic avoidance (Mei & Nathalang, 2010).
In general, the results across a number of these studies seems to indicate that high proficiency learners are more likely to make effective use of achievement strategies to enhance communication whereas low proficiency learners are more likely to use reduction strategies.

However, not all studies support the relationship between proficiency and CS use. Huang (2010) found no differences in CS use across high and low proficiency groups but instead found that self-perceived oral proficiency, frequency of speaking English outside the classroom and motivation correlated significantly with CS use.

CS Research in Thailand

Previous studies into strategy use of Thai students generally focus on describing the frequency of CS use. Luangsaengthong (2002) found approximation and repetition to be the strategies most used by Thai undergraduate students, with L3 language switch (using a word from a third language such as French) the most infrequent.

A study by Prapobratanakul and Kangkun (2011) investigated the CS use of young Thai students. Using CS categories based on Tarone's (1981) and Faerch and Kasper's (1983b) taxonomies, they observed the CS use of fourth grade Thai students during a speech production task (object description). They found paralinguistic strategies (such as gestures or facial expressions) to be most frequently used (45%), followed by intralinguistic strategies such as circumlocution and approximation (26%).

Somsai and Interaprasert (2011) used interview data to identify and classify the CSs used by Thai students. In their classification, they identify continuous and discontinuous strategies for conveying a message. Continuous strategies, focusing on sustaining the interaction and achieving a communicative goal, included circumlocution, using familiar words or phrases, using time fillers and appeals for help. Discontinuous strategies emerged when speakers had failed to convey their message and resorted to alternative methods such as switching topics, appealing to another person for help or using a dictionary. A further group of strategies was identified for understanding a message, including asking for repetition, asking the speaker to use simple language and noting facial expressions and gestures.

There is limited research within the Thai context relating to differences in CS use of high and low proficiency groups. Wannaruk (2003) found that high proficiency learners were observed using more L2 based strategies (such as circumlocution and approximation) in comparison to low proficiency learners used significantly more avoidance strategies, L1 based strategies (such as language switching) and paralinguistic strategies (including gesture and mime). Chuanchaisit and Prapphal (2009) found that high proficiency learners reported significantly more risk taking techniques, in particular social-affective, fluency-oriented and help-seeking strategies. In contrast, low proficiency learners reported more risk avoidance, specifically time gaining strategies. Whilst there were no significant differences between the two groups reported use of message abandonment, during an interactive task low proficiency learners were observed using this strategy significantly more than high proficiency learners.

In order to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the CS use of Thai students and allow for easier comparison with research from other countries where OCSI (Nakatani, 2006) has been used, this study proposes to use OCSI to address the following research questions:

1. What communication strategies are used by first year undergraduate students at a university in Thailand?
2. Is there a relationship between CS use and English proficiency?
3. What are the differences in the types of CSs used by high and low proficiency learners?

Methodology

Participants

Opportunity sampling was used to select five class groups of the compulsory general English course, English II, to take part in the study, resulting in a total sample size of 104 participants. This sample was taken from the general population (327 students) of first year undergraduate students enrolled in the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. The sample population was fairly homogenous in terms of age (approximately 18 years old), first language (all native Thai speakers) and length of English study (approximately 15 years).

Within the Faculty of Arts as a whole, there are significantly higher numbers of female students, which is reflected in the gender profile of the sample group, with 89 female participants and 15 males.

For practical reasons relating to the assessment of oral fluency, it was not deemed possible for the sample size to be greater than 104; however, this figure is considered an acceptable minimum sample size for quantitative research based on the general *rule of thumb* stating that samples should consist of approximately 10% of the overall population with a minimum size of 100 (Dornyei, 2007).

Instrumentation

As the OCSI was originally developed and delivered in Japanese, the English language version published by Nakatani (2006) contains items using complex vocabulary which may inhibit comprehension by EFL learners. Additionally, the OCSI does not include any items relating to lexical compensation, which are common in all of the major taxonomies; therefore, the decision was taken to adapt the questionnaire and translate it into Thai language.

In adapting the questionnaire, the English versions of the original items were compared to the items used in two other studies: Chiang (2011), who used an adapted version of OCSI, and Chuanchaisit and Prapphal's (2009) questionnaire, Strategies Used during Speaking Tasks Inventory (SUSTI). As a result of the comparison, 18 items were reworded, 5 items were moved to a different category, 8 new items were created and 2 items were deleted. This resulted in a total of 37 items relating to speaking and 25 items relating to listening, separated into the following factors:

<u>Strategies relating to speaking problems</u>
1 – Social-affective* (6 items)
2 – Fluency-oriented* (6 items)
3 - Negotiation for meaning whilst speaking* (4 items)
4 – Accuracy-oriented* (4 items)
5 - Message reduction and alteration** (3 items)
6 - Non-verbal strategies whilst speaking* (4 items)
7 - Message abandonment** (5 items)
8 - Attempt to think in English* (2 items)
9 – Circumlocution strategies* (3 items)

<u>Strategies relating to listening problems</u>
1 - Negotiation for meaning whilst listening* (6 items)
2 – Fluency-maintaining* (4 items)
3 - Getting the gist* (5 items)
4 - Non-verbal strategies whilst listening* (2 items)
5 - Less active listener** (2 items)
6 – Word-oriented* (6 items)
(* = achievement strategy. ** = reduction strategy)

The adapted version of OCSI was then translated into Thai language by two language experts (see Appendix). As recommended by Sperber, DeVellis and Boehlecke (1994), a backwards translation was completed to identify any linguistic ambiguities in the translation. In addition, six independent language experts were also asked to complete an Item Objective Congruence (IOC) index to verify the validity of the translation. The IOC index for the adapted questionnaire was 0.83 which is considered an acceptable level of validity for a research tool (Foster & Parker, 1995).

To further validate the translation of the questionnaire, a group of 26 Thai undergraduate students were selected through opportunity sampling to take part in the pilot study. A Cronbach alpha was conducted on the results to ensure acceptable levels of internal consistency. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the pilot study was .838 for the speaking section and .905 for the listening section, confirming that the questionnaire has high levels of internal consistency (Nakatani, 2006).

Research Design

The study used a non-experimental design to gather quantitative data on the overall CS use of first year undergraduate students in the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University and investigate any differences in use relating to English proficiency. The aim of the study was to address the following research questions:

1. What communication strategies are used by undergraduate students in Thailand?
2. Is there a relationship between CS use and English proficiency?
3. What are the differences in the types of CSs used by high and low proficiency learners?

In order to address the research questions, two measures of English proficiency were obtained for each participant: oral fluency and general English proficiency (academic assessment from English II course). The responses from the OCSI were correlated with the measurement of oral fluency and general English proficiency to identify any relationship between self-reported strategy use and proficiency. Oral fluency scores were also used to assign students to high, medium and low proficiency groups to allow for comparison of the CS use between groups.

Data Collection

Data were collected from three separate sources for analysis: OCSI questionnaire responses, oral fluency assessment and general English proficiency scores.

1. The OCSI (Thai translation) was administered to all participants during normal class time. The questionnaire consists of 62 Likert scale items relating to strategy use. All written and verbal instructions were given in English and participants were informed that participation was voluntary and contributions would remain anonymous.
2. The oral fluency of the participants was assessed through a spontaneous speaking task. Each participant selected a speaking topic (for example ‘Describe a holiday you took when you were a child’) at random and was given two or three minutes to prepare. They were then required to speak for two to three minutes on the topic, followed by a further two to three minutes of questions related to the same topic. This activity was administered during class time and recorded by the class teacher. The oral fluency was then rated by two independent raters using the IELTS speaking band descriptors (a scale from 1 to 9, with 9 indicating the highest level of proficiency). The inter-rater reliability for the oral proficiency assessment was .963.
3. In addition, general English proficiency scores were also obtained for each participant. These scores were taken from the academic grades for the general English course (English II), completed by all participants as part of their academic studies. The academic assessment of this course focuses mainly on tests of grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing. The total point score for the course (maximum 280 points) was obtained from each participant for analysis.

Data Analysis

Descriptive data (mean and S.D.) from the OCSI were used to identify the frequency and range of communication strategies used by the participants. Additionally, Pearson's product moment correlation was applied to data from the OCSI and the two measurements of English proficiency to identify any relationship between the students' oral fluency scores, general English proficiency and self-reported strategy use.
High and low proficiency groups were identified using the participants' oral fluency scores. In accordance with other similar studies into CS and proficiency, the high proficiency group consists of the top scoring 33% of students and bottom scoring 33% was used as the low proficiency group to enable comparison between groups. The middle proficiency group was not included in the analysis (Chen, 2009; Huang, 2010). Descriptive data (mean and S.D.) were used to identify the frequency of communication strategies used by high and low proficiency learners. Inferential statistics (t-test) were used to identify whether a significant difference exists between the types of strategies used by the two groups.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One: What Communication Strategies are Used by Undergraduate Students in Thailand?

In response to research question one, descriptive statistics from the participants responses to OCSI (Thai translation) were examined. In relation to speaking strategies, message reduction and alteration, non-verbal strategies whilst speaking, social-affective and negotiation for meaning whilst speaking were the most frequently reported speaking strategies whereas message abandonment was the least frequently reported. (see Table 1).
In order to compare the speaking strategy use of participants this study with findings from other cultures, four studies using OCSI (either the original version or adapted / translated versions) were selected: Nakatani (2006), Chen (2009), Huang (2010) and Chiang (2011). These studies were conducted with undergraduate students in Japan (Nakatani, 2006) and Taiwan (Chen, 2009; Huang, 2010; Chiang, 2011).

An examination of the descriptive data (Table 2) from each of the studies reveals that the most frequently reported speaking strategies seem to remain constant across different settings. In relation to speaking strategies, it can be seen that message reduction and alteration (renamed compensation by Chiang, 2011), non-verbal strategies while speaking, social-affective and negotiation for meaning while speaking seem to rank highly in most of the studies.

One interesting difference is in relation to the factor message abandonment. In Nakatani's study (2006), Japanese students reported this as their second most highly used speaking strategy. In comparison, Thai students (in the present study) and Taiwanese students (Huang, 2010; Chen, 2009) reported this as their least frequently used speaking strategy, indicating that this factor may be influenced by the speakers' culture more heavily than other factors.

The consistent high ranking of achievement strategies such as non-verbal strategies whilst speaking, social-affective and negotiation for meaning whilst speaking across different cultures seems to indicate that these strategies are regarded as the most useful and important by students, regardless of their cultural background. Indeed, research generally supports the

usefulness of non-verbal strategies (Canale & Swaine, 1980, Allen, 1999), social-affective strategies (Oxford, 1990) and negotiation for meaning (Naughton, 2006; Nakatani, 2010) as effective ways to enhance communication. However, as message reduction and alteration is classified in Nakatani's (2006) model as a reduction strategy, it seems uncertain as to how beneficial this behaviour is. As this strategy is reported frequently by learner across several cultures, it is possible that further study is needed to investigate the usefulness of this strategy.

Out of the strategies relating to listening problems, negotiation for meaning whilst listening, non-verbal strategies whilst listening and getting the gist were the most frequently reported while less active listener was the least frequently reported (see Table 3).
A comparison of listening strategies used in different studies is more difficult than strategies relating to speaking problems as there is less consistency in the treatment of listening strategies across various studies. Strategies relating to listening problems are omitted entirely in the studies by Chen (2009) and Huang (2010) and some of the factors were adapted or deleted in both the study by Chiang (2011) and the present study, making direct comparison more difficult.

However, as can be seen in Table 4, non-verbal strategies whilst listening, negotiation for meaning whilst listening and word-oriented strategies all feature as the most highly reported listening strategies in both the present study and Nakatani's (2006) study. Additionally, getting the gist strategies rank highly in the present study and Chiang's (2010) study.

As all of the most frequently reported listening strategies are classified as achievement strategies and results remain fairly consistent across different cultures, it could be concluded that learners view these strategies as the most useful to achieve success in listening. Research generally seems to support the usefulness of these listening strategies, in particular negotiation for meaning whilst listening (Nakahama, Tyler & van Lier, 2001; Naughton, 2006), non-verbal strategies whilst listening (Murphy, 1991; Allen, 1999) and getting the gist (Vandergrift, 1999; Vogely, 1995).

Research Question Two: Is There a Relationship Between CS Use and English Proficiency?

To respond to research question two, the relationship between strategy use and English proficiency was investigated through using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. Two separate measures of English proficiency were obtained for each participant. The general English score (obtained from academic grades on the English II course) for the participants in the study ranges from 148 to 260.25 with a mean of 210.45 and SD of 22.124 (maximum score for the course is 280). The oral fluency score for each participant ranged from 3 to 7.75 with a mean of 5.2 and SD of 1.066 (with a maximum score of 9).

The results show fairly low levels of correlation between general English proficiency scores and OCSI responses (see Table 5). A significant positive correlation was obtained for fluency-oriented strategies (.229) and significant negative correlations were obtained for message abandonment (-.200) and less active listener (-.209), all significant at 0.05 level.
In comparison to general English proficiency, oral fluency scores correlate with OCSI responses use more strongly (see Table 5). Significant positive correlations were obtained for four factors: social-affective (.290), fluency-oriented (.400), negotiation for meaning whilst

speaking (.259) and circumlocution (.230). Additionally, significant negative correlations were obtained for two factors: message abandonment (-.363) and less active listener (-.260).

This seems to suggest that oral fluency is a stronger predictor of participants' CS use than general academic English abilities. However, the significant correlations found between oral fluency and reported CS use were not particularly strong, ranging from .230 to .400. This may suggest that oral fluency is not necessarily the strongest indicator of CS use and that other factors may be more influential. It seems likely that strategy use is influenced by a range of different factors. Huang (2010), for example, concluded that motivation and frequency of English use outside the classroom were better predictors of CS use than general English proficiency. In an empirical review of CS studies, Jidong (2011) identifies numerous factors such as proficiency, learning and communicating contexts, task type, personality, gender differences and first language, which have all been identified as influential on strategy choice. However, he concludes that further study is needed to identify the way these factors may interact with each other and the extent that they influence CS use.

Research Question Three: What are the Differences in the Types of CSs Used by High and Low Proficiency Learners?

To respond to research question three, the differences in OCSI responses between participants with high and low levels of oral fluency in English were explored through inferential statistics. Scores from the oral fluency assessment were used to assign participants to high, medium or low proficiency groups. In accordance with other similar studies in this field (Chen, 2009; Huang, 2010), the top scoring 33% of participants were assigned to the high proficiency group (N = 32) and the bottom scoring 33% were assigned to the low proficiency group (N = 39). The middle group (N = 33) were not included in the analysis.
In order to investigate any significant differences in means of the two groups, independent samples t-tests were performed for each of the factors. The results of the analysis show significant differences in five out of nine speaking factors and one out of six listening factors (see Table 6).

The results in Table 6 indicate that high proficiency learners report using significantly higher levels of social-affective, fluency-oriented, negotiation for meaning whilst speaking and circumlocution strategies (all significant all at $p < .05$). In contrast, low proficiency learners report significantly higher use of message abandonment strategies (significant at $p<.01$) and less active listener strategies (significant at $p < .05$).

A pattern that can be clearly identified here is that high proficiency learners are more likely to use achievement strategies when faced with a communicative problem in comparison to low proficiency learners who are more likely to try and avoid the problem through reduction strategies. It seems likely that learners with more linguistic competence feel more able to control their anxiety and are subsequently more able to sustain a fluent conversation and to solve communication problems through negotiation. Additionally, their higher level of lexical knowledge makes it possible for them to use circumlocution to overcome communicative problems. In contrast, it seems likely that learners with lower levels of linguistic knowledge find it more difficult to control their anxiety and lack sufficient lexical resources to maintain fluent conversation. When faced with a breakdown in communication, they choose to end the interaction, possibly due to lack of linguistic resources or possibly due to culturally influenced factors such as loss of face (Chuanchaisit & Prapphal, 2009).

Chuanchaisit and Prapphal (2009) go on to suggest that Thai students who effectively utilise social-affective strategies are more likely to intentionally seek out opportunities to communicate in a target language, implying that there may be an inverse relationship between social-affective strategies and avoidance. Additional analysis of the data from the present study revealed a significant negative correlation between use of social-affective strategies and use of message abandonment (correlation coefficient of -.283, significant at 0.01 level) suggesting that participants who used higher levels of social-affective strategies are less likely to abandon their attempt at communicating. This suggests that strategy training in effective use of social-affective strategies may be particularly of use to help learners reduce their use of message abandonment or topic avoidance (Oxford, 1990).

The relationship between oral proficiency and CS use also seems to show some consistency across different cultural settings (see Table 7). The most consistent findings across previous studies focus on three factors: social-affective, fluency-oriented and negotiation for meaning whilst speaking. High proficiency learners report significantly higher use of these three strategies in the present study and in previous studies by Nakatani (2006) and Chen (2009). Additionally, lower proficiency learners reported significantly higher use of message abandonment in the present study and previous studies by Chen (2009) and Kavasoglu (2011).

Summary and Conclusions

In this study, participants reported the highest use of message reduction and alteration, non-verbal strategies whilst speaking, social-affective and negotiation for meaning whilst speaking strategies as a way to enhance their own spoken communication. When listening to an interlocutor, they reported that they are most likely to use negotiation for meaning whilst listening, non-verbal strategies whilst listening and getting the gist strategies.

Statistical analysis confirms that there is a relationship between CS use and English proficiency. However, it appears that oral fluency correlates more strongly with CS use than general English proficiency, suggesting that general English proficiency levels are not a good predictor of strategy use. Further analysis between the strategy use of high and low proficiency groups revealed that high proficiency learners are significantly more likely to use achievement strategies in particular social-affective, fluency-oriented, negotiation for meaning whilst speaking and circumlocution. In contrast, low proficiency learners are more likely to use reduction strategies, specifically message abandonment and less active listener.
The differences observed between the CS use of high and low proficiency learners suggest some useful pedagogical implications. For example, low proficiency learners in particular may benefit from more effective use of social-affective strategies as a way to lessen their use message abandonment (Oxford, 1990). Jidong (2011) also suggests that CS strategy training should focus on encouraging students to make use of L2 based strategies (such as circumlocution) which may also decrease their use of avoidance strategies (Jourdain, 2000).

Although the debate on whether strategies can actually be taught within a classroom setting remains, there is some evidence suggesting that direct strategy training can result in an improvement in the quality and quantity of strategy use (Dornyei, 1995) and oral fluency (Nakatani, 2005, 2010). Based on the findings of this study, further research focusing on the effects of CS training with Thai students would be extremely beneficial.

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Appendix

Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (Thai Translation)

Social Affective Strategies (6 items)	
I try to relax when I feel anxious.	ฉันพยายามผ่อนคลายยามที่รู้สึกตื่นเต้นหรือกังวล
I try to enjoy the conversation.	ฉันพยายามที่จะสนุกกับการพูดคุยกับคู่สนทนา
I try to give a good impression to the listener.	ฉันพยายามทำให้ผู้ฟังเกิดความประทับใจที่ดี
I actively encourage myself to express what I want to say.	ฉันให้กำลังใจตนเองเพื่อจะพูดสิ่งที่ตนเองต้องการให้ได้
I encourage myself to use English even though this may cause mistakes	ฉันให้กำลังใจตนเองในการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษแม้ว่าจะพูดผิดบ้างถูกบ้างก็ไม่เป็นไร
I use fillers such as "well, you know", "um", "uh" when I cannot think of what to say.	ฉันมักจะเติมคำประเภท'เอ้อ…อ้า…รู้ไหม?' ลงไปในประโยคเพื่อขัดจังหวะเวลาคิดไม่ออกว่าจะพูดอะไรต่อ
Fluency-oriented Strategies (6 items)	
I pay attention to my rhythm and intonation.	ฉันพยายามพูดให้มีจังหวะและน้ำเสียงที่เหมาะสม
I pay attention to my pronunciation.	ฉันระมัดระวังเรื่องสำเนียงการออกเสียง
I pay attention to the conversation flow and avoid silence	ฉันพยายามให้การสนทนาต่อเนื่องลื่นไหลไปได้ จะได้ไม่เกิดการเงียบ
I try to speak English as fluently as native speakers	ฉันพยายามพูดให้คล่องแคล่วเหมือนเจ้าของภาษา
I take my time to express what I want to say.	ฉันให้เวลากับตัวเองและค่อยๆพูดสิ่งที่ต้องการ
I speak clearly and loudly to make myself heard.	ฉันพยายามพูดให้ชัดเจนและเสียงดังพอที่จะให้ผู้อื่นได้ยิน
Negotiation for meaning whilst speaking (4 items)	
I check with the listener to make sure he/she understands what I have said	ฉันมักจะซักถามตรวจสอบเพื่อให้แน่ใจว่าผู้ฟังเข้าใจตรงกับสิ่งที่ฉันต้องการจะพูด
I repeat myself to help the listener understand what I want to say	ฉันจะพูดสิ่งที่ต้องการซ้ำไปซ้ำมา จนกว่าผู้ฟังจะเข้าใจ
While speaking, I pay attention to the listener's reaction to my speech.	ในขณะที่พูด ฉันพยายามสังเกตปฏิกิริยาของผู้ฟังเสมอ
I give examples if the listener doesn't understand what I am saying.	เวลาที่ผู้ฟังไม่เข้าใจสิ่งที่ฉันพูด ฉันจะยกตัวอย่างเพิ่มเติม
Accuracy-oriented Strategies (4 items)	
I pay attention to grammar and word order during conversation.	ฉันระมัดระวังเรื่องไวยากรณ์และการลำดับคำในระหว่างสนทนา
I notice myself using a phrase which fits a grammatical rule that I have learned.	ฉันสังเกตว่าตนเองใช้วลีตามหลักไวยากรณ์ที่เรียนมา
I correct myself when I notice that I have made a mistake.	ฉันแก้คำพูดตัวเองใหม่ เวลาที่รู้ตัวว่าพูดผิด
I emphasise the subject and verb of the sentence	ฉันพยายามเน้นตรงประธานและกริยาของประโยค
Message Reduction and Alteration (3 items)	

I reduce the message and use simple expressions.	ฉันมักจะลดข้อความที่จะพูด และเลือกใช้สำนวนง่ายๆ
I use words which are familiar to me.	ฉันใช้คำที่คุ้นเคย
I change my sentence(s) when I feel I can't get the message across with the first/previous sentence I produced.	ฉันเปลี่ยนประโยค เมื่อรู้สึกว่าไม่สามารถสื่อสารด้วยประโยคเดิมให้ผู้ฟังเข้าใจได้
Nonverbal Strategies whilst Speaking (4 items)	
I make eye-contact when I am talking.	ฉันพยามยามสบตาคู่สนทนาเมื่อพูดคุย
I use gestures if I cannot express myself	ฉันใช้ท่าทางแทน เวลาที่ไม่สามารถสื่อเป็นคำพูดได้
I use facial expressions if I cannot express what I want to say	ฉันใช้การแสดงออกทางสีหน้า เวลาที่ไม่สามารถสื่อสารสิ่งที่อยากพูด
When I can't think of a word, I use mime to try and convey the meaning	เวลาคิดคำไม่ได้, ฉันมักจะแสดงท่าใบ้แทน
Message Abandonment Strategies (4 items)	
If I face some language difficulties, I leave the message unfinished	ฉันมักจะพูดได้ไม่ครบข้อความหรือหยุดกลางคันเมื่อคิดภาษาในการสื่อสารไม่ได้
I ask other people to help when I can't communicate well.	ฉันจะให้คนอื่นช่วย เวลาที่ไม่สามารถสื่อสารได้ดี
I give up when I can't make myself understood.	ฉันจะเลิกพูด เวลาที่ไม่สามารถทำให้ผู้อื่นเข้าใจตนเองได้
I use my talking dictionary to help me communicate when I don't know what to say	ฉันใช้พจนานุกรมที่ออกเสียงได้ (a talking dictionary) เพื่อช่วยในการสื่อสารเมื่อฉันไม่รู้ว่าจะพูดอย่างไร
I prefer to remain quiet if I don't know what to say to avoid embarrassing myself	เมื่อไม่รู้ว่าจะพูดอย่างไร ฉันคิดว่าการนิ่งเงียบจะดีกว่าการพูดออกไปแล้วขายหน้า
Attempt to Think in English Strategies (2 items)	
I think first of what I want to say in my native language and then construct the English sentence.	ฉันคิดเป็นภาษาไทยก่อนแล้วสร้างประโยคใหม่เป็นภาษาอังกฤษ
I think first of a sentence I already know in English and then try to change it to fit the situation.	ฉันคิดถึงประโยคภาษาอังกฤษที่ฉันรู้จักอยู่แล้ว แล้วพยายามปรับเปลี่ยนให้เข้ากับสถานการณ์
Circumlocution Strategies (3 items)	
I describe the characteristics of the object instead of using the exact word when I am not sure	หากไม่แน่ใจว่าจะใช้คำว่าอะไร ฉันจะบรรยายลักษณะของวัตถุที่พูดถึงนั้นแทน
I create new words when I don't understand how to express myself	ฉันคิดคำขึ้นมาใหม่เวลาที่ไม่รู้ว่าจะใช้คำพูดว่าอย่างไร
I use key words to replace a whole sentence when I have difficulties conveying my ideas	เมื่อฉันรู้สึกว่าไม่สามารถจะสื่อสารความคิดได้โดยง่าย ฉันจะใช้เฉพาะคำสำคัญแทนการพูดทั้งประโยค
Negotiation for Meaning While Listening (6 items)	
I ask for repetition when I can't understand what the speaker has said.	ฉันขอให้ผู้พูดพูดซ้ำ เวลาที่ไม่เข้าใจสิ่งที่เขาพูดไปแล้ว
I make a clarification request when I am not sure what the speaker has said.	ฉันขอให้ผู้พูดอธิบายเพิ่มเติม เวลาที่ไม่มั่นใจว่าเข้าใจสิ่งที่เขาพูดถึง

I ask the speaker to use easy words when I have difficulties in comprehension.	ฉันขอให้ผู้พูดใช้คำที่ง่ายลง เวลาที่ไม่เข้าใจสิ่งที่เขาพูด
I ask the speaker to slow down when I can't understand what the speaker has said.	ฉันขอให้ผู้พูดพูดช้าลง เวลาที่ไม่เข้าใจสิ่งที่เขาพูด
I make clear to the speaker what I haven't been able to understand.	ฉันบอกให้ผู้พูดทราบ ในส่วนที่ฉันไม่เข้าใจ
I ask the speaker to give an example when I am not sure what he/she said.	ฉันขอให้ผู้พูดยกตัวอย่างเมื่อไม่แน่ใจว่าผู้พูดต้องการจะบอกอะไร
Fluency-Maintaining Strategies (4 items)	
I pay attention to the speaker's pronunciation, rhythm and intonation	ฉันตั้งใจฟังจังหวะในการออกเสียงและท่วงทำนองและน้ำเสียงของผู้พูด
I send the speaker signals to show my understanding to avoid communication gaps	ฉันส่งสัญญาณระหว่างการสื่อสารว่าเข้าใจ เพื่อหลีกเลี่ยงช่องว่างในระหว่างการสนทนา
Even if I do not understand what the speaker has said, I still try to respond to him/her by saying "Really?", "Is that so?", etc	แม้จะไม่เข้าใจว่าคู่สนทนาพูดอะไร ฉันก็พยายามจะโต้ตอบด้วย
I pretend that I understand what the speaker has said, even if I do not understand all the details	ฉันแสร้งทำเป็นว่าเข้าใจสิ่งที่คู่สนทนาพูด แม้จะไม่เข้าใจทั้งหมดก็ตาม
Getting the Gist Strategies (5 items)	
I try to catch the speaker's main point if there are too many details	ฉันพยายามจับใจความสำคัญให้ได้ แม้จะไม่เข้าใจรายละเอียดทุกคำพูดของคู่สนทนา
I guess what the speaker is going to say based on the context.	ฉันคิดตามว่าผู้พูดน่าจะพูดอะไรต่อไป โดยอาศัยบริบทช่วย
I guess the speaker's intention based on what he/she has said so far.	ฉันพยายามคาดเดาเจตนาของผู้พูดจากสิ่งที่เขาพูดมาแล้ว
I guess the speaker's intention by paying attention to the first part of the sentences	ฉันตั้งใจฟังท่อนแรกของประโยคเพื่อจะเดาต่อว่าผู้พูดต้องการอะไร
I don't mind if I can't understand every single detail.	ฉันคิดว่าผู้ฟังไม่จำเป็นต้องเข้าใจทุกคำพูดที่ผู้พูดสื่อสาร
Nonverbal Strategies While Listening (2 items)	
I use gestures when I have difficulties in understanding.	ฉันพยายามแสดงออกด้วยท่าทางในยามที่ฟังไม่เข้าใจ
I pay attention to the speaker's eye contact, facial expression and gestures.	ฉันฟังโดยการสบตาและสังเกตสีหน้าท่าทางของผู้พูด
Less Active Listener Strategies (2 items)	
I translate into native language little by little to understand what the speaker has said.	ฉันพยายามแปลกลับมาเป็นภาษาไทยทีละนิดๆเพื่อจะได้เข้าใจสิ่งที่ผู้พูดพูดไปแล้ว
I only focus on familiar expressions.	ฉันจับความเฉพาะจากศัพท์สำนวนที่คุ้นเคยเท่านั้น
Word-Oriented Strategies (6 items)	
I pay attention to the words which the speaker slows down or emphasises.	ฉันให้ความสำคัญกับคำที่คู่สนทนาพูดช้าหรือพูดเน้นเสียง
I guess the speaker's intention by picking up familiar words.	ฉันเดาว่าผู้พูดต้องการอะไร โดยฟังจากคำที่คุ้นเคย

I try to catch every word that the speaker uses.	ฉันพยายามฟังคำทุกคำที่ผู้พูดใช้
I pay attention to the first word to judge whether it is an interrogative sentence or not.	ฉันฟังคำแรกของประโยคอย่างตั้งใจ เพื่อจะได้รู้ว่าเป็นประโยคคำถามหรือไม่
I pay attention to the parts of speech, such as noun and verb	ฉันตั้งใจฟังตรงประธานและกริยาของประโยคมากที่สุดในการฟัง
When I hear a question, I focus on which question word has been used	เมื่อได้ยินประโยคคำถาม ฉันพยายามฟังว่าตัวตั้งคำถามคือคำอะไร

Tables

Table 1

Mean, Standard Deviation and Rank of Strategies Relating to Speaking Problems (*N* = 104)

Rank	Strategy	Mean	SD
1	Message reduction and alteration	4.12	.54
2	Non-verbal strategies whilst speaking	3.75	.73
3	Social-affective	3.74	.55
4	Negotiation for meaning whilst speaking	3.57	.55
5	Fluency-oriented	3.53	.61
6	Circumlocution	3.50	.71
7	Attempt to think in English	3.30	.77
8	Accuracy-oriented	3.25	.61
9	Message abandonment	2.68	.61

Table 2

Mean Rankings of Speaking Strategies across Other Studies

Ranking	Nakatani (2006)	Chen (2009)	Huang (2010)	Chiang (2011)	Present study
1	Message reduction and alteration	Message reduction and alteration	Message reduction and alteration	Negotiation for meaning while speaking	Message reduction and alteration
2	Message abandonment	Non-verbal strategies while speaking	Non-verbal strategies while speaking	Compensation	Non-verbal strategies while speaking
3	Non-verbal strategies while speaking	Negotiation for meaning while speaking	Social-affective	Social-affective	Social-affective
4	Social-affective	Social-affective	Attempt to think in English	Accuracy oriented	Negotiation for meaning whilst speaking

Table 3

Mean, Standard Deviation and Rank of Strategies Relating to Listening Problems (*N* = 104)

Rank	Strategy	Mean	SD
1	Negotiation for meaning whilst listening	3.82	.64
2	Non-verbal strategies whilst listening	3.71	.89
3	Getting the gist	3.68	.58
4	Word-oriented	3.48	.54
5	Fluency-maintaining	3.35	.62
6	Less active listener	2.92	.82

Table 4

Mean Rankings of Listening Strategies across Other Studies

Ranking	Nakatani (2006)	Chiang (2011)	Present study
1	Non-verbal strategies whilst listening	Getting the gist	Negotiation for meaning whilst listening
2	Negotiation for meaning whilst listening	Compensation	Non-verbal strategies whilst listening
3	Word-oriented	Word-oriented	Getting the gist
4	Less active listener	Clarification	Word-oriented

Table 5

Correlations of English Proficiency and Strategy Use

	General English Proficiency		Oral Fluency	
Speaking Strategy	Pearson correlation	Sig. (2 tailed)	Pearson correlation	Sig. (2 tailed)
Social-affective	.102	.303	.290**	.003
Fluency-oriented	.229*	.019	.400**	.000
Negotiation for meaning whilst speaking	.130	.191	.259**	.008
Accuracy-oriented	-.001	.988	.065	.509
Message reduction and alteration	.147	.136	.004	.970
Non-verbal strategies whilst speaking	-.038	.702	.062	.529
Message abandonment	-.200*	.042	-.363**	.000
Attempt to think in English	.063	.522	.148	.133
Circumlocution strategies	.077	.438	.230*	.019
Listening Strategy				
Negotiation for meaning whilst listening	.078	.436	.183	.065
Fluency-maintaining	-.178	.071	-.018	.859
Getting the gist	.179	.068	.003	.977
Non-verbal strategies whilst listening	-.158	.109	.062	.533
Less active listener	-.209*	.033	-.260**	.008
Word-oriented	-.086	.386	-.084	.398

*Correlation significant to .05 level

**Correlation significant to .001 level

Table 6
Comparison of High and Low Proficiency Groups OCS Use
(*N* = 71)

	High Proficiency		Low Proficiency				
Speaking Strategy	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	T value	df	P
Social-affective	3.88	.45	3.59	.60	-2.305	69	.024*
Fluency-oriented	3.66	.49	3.37	.70	-2.008	69	.049*
Negotiation for meaning whilst speaking	3.77	.57	3.45	.54	-2.409	68	.019*
Accuracy-oriented	3.30	.56	3.29	.58	-.072	69	.943
Message reduction and alteration	4.07	.60	4.17	.52	.737	69	.464
Non-verbal strategies whilst speaking	3.84	.67	3.80	.81	-.193	69	.848
Message abandonment	2.38	.56	2.84	.61	3.284	69	.002**
Attempt to think in English	3.45	.77	3.26	.84	-1.020	69	.311
Circumlocution	3.50	.71	3.36	.69	-2.142	69	.036*
Listening Strategies							
Negotiation for meaning whilst listening	3.95	.58	3.71	.72	-1.563	68	.123
Fluency-maintaining	3.34	.65	3.44	.63	.603	69	.548
Getting the gist	3.70	.65	3.74	.46	.290	69	.773
Non-verbal strategies whilst listening	3.84	.88	3.76	.97	-.394	69	.695
Less active listener	2.72	.83	3.12	.81	2.017	65.74	.048*
Word-oriented	3.40	.65	3.62	.47	3.62	0.47	3.62

*p< .05, **p<.01

Table 7

A summary of findings relating to CS use of high and low proficiency learners from different cultures.

Researcher	**Country**	**Method of CS measurement**	**CSs showing differences between high and low proficiency groups**	**Nature of relationship**
Nakatani (2006)	Japan	OCSI	Social-affective Fluency-oriented (whilst speaking) Negotiation for meaning (whilst speaking) Message abandonment Less active listener	H>L** H>L** H>L* L>H (not significant) L>H (not significant)
Chen (2009)	Taiwan	OCSI (Chinese translation)	Social-affective Fluency-oriented (whilst speaking) Negotiation for meaning (whilst speaking) Accuracy-oriented Message reduction and alteration Message abandonment	H>L*** H>L*** H>L* H>L* L>H* L>H***
Chuangchaisit and Prapphal (2009)	Thailand	Strategy Use in Speaking Task Inventory (SUSTI), developed by the researcher	Social-affective Fluency-oriented Help-seeking Time-gaining	H>L*** H>L*** H>L*** H>L**
Chiang (2011)	Taiwan	Adapted version of OCSI (Chinese translation)	Fluency-oriented (whilst speaking) Speaking compensation Listening compensation	H>L** H>L** H>L**
Kavasoglu (2011)	Turkey	OCSI (Turkish translation)	Message abandonment Planning and organising	L>H* L>H*
Present study	Thailand	OCSI (Thai translation)	Social-affective Fluency-oriented (whilst speaking) Negotiation for meaning (whilst speaking) Message abandonment Less active listener	H>L* H>L* H>L* L>H** L>H*

H = high oral proficiency group, L = low oral proficiency group.
*p< .05, **p<.01, ***p<.001