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Teachers' Knowledge of the Use of Communication Strategies: A case of Kiswahili as a Second Language Classrooms in Tanzania

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Abstract

In second language (SL) classroom interaction, both teachers and learners might face language mismatch due to the learners' limited target language (TL) linguistic resources. In such situations, communication strategies (CS) like approximation, non-verbal cues, code-switching, and others crucially help to compensate for the breakdown. However, in most SL classes teachers either do not use these strategies to ease interaction with their learners or use them without noticing their significance. Thus, it is questionable whether SL teachers are cognizant of the use of CSs when interacting with their learners. This paper intends to examine teachers' knowledge of the use of Communication Strategies (CSs) in Kiswahili as a Second Language (KSL) classroom in Tanzania. The thesis of this paper stands to be important because Kiswahili gains importance in the world's communication every day, and there is a remarkable growth of KSL classes where appropriate CSs are needed. In particular, the present paper sought to determine CSs used by KSL teachers and to ascertain their cognizance of the use of CSs in classroom interaction. This qualitative case study involved three KSL teachers who were purposively sampled from the Kiswahili na Utamaduni (KIU) training centre. Classroom observation and personal interviews were used to collect data. Findings indicate that the teachers relied on code-switching and used CSs with limited knowledge of specific strategies. This study recommends that KSL teachers should consider using CSs effectively to facilitate classroom interaction. In addition, teachers' training colleges should consider involving units on CSs in language teaching courses.

Key Words: Communication Strategies, Kiswahili as the Second Language, Kiswahili as the Second Language Teachers

1. Introduction

Active communication is a key to any SLL (second language learning) class. However, this cannot be the case if there is a communication breakdown due to language mismatch between teachers and learners. This mismatch is caused by the gaps between speaker and listener which may appear because of their (learners') limitation in grammatical or linguistic knowledge (Masithoh; Fauziati; Supriyadi, 2018). In such a situations interlocutors (e.g. teachers and learners) must find some effective ways to communicate their thoughts. These ways aim

at coping with various communicative situations. These ways are used to compensate for the low proficient speakers' (e.g. learners') inadequacies so that they can survive in their communication in the target language. Those effective ways which help people to communicate in the presence of such deficiencies can be called communication strategies. Burch defines Communication Strategies as a "conscious technique" and as "conscious attempts" used by speakers to deal with communication difficulties.

Although the research of CSs in the field of SLL has yielded contradictory results, many researchers have argued that they have a great contribution to SLL, and L2 learners would benefit from explicit instruction on strategies to cope with communication problems (Aljohan & Hanna, 2021). Thus, research revealed that learners' use of communication strategies was closely related to their language proficiency (Hsieh, 2014). Moreover, research on L2 learners shows that despite the acquisition of communication strategies from their L1 communication experiences, their use of these strategies was found to be non-systematic and not well-defined (Vazquez & Ordonez, 2019). This implies that for the learners to benefit from CSs, its uses by teachers and learners in the SLL classes should be explicit.

Different researchers have grouped the CSs into different taxonomies. For example, Tarone (1977) categorized them as avoidance, paraphrasing, conscious transfer, and appeal for assistance; Fearch and Kasper (1983) categorized them as formal reduction, functional reduction, and achievement; Bialystok (1983) grouped such strategies as L1-based strategies, L2-based strategies, and non-linguistic strategies. Moreover, Paribakht (1985) categorized them as linguistic-based strategies, contextually-based strategies, conceptually-based strategies, and mime; and Dörnyei and Scott (1995) categorized them as direct strategies, interactional strategies, and indirect strategies.

Although the terminologies used and their levels of specificity vary considerably, the corresponding parts of the taxonomies of CSs show many similarities (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). Thus, based on these typologies, researchers propose two main categories of CSs: reduction strategies and achievement strategies. The former is adopted by a speaker who attempts to do away with a problem by giving up his/her communicative goal like topic avoidance. The latter is taken by a speaker when he/she decides to keep the communicative goal, but he/she compensates for insufficient means or makes efforts to retrieve the required items like paraphrasing (Sukirlan, 2014). The present study relied on Dörnyei and Scott's (1995) Taxonomy (Table 1) because it aimed to investigate KSL

teachers' use of CSs when interacting with their learners. Grounded in this taxonomy, researchers can investigate CSs by focusing on mutual comprehensibility between, for example, Kiswahili native-speaking teachers and KSL learners (cf. Hmaid, 2014).

Table 1: Inventory, classification, and definition of CSs adopted from Dörnyei and Scotts (1997:188-190)

No	Strategy	Description
1	Message abandonment	<i>Leaving a message unfinished because of some language difficulties</i>
2	Circumlocution	<i>Exemplifying, illustrating, or describing the properties of a TL object/action</i>
3	Approximation	<i>Using a single alternative, lexical item, such as features with the TL word which shares semantic features with a target word</i>
4	Word coinage	<i>Creating a non-existent L2 word by applying a supposed L2 rule to an existing L2 word</i>
5	Restructuring	<i>Leaving the utterance unfinished, and communicating the intended message according to an alternative plan</i>
6	Literal translation	<i>Translating a lexical item, an idiom, a compound word or structure from L1 to L2</i>
7	Foreignizing	<i>Using an L2 word with L1 phonology and/or morphology</i>
8	Code-switching	<i>Including L1 words with L2 speech: this may involve stretching from a single word to a whole sentence</i>
9	Non-verbal cues	<i>Describing whole concepts non-verbally, or accompanying a verbal strategy with a visual illustration</i>
10	Appeal for assistance	<i>Turning to the interlocutor for assistance by asking explicit questions concerning a gap in one's L2 knowledge</i>
11	Expressing non-understanding	<i>Expressing that one did not understand something properly either verbally or non-verbally</i>
12	Guessing	<i>Similar to a confirmation request, except that guessing involves real indecision</i>
13	Verbal strategy markers	<i>Using verbal marking phrases before or after a strategy to signal that the word or structure does not carry the intended meaning perfectly in the L2 code</i>
14	Responses	<i>Responding to the interlocutor by repeating, repairing, rephrasing, expanding, or confirming what the other interlocutor has said.</i>
15	Other-repetition	<i>Repeating something the interlocutor said to gain time</i>
16	Self-repetition	<i>Repeating a word or a string of words immediately after they were said</i>
17	Self-rephrasing	<i>Repeating a term but not quite as it is, but by adding something or using a rephrase</i>
18	Other-repair	<i>Correcting something in the interlocutor's speech</i>
19	Self-repair	<i>Making self-initiated corrections in one's speech</i>

No	Strategy	Description
21	Omission	<i>Leaving a gap when not knowing a word and carrying on as if it had been said.</i>
22	Mumbling	<i>Swallowing or muttering inaudibly a word (or part of a word) whose correct form the speaker is uncertain about</i>
23	Use of similar sound words	<i>Compensating for a lexical item whose form the speaker is unsure of with a word (either existing or non-existing) which sounds more or less like the target item.</i>
24	Message replacement	<i>Substituting the original message with a new one because of not feeling capable of executing it</i>
25	Use of all-purpose words	<i>Extending a general "empty" lexical item to the context where specific items are lacking</i>
26	Comprehension checks	<i>Asking questions to check that the interlocutor can follow you</i>
27	Asking for repetition	<i>Requesting repetition when one has not heard/understood something properly</i>
28	Asking for clarification	<i>Requesting explanations of an unfamiliar meaning structure</i>
29	Use of fillers	<i>Using gambits to fill pauses, to stall, and to gain time to keep the communication channel open</i>
30	Repetitions	<i>Repeat utterances of another interlocutor to gain time/for insistence</i>
31	Feigning understanding	<i>Attempting to carry on with the conversation despite not understanding something by pretending that it has been understood</i>
32	Asking for confirmation	<i>Requesting confirmation that one heard or understood something correctly</i>

In researching CSs in SL teaching, researchers focused on the "teachability" of CSs and their impact on SL classrooms (cf. Dorneyi, 1995; Maleki, 2007; Nakatani, 2005; Sukirlan, 2014). Findings from these studies reveal that learners can be trained using some strategies since such strategies have a salient contribution to classroom SL learning. Contrary to the interactional taxonomies of CSs (cf. Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Tarone, 1981), the findings from these studies are based only on the learners' use of CSs.

Nevertheless, few studies have specifically looked at teachers' use of CSs (Azar & Mohammadzadeh, 2013; Cervetes & Rodriguez, 2012). Generally, these studies noted that the teachers used discourse rather than lexical-based strategies (cf. Azar & Mohammadzadeh, 2013). In addition, the teachers and students relied more on code-switching than on other strategies. Code-switching was the easiest way to communicate but a less convenient one for language learning (cf. Cervetes & Rodriguez, 2012).

Based on the previous studies, research shows that CSs play salient roles in L2 classroom interaction. Studies therefore recommend that L2 teachers should employ CSs in interacting with their learners. However, research also reveals that L2 teachers do not efficiently use CSs, or they use some without noticing their significance. Consequently, they fail to facilitate classroom interaction. Considering these propositions, the present study addressed the following objectives:

- i. To identify types of CSs used by teachers in Kiswahili as a Second Language classrooms
- ii. To ascertain teachers' cognizance of the use of CSs in facilitating Kiswahili as a Second Language classrooms

2. Methodology

Data were collected from the Kiswahili na Utamaduni (KIU) centre located in Msasani - Dar es Salaam. This centre was established in 1985 offering Kiswahili language training using Kiswahili native-speaking trainers. KIU has more than twenty teachers training more than 160 students per year, and such trainees come from various nations including the USA, UK, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Kenya, Uganda, to mention a few. The present study adopted an exploratory case study design. This design was appropriate for the present study since the design is rich in contextual variables that could offer more insights into the dynamics of using CSs by native-speaking teachers of KSL (cf. Mackey & Gass, 2005).

For the present study, three native KSL teachers were purposively sampled to see how they used CSs to interact with their learners in the classroom. The three KSL teachers were enough for the present study since case studies are normally more effectively conducted with fewer participants (Mackey & Gass, 2005). *The teachers* attended several in-service trainings in grammar, conversation, and culture; however, none of them involved specific units on the use of CSs. They also train other KSL teachers.

Based on the study's objectives, two sets of data were collected focusing on two aspects: the types of CSs used by the KSL teachers and their knowledge of the use of such strategies via classroom observation and personal interviews respectively. The use of repeated observations (three for each teacher), allowed me to gain a deeper and more understanding of how the KSL teachers used CSs in the classroom context (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The personal interview questions allowed for exploring the teachers' perspectives regarding their use of CSs.

The researcher transcribed and coded the collected data grounded in Dörnyei and Scott's (1995) Taxonomy of CSs. The data were thematically analysed to determine the types of CSs used by the teachers and to ascertain their cognizance of the use of such strategies in classroom interaction.

3. Findings and Discussion

The profile of the respondents who participated in the study is presented in Table 2. The findings of this study are presented in the order of the research objectives as indicated in the following sections.

Table 2: The profile of respondents

Teacher	Age	Gender	Years of Teaching KSL	Class Level
T1	36	Female	14	Elementary
T2	63	Female	28	Intermediate
T3	46	Male	24	Elementary

3.1 Types of Strategies Used by the KSL Teachers in Classroom Interaction

Considering the first research question, the strategies presented in this section are based on a modified version of Dörnyei and Scott's (1995) Taxonomy of CSs. Thus, the strategies involve pre-determined, and other strategies that emerged during the observation sessions. The following are some of the excerpts.

During classroom observation, T1 used comprehension checks to see whether the learners were following them. The following data excerpt is illustrative:

- (1) T1: Eee.. mfanyabiashara *tasu*. wafanyabiashara *ukusu sawa?*
 'eee.. businessman' singular... businessmen plural right?'
 SSS: Sawaa!
 'Right?'
 T1: Mashamba yangu yana matuta mengi. **Sawa sawa eeh?**
 'My farms have many terraces right.'

The following excerpt exemplifies the use of code-switching by T2 and T3. The teachers switched from Kiswahili to English to elaborate grammatical features of Kiswahili as a TL. In addition, they switched from Kiswahili to English to introduce new topics to the learners:

- (2) T2: Sasa wiki iliyopita na Nancy mlikuwa mnazungumzia *preposition...*
 'Last week, (teacher) Nancy taught you about prepositions...'

- T2: ambapo *preposition* ni "i" au "e" au "liw" au "lew"
 'Whereas the preposition markers are "i," "e," or "lew"
 T3: lakini tunajifunza to be in.. in order to be able to express
 ourselves...
 but we learn the verb "to be" in order to express ourselves.'

In the classroom observation sessions, there were instances where the teachers used self-repetition to insist on a lexical item or a concept. The following excerpt illustrates this phenomenon:

(3) T1: *Badaaeee, badae...badae tutakwenda sokoni.*

'later on, later on... later on we will go to the market'

T2: *mpendwa, mpendwa Kama mpendwa shangazi.*

'dear, dear like dear aunt'

T3: *Mimi, mimi, mimi ni kijana kidoooo.*

'T3 repeats the Swahili first person pronoun.'

Concerning the types and frequencies of CSs, the teachers used code-switching, other repairs, literal translation, self-repetition, repetition, fillers, and comprehension checks. In addition, they used asking for confirmation, asking for clarification, asking for repetition, circumlocution, non-verbal cues, all-purpose words, and appeal for assistance. Of all these CSs, the KSL teachers relied mainly on code-switching, non-verbal cues, self-repetition, and comprehension checks. In terms of frequencies, code-switching was the most frequently used strategy (17%) followed by non-verbal cues (12%), self-repetition (12%), and comprehension check (11%). The least frequently used strategies were appealing for assistance (1%) and asking for repetition (1%). However, the frequency results contradict what was claimed by teachers during the interviews. The teachers said that they discouraged their learners from using L1 or any other language apart from Kiswahili. They did so by sticking to Kiswahili no matter how the learners relied on their L1.

In contrast, the findings from the observational data show that code-switching was the most frequently used strategy by the teachers. The teachers were not aware of their use of code-switching in preference to the other strategies. The findings concur with those of Cervantes and Rodriguez (2012) who examined the use of CSs in beginner Spanish learners of English classrooms in which teachers relied on code-switching. The findings revealed that the teachers' reliance on code-switching was due to their habit of looking for easier ways to communicate with their learners rather than using other strategies.

3.2 Teachers' Cognizance of the Use of CSs in KSL Classroom Interaction

Interviews were conducted with the teachers to get introspective information from them on the use of CSs. Specifically, the interviews focused on the teachers' knowledge of the use of CSs in classroom interaction. The purpose was to ascertain the KSL teachers' knowledge of the strategies they used to communicate with their learners in the classroom.

Concerning the strategies that the teachers used to overcome communication breakdowns, the data collected show that T1 and T2 used pictures whereas T3 used demonstrations to help learners who could not understand the lesson. T2 used pictures and body language while T1 and T3 used topic avoidance to deal with the learners who were not interested in the subject matter. The following excerpts reveal the answers given by the teachers:

"Mimi natumia zaidi picha, *kudemo*, na direct translation." (T1)
"I use mostly pictures, demonstrations, and direct translation."
(T1)

"Mimi natumia zaidi vitendo, picha, na mifano." (T2)
"I mostly use actions, pictures, and examples.... " (T2)

The teachers' responses indicate that they mainly relied on pictures, demonstrations, and examples to overcome different communication breakdowns in classrooms. Out of the nine examples, the teachers argued to use of pictures in five instances. However, their argument that they used pictures most frequently contradicts the findings from the observation data. During the observation sessions, neither T1 nor T3 used pictures, although some instances required them do to so. In contrast, only T2 used pictures once.

In comparing the findings of this study and the previous ones (cf. Azar & Mohammadzadeh, 2013; Yaghoubi-Notash & Karafkan, 2015), the latter did not involve interviews; therefore, their participants' voices were not heard. The studies could thus not delineate the participants' awareness of using some strategies.

Another area of focus was teachers' understanding of CSs and their uses. The data collected focused on identifying CSs about pre-determined communication breakdowns, gaining insights into teachers' understanding of the meaning of CSs, exemplifying the CSs which were given by the KSL teachers as well as including CSs as a unit of study in teacher training programmes. Concerning their understanding of the term 'communication strategies,' the teachers had the following to say:

"Mbinu za mawasiliano ni njia au ile namna ambayo unatumia kumfanya mtu akajifunza lugha nyingine." (T1)

"Communication strategies are the methods one uses to enable someone to learn a different language." (T1)

"Ni njia ya kumfanya mwingine aelewe kile unachokizungumza au wewe uelewe kile anachokizungumza mh... ni maelewano kati ya mtu na mtu. Sivyo ilivyo labda?" (T2)

"...It is a technique to make a person understand what you are saying and vice versa. Maybe it means enabling understanding between interlocutors, right?" (T2)

Also, I asked them to exemplify the strategies that they used when interacting with their learners. The following are their responses:

"Ni zilezile labda kujifunza darasani. Mwingine hajifunzi labda kusikiliza, kusoma au kuandika na vitu kama hivyo. (Nilipomkumbusha "Lakini hapo awali ulisema unaweza ukatumia picha.") Yah... picha pia, body language nazo ni mbinu pia." (T1)

"They are the same classroom learning strategies such as listening, reading, or writing (I reminded her of the pictures which she mentioned before) yah... the use of pictures and body language are also strategies." (T1)

“Yah naweza kukutajia kwa mfano... kwa picha, kwa vitendo namaanisha kwa ishara. Ndiyo kwa picha na ishara, yah nafikiri ni mbinu kuu hizo.” (T3)

“Yah I can give you some examples... via pictures, actions, I mean non-verbal cues. Yes, the major ones are pictures and non-verbal cues.” (T3)

The teachers described CSs in the light of the general teaching and learning strategies. The teachers seemed to have limited specific knowledge of the meaning of CSs even though they used them in their classes. For instance, they exemplified CSs as writing, reading, and role-play; nevertheless, these are not CSs (cf. Dörnyei and Scott’s, 1995 - Taxonomy). What is more, the teachers could not even exemplify some strategies they provided in the previous questions for the interviews. The study reveals that the KSL teachers who participated in the present study had limited explicit knowledge of what specifically CSs are. In some instances, the teachers could not identify the strategies that they mostly used in the classroom such as code-switching and other repairs; in contrast, they said that they mostly used pictures, which were not there during classroom observation, except for T2 who used them once.

This is in line with the observation by Cervantes and Rodriguez (2012:116) that “many teachers’ education or teaching training programmes do not include CSs in language learning programmes. Other programmes do include communication strategy training contents; however, teachers do not make use of this knowledge in their everyday practice.” In the present study, T2 and T3 said that they attended in-service training for more than twenty years, but they did not attend any training related specifically to CSs. T1 claimed to remember some units in her training related to CSs but the examples she provided did not relate to CSs. Thus, she was not taught CSs.

Considering the importance of teachers’ explicit knowledge of CSs, studies have shown a significant role of such knowledge in SLL classrooms (cf. Long, 1981).

Thus, having explicit knowledge of CSs helps teachers become conscious of the impact of the strategies used in classroom interaction and significant negotiation for meaning with their learners. The teachers' limited knowledge of these strategies can be attributed to the lack of training in CSs at the college level. Moreover, instead of giving communication breakdowns and the strategies that they could use, the teachers provided general challenges that they faced in teaching KSL. No teacher provided a specific breakdown related to CSs even though we talked about some of them in the previous questions. These findings, thus, imply that the KSL teachers were not aware of some CSs. These findings are based on the precaution raised by some scholars; that is, CSs should not be confused with Learning Strategies (LSs), despite some overlap (Mitchell & Myles, 2004; Tarone, 1980). Although both facilitate language learning, the primary focus of LSs is to learn while that of CSs is to communicate by overcoming specific communication breakdowns.

The profiles show that the three teachers attended language-teaching colleges and schools. The question that followed was whether the courses at college and school levels involved training in CSs. Consideration of the following extracts is useful:

(35) "ee... kulikuwa kuna baadhi ya topics tulizofundishwa. (I asked how they were taught)Yah nakumbuka, kwanza tulifundishwa utamaduni wa nchi za nje hasa Waingereza na Wajerumani, yaani utamaduni wa nje, ili kujua values zao, jinsi yaku-behave pale mbele. Halafu jinsi ya ku-introduce topic kama ma-noun class tulifundishwa, kutoa logic ya somo na malengo." (T1)

"Yah there were some topics which involved it. (I asked on how they were taught) yah... I remember that firstly we were taught about foreign cultures especially that of German and English people, for us to be acquainted with their values. We were also taught how to behave in front of the class, how to introduce a lesson, how to deliver it, and lesson objectives and issues pertaining to noun classes..." (T1)

(36) "mhh. sikumbuki labda kama kulikuwa kuna vipengele kama hivyo ila mimi nilikuwa sivitilii maanani labda ila sikimbuki. Labda uniambie wewe mwenzangu?" (T2)

"In college, I do not remember at all. During in-service training.... maybe I forgot such lessons, but I don't remember at all". (T2)

"Sikumbuki kabisa, inawezekana walitoa lakini mimi kweli sikumbuki kabisa". (T3)

"I do not remember at all. Maybe they were involved in the units, but I don't remember them at all". (T3)

In the excerpts above, T1 claimed to have taken courses on CSs in college but her description was not related to CSs. Her response raises two issues: her college training did not involve units on CSs and her knowledge of CSs is questionable. The responses given by T2 and T3 are very clear that, during their college training, the programme did not involve CSs. Note that T2 and T3 are experienced experts who also train other KSL teachers. Cervantes and Rodriguez (2012) found that teacher education or teaching training programs do not include communication strategy knowledge to make teachers aware of the importance of communication strategies in language learning. As a result, such teachers do not use or use CSs insignificantly.

The analysis and discussion of the findings show that KSL teachers used mainly code-switching, other repairs, non-verbal cues, and self-repetitions. However, the findings reveal that the teachers were not aware of some strategies that they used in the classroom interaction. This was attributed to their limited specific knowledge of CSs and uses. Pedagogically, the findings unfold the importance of orienting and encouraging second language teachers to train in the use of CSs at college levels and in in-service training.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Research shows that in SL classroom interaction CSs crucially help to compensate for the breakdown. However, SL teachers either do not use these strategies to ease interaction with their learners or use them without noticing their significance. Based on this idea, the present study set out to explore how cognizant are the KSL teachers in the use of such strategies in classroom interaction. In light of the findings, the teachers used some CSs when interacting with their learners in the classes. Nevertheless, there is a gap between the strategies they used and their awareness of these strategies. Although they used such strategies, the teachers had limited explicit knowledge of the strategies.

Therefore, teachers should be acquainted with CSs via in-service training. Moreover, the findings have shown that there is a problem with the inclusion of CSs in teachers' SL teaching courses. Evidence from the interviewed teachers reveals that lessons on CSs are not included in course modules in some schools/colleges. Considering their importance, modules on CSs should be included in colleges/schools' curricula.

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