INVESTIGATING PERSONALITY AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES
USED BY ESL LEARNERS

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To my beloved parents, siblings, family and friends
for their Love, Prayer and Support

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to look into learner differences in terms of extraversion that affect oral discussions and the communication strategies the individuals use in order to converse. Extroverts were the chosen focus and their use of the oral communication strategies were analyzed in order to reach the research objectives. Participants of the study were 79 undergraduates taking an engineering course at Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP). The participants were in their first year of studies and are from 20 to 24 years of age. The learners were low proficiency students based on their English Placement Test (EPT) conducted by the institution. The study adopted a mixed method design in order to answer the research questions. Several instruments were used which included two questionnaires; the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire- Revised (EPQ-R) and the Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI), to gauge data for the quantitative analysis and a recorded group discussion to further support the quantitative data contribute to the findings and discussion. The study found that there is a significant correlation between extraversion and oral communication strategies. In depth analysis found that the while both personalities used most of the oral communication strategies, extroverts applied them more frequently than introverts. The present study also sought out to identify the oral communication strategies used by extroverts in an oral discussion and concluded that out of eight factors, extroverts employed most of the strategies listed under all eight factors of coping with speaking problems.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk melihat perbezaan pelajar dari segi sikap ekstrovert yang memberi kesan kepada perbincangan secara lisan serta strategi komunikasi yang digunakan oeh individu untuk berkomunikasi. Ekstrovert dipilih sebagai fokus kajian dan penggunaan strategi-strategi komunikasi mereka dikaji untuk mencapai objektif kajian. Peserta kajian terdiri daripada 79 pelajar yang mengambil kursus kejuruteraan dan sains teknologi di Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP). Para peserta berada dalam tahun pertama pengajian mereka dan berusia antara 20 hingga 24 tahun. Mereka adalah pelajar yang mempunyai penguasaan bahasa Inggeris yang lemah berdasarkan kepada Ujian Penempatan Bahasa Inggeris (EPT) yang dijalankan oleh institusi tersebut. Kajian mengambil kaedah gabungan untuk menjawab persoalan kajian. Beberapa instrumen telah digunakan termasuk dua soal selidik; Soal Selidik Personaliti Eysenck-Pindaan (EPQ-R) dan Inventori Strategi Komunikasi Lisan (OCSI), untuk mengukur data analisis kuantitatif dan juga perbincangan kumpulan yang direkodkan untuk menyokong data yang seterusnya menyumbang kepada laporan kajian dan perbincangan. Kajian mendapati bahawa terdapat hubungan yang signifikan antara sikap ekstrovert dan strategi komunikasi lisan. Analisa mendalam mendapati bahawa kedua-dua personaliti telah digunakan hampir kesemua strategi komunikasi lisan, tetapi ekstrovert menggunakannya dengan lebih kerap berbanding dengan introvert. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti strategi-strategi komunikasi lisan yang digunakan oleh ekstrovert dalam perbincangan secara lisan dan membuat kesimpulan bahawa daripada lapan faktor, ekstrovert menggunakan hampir kesemua strategi yang disenaraikan di bawah lapan faktor menangani masalah berbahasa Inggeris.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CS	-	Communication Strategies
EFL	-	English as a Foreign Language
EPQ-R	-	Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised
EPT	-	English Placement Test
ESL	-	English as a Second Language
MUET	-	Malaysian University English Test
OCS	-	Oral Communication Strategies
OCSI	-	Oral Communication Strategy Inventory
UMP	-	Universiti Malaysia Pahang

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

There is a clear contradiction between the predictions of psychologists and applied linguists regarding the relationship between extraversion and language learning. Psychologists claim that extraversion is a disadvantage for learning on the grounds that an extravert has less cortical arousal, is more easily inhibited and has a limited long-term memory. In contrast, many applied linguists predict that extraversion is an advantage for learning a second or foreign language, based on the assumption that an extravert elicits more input and produces more output (Kiany, 1997). However, in the actual classroom, since no individual's linguistic repertoire is perfect, most people have experienced struggling to find the appropriate expression or grammatical construction when attempting to communicate their meaning. This is especially for learners of the second language who have difficulty in communicating for a number of reasons. The steps taken by language learners in order to enhance the effectiveness of their communication are known as communication strategies (Littlemore, 2003). Although there still is not a consensus among researchers, communication strategies (CS) have been generally defined as the means that speakers use to solve their communicative

problems. According to Dornyei and Scott (1997), the notion of second language (L2) communication strategies was raised with the recognition that the mismatch between L2 speakers' linguistic resources and communicative intentions leads to systematic language phenomena whose main function is to handle difficulties or breakdowns in communication.

Hence, as personality and communication strategies could not be independent factors, a study to investigate whether there exists a significant relationship between the two variables should be conducted outlining the grounds of this research. This chapter provides the background and statement of the problem, objectives and research questions, scope and limitations of the study as well as the significance of the study.

1.1.1 Background of the Study

Corder (1978:34) defined CS as "a systematic technique practiced by the speakers when faced with difficulty to express the intended meaning." Difficulties mentioned by Corder (1978) are caused by many factors and one of the key factors identified inherently by researchers is their lack in proficiency. Vast research has been conducted in identifying the relationship between communication strategy use and learners level of proficiency. Communication strategies is said to help learners achieve their communication in L2 (Dornyei & Kormos, 1998).

Dornyei and Scott (1997) recommended their taxonomy of CS and is used widely in CS research. According to Dornyei and Scott (1997), this taxonomy stretched from the base of taxonomies developed by Tarone (1977) and Faerch and Kasper (1983)

but it dealt with "how CSs help the speakers to solve the problems during oral communication tasks and accomplish mutual understanding." Their classification were extended and collected on the base of CS research.

Apart from language proficiency as one of the main factors, psychologists of education have also identified many other factors affecting oral proficiency when learners participate in oral tasks or discussions. Individual differences; personality, attitude and aptitude, and motivation are among those other factors. Outlining and introducing the dimensions of individual differences by frontrunners of psychometrics (eg. Eysenck, 1992; Costa and McRae, 1992; Zuckerman, 1992) have extended the opportunities for research and broaden the outlook of language learning and teaching methodologies.

A personality that has been associated to oral proficiency is extraversion. Eysenck (1967) defines extraversion-introversion as the degree to which a person is outgoing and interactive with other people. Extroverts tend to be outgoing, sociable and risk-taking. Introverts tend to be quiet and unassertive and seldom behave in an aggressive manner (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1964). Another important difference between extroverts and introverts revealed by psychological studies is that extroverts are superior to introverts in short-term memory. However, in a more recent review, Brown (2000) describes extraversion as the extent to which a person has a deep need to receive ego enhancement, self-esteem and a sense of wholeness from other people as opposed to receiving that affirmation within oneself. In contrast to introverts, this group of people can have the inner strength of character that extroverts do not have and vice versa. Brown (2000) further provides his analysis of this personality and claims that introverts may have the patience and focus to attend to clear articulation to a foreign or second language. Both sides of the extraversion continuum displays advantages and disadvantages, and therefore it is important to identify how extraversion affects oral

discussion based on the strategies that they use in order to communicate and maintain discussion.

1.3   Problem Statement

Some learners have the ability to employ certain strategies most effective in building strong communication skills while some do not. These are communication strategies that learners consciously or subconsciously use and categorized by Dornyei (1995) into; 1) avoidance strategies; 2) achievement strategies and; 3) time-gaining strategies. Many researches on communication have been made utilizing Dornyei's (1995) Communication Strategies which is also basis for the current research. Besides that, Dornyei (1995) also proposed training on CS such as explicit encouragement of risk taking and CS and reported the findings in his "Teachability of CS" which discussed the practicality of providing awareness of communication strategies and its advantages of doing so in the classroom.

Learners of the second language in Malaysia have always been associated with the character of being passive learners and having difficulties in expressing thought, hence using the language altogether, (Hussin 2006; Mustapha 2011). While many factors contribute to the phenomenon, one of them is extraversion. Wakamoto (2007) proposed extraversion as an influence on the success of second language learning including communication. Therefore, this study investigated the relationship between the extraversion factor and the use of communication strategies. This was conducted since the association of personality characteristics and oral proficiency has been proved numerously through many studies and researchers may question the relevance of exploring the extent to which of these characteristics (extraversion) effects CS in terms

of frequency of different categories of CS especially in the Malaysian classroom context. Common researches on communication strategies have discussed the selection of CS by learners to strongly be a result of language proficiency itself that are between high and low proficiency learners (Bialystok 1990, Dornyei 1995). Hence, the current research looked at a different angle besides language proficiency as the main impact on communication. The interest was into looking at learner differences in terms of extraversion that affect oral discussions and the communication strategies the individuals use in order to converse and complete oral tasks.

1.4   Purpose of the Study

Firstly, the research is an addition to the numerous research conducted in relation to communication strategies. And while many have included learning proficiency as a variable in understanding the strategies used by learners, this research sought to identify whether personality has an effect on the communication strategies adopted by individuals. Moreover, Marin (2005) states that when determining the personality traits of second language learners such as extraversion, teachers could predict the frequency of CS and decide on appropriate CS training with certain objectives predetermined and emphasized to meet learners' true condition. Moreover, according to Ehrman and oxford (1995), personality may well shape the response of students to the learning situation and to their choice of learning strategies. However, there have been relatively few studies of the relationship between personality and l2 production and development (Dewaele and Furnham,1999)

Secondly, since there has not been many research done on extraversion, the current research took the opportunity to explore the thought which hopefully will help

language instructors improve their teaching skills and consider individual characteristic in their teaching. This is especially for the Malaysian context where anxiety, formality of the task and personality takes the foreground in oral tasks and hampers the process of speech production by learners.

1.5   Objectives of the Study

The present study therefore is aimed to;

      1)   Investigate the relationship between extraversion and communication strategies used by students.

      2)   Identify the communication strategies used by extroverts in an oral discussion.

1.6   Research Questions

The following research questions are addressed in this study:

      1)   What is the correlation between extraversion and communication strategies used by students?

2)   What are the communication strategies used by extroverts in an oral discussion?

1.7   Scope of the Study

The present study involved the theoretical concepts of a personality trait (extraversion) and communication strategies. The study is conducted at Universiti Malaysia Pahang, (UMP); the single technical University in Pahang which is the largest state in Peninsular Malaysia. The participants for the study were students undertaking a variation of bachelor degree courses which are engineering, computer science, and science management. The present study is a mixed method study. Results from the study were used to answer questions whether a significant correlation between extraversion and communication strategy use exists as well as whether the two different groups of personality employed similar or different strategies to communicate in oral discussions.

1.8   Significance of the Study

Extraversion in the language classroom is among the many factors that enhances individual differences and is inevitable in any part of the world. Acknowledging individual difference and more importantly understanding it will allow language practitioners to develop improved approaches in language learning by considering each student's need. Hence, syllabus design will be much easier and

relevant when teachers are able to take into account the learners and their personalities and incorporate appropriate language activities in the classroom. This is especially in the case of oral interaction tasks as learner difference plays a major role in the outcome of these tasks.

Apart from convincing teachers to observe personality, this research also hopes to encourage communication strategy teaching that is based on the categories of students (extroverts or introverts) and can be more focused due to the categorization made. Many scholars believe that metacognitive strategies, which focus on raising the learners' awareness of the learning process, might enhance second language skills, (Cohen, 1998; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). Furthermore, Dornyei (1995) looked at speaking skills in conversation and examined the teachability of communication strategies by focusing on whether the training of a specific strategy enhanced the quantity and quality of learners' strategy use. He conducted a study in a Hungarian EFL classes over a period of six weeks. He focused on three types of communication strategies; topic avoidance and replacement, circumlocution and using fillers and hesitation in order to maintain conversation and gain time to think for the latter strategy. The study resulted in data that showed that there was a significant improvement among the participants in the strategy training group in the quantity and quality of strategy use and in overall speech performance. In addition, the study also included that the participants displayed positive responses towards their training.

The present study also identified the types of communication strategies used by introverts and extroverts and hopefully can help teachers provide the right tools for students in oral communication tasks in order to achieve optimum levels of language use.

In conclusion, this study hopes to fill a gap in research of Second Language Acquisition and language studies in general. It also hopes to help language practitioners understand more on individual differences and adapt that with their teaching styles in order to enhance second language learning, specifically in oral communication tasks.

1.9   Operational Definition of Terms

The present study has adopted several terms in the research. The terms are as follows:

1.9.1   Personality

The Concise Oxford Dictionary provides two meanings to personality: (1) being a person; personal existence or identity; (2) distinctive personal character. Within psychology, Allport (1937: 48) has defined personality as "The dynamic organisation within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustments to his environment. Child (1968: 83) defines it as "More or less stable internal factors that make one person's behaviour consistent from one time to another and different from the behaviour other people would manifest in comparable situations."

Therefore, based on studies by the psychologists, what is taken is the recognition that people reflect on their own experiences, take decisions, and try to change the situations in which they find themselves. Personality such as motivation does not cause failure, but simply influences how learners make sense of their experience.

1.9.2 Extraversion

Merriam Webster Dictionary defines Extraversion as "the act, state, or habit of being predominantly concerned with and obtaining gratification from what is outside the self"

Brown (2000) in his recent study describes extraversion as the extent to which a person has a deep need to receive ego enhancement, self-esteem and a sense of wholeness from other people as opposed to receiving that affirmation within oneself. In contrast to introverts, this group of people can have the inner strength of character that extroverts do not have and vice versa. Brown (2000) further provides his analysis of this personality and claims that introverts may have the patience and focus to attend to clear articulation to a foreign or second language. This leads to his point that traditional practical teaching may try to invoke learners to become extroverts in the classroom when it may not be necessary. This is due to assumption that different cultures will allow different optimum levels of extraversion that teachers must be sensible of and consider individual differences.

The present study takes definition of Hans Eysenck (1967) who described extraversion-introversion as the degree to which a person is outgoing and interactive

with other people. Similar to Brown (2000), he explains that Extroverts seek excitement and social activity in an effort to heighten their arousal level, whereas introverts tend to avoid social situations in an effort to keep such arousal to a minimum.

1.9.3   Communication Strategies

According to Richards and Schmidt (2009), communication strategies are strategies that learners use to overcome these problems in order to convey their intended meaning.

Canale and Swain (1980:43) described CS as "verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for insufficient competence."

Rather similar to the definitions above, the working definition adopted for the present study is taken in Dornyei's (1995:56) Teachability of CS, where he states that one working definition many researchers accept is that CSs are "a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his or her meaning when faced with some difficulty"

1.9.4 ESL Learners

ESL learners are defined as English as a Second Language Learners whose primary language(s) or language(s) of the home, is other than English and who may therefore require additional services in order to develop their individual potential, (Ministry of Education, Government of British Columbia, 1999).

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter presented the the background of the study, problem statement, purpose, objectives and research questions, significance as well as the scope of study for the present research. Operational definition of terms was also included in this chapter.

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