Nonnative Speakers' Use of Negotiation Strategies with Different Interlocutors

Megan Brown and Christy Berry

Northern Arizona University

Abstract

An issue in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) research that is starting to receive attention is the use of negotiation strategies in interactions between non-native English speakers (NNES). In the literature on negotiation strategies, there is a variety of research on conversations between native English speakers (NES) and NNES, but research into strategies used in conversations been NNES is lacking. The present study investigates whether English language learners use different negotiation strategies with different interlocutors. Four students were recruited from the Program in Intensive English, and one student was recruited from an undergraduate class at Northern Arizona University. These students were assigned as conversation partners for seven 10 minute conversations about a provided task. The conversations were recorded, transcribed, and coded for use of negotiation strategies. Results of the analysis revealed 11 post-utterance negotiation strategies and 5 preemptive negotiation strategies. This study can inform future research on NNES-NNES and NES-NNES conversations, and aid educators in teaching the use of negotiation strategies in these conversations.

Keywords: negotiation strategies, non-native English speaker, English as a Lingua Franca

Nonnative Speakers' Use of Negotiation Strategies with Different Interlocutors

Background

For many years, research investigating negotiation strategies in conversation has focused largely on interactions between native English speakers (NES) and nonnative English speakers (NNES); however, researchers have recently begun to take more interest in conversations between NNES. Matsumoto (2011) describes conversations between two or more NNES as more equal than conversations between NNES and an NES interlocutor due to a balance of linguistic power as both interlocutors are required to use a second language (L2) and both must equally navigate unfamiliar cultural territory (if both participants are living in a majority English speaking environment). Firth (1996), Firth and Wagner (1997), and Seidlhofer (2004) similarly argue that conversations between NNES participants are more collaborative in nature than conversations between NES and NNES interlocutors. NNES may use negotiation strategies and accommodation strategies more often than NES, which can create a sense of building meaning together in the conversation.

However, some researchers argue that difficulty with comprehension is "unavoidable" in any conversation with at least one NNES (Beldad & Steehouder, 2012, p. 182). Even NNES from the same language background face misunderstandings while conversing in English. Deterding, Jenkins, & Baker (2013) investigated recordings of Asian university students talking with each other in English. The students were asked to transcribe the recordings themselves and identify any misunderstandings that may have happened. From 6.5 hours of recording, the students identified 147 misunderstandings that were not clarified in the situation. Similarly, Matsumoto (2011) investigated pronunciation negotiation in interactions between all NNES

interlocutors in informal conversation settings. Her findings indicate that NNES interlocutors most frequently utilized clarification requests, repetition with rising intonation, and elaboration to clarify misunderstandings in pronunciation. Clarification requests were used semi-successfully if one or both interlocutors adjusted their pronunciation upon request; however, not all participants adjusted their pronunciation and some continued repeating the same pronunciation without adjustment, in which case further strategies were utilized to illicit clarification.

In many of these studies, the participants were either strangers or mostly unfamiliar with each other. It may be important to consider how participants use negotiation strategies when they are in a friendly or close relationship. Pietikainen (2018) examined recorded conversations between seven NNES couples in romantic relationships who use English as their common language. These couples were found to have a very small number of misunderstandings (1.9/hour). They tended to use direct clarification requests the most by specifically asking 'what' and 'who' questions. Other common strategies were code-switching into a partner's L1, repetition with extra detail, and clarification checks. Furthermore, humor was used as a strategy more often than co-constructing utterances. These findings contrast with results of a study from a university context (Mauranen, 2006) which may indicate that familiarity of interlocutors plays a role in choice of negotiation strategies

Examining the research of negotiation strategies used by NNES reveals that speakers may prefer one negotiation strategy over another in various contexts with various interlocutors. However, the literature does not fully address this assumption because conversations are often between the same participants throughout the duration of the study. Our research hopes to bridge the gap by examining how the same participants use negotiation strategies with different interlocutors.

Research Questions

1. How do negotiation strategies differ for an individual interlocutor depending on the language background of his/her conversation partner?

2. Which factors affect negotiation strategy preference?

Methods

Participants

This study required the involvement of five participants. Three primary participants were all NNES and shared Chinese as their L1, and two secondary participants were one NNES participant who had a different L1 from the primary participants (Vietnamese), and one NES participant (American). Four participants were male, and one was female. Each NNES participant was a volunteer from the Program in Intensive English (PIE), while the NES was a volunteer from an undergraduate linguistics class at Northern Arizona University (NAU).

Materials

In each interaction, two participants discussed a provided prompt which was modified from previous literature (Ghanem, 2017). The prompt asked students to decide which individual, out of seven, should remain in a hot air balloon that is falling. The only information known about each individual in the balloon is their career title. The participants were given a few minutes to review the prompt, decide who they would choose to save, and ask any questions to clarify the prompt or listed career titles. Then participants were given 10 minutes to discuss. Version A of the hot air balloon task is attached in Appendix A.

Procedure

In total, there were seven conversations. These interactions occurred in a classroom in the PIE building and were recorded with the researchers present over the course of two afternoons. Participants were divided into groups of two for each round and participated in conversations

simultaneously in opposite corners of the room. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, they were each given a code name by which they were referred to by the researchers in all documents and recordings. The Chinese L1 speakers are labeled C1-C3, the Vietnamese L1 speaker is labeled V1, and the NES is E1.

Coding Negotiation Strategies

The seven conversations were transcribed by the researchers and examined for use of negotiation strategies. The transcripts were read through once to identify possible negotiation strategies, then the recordings were carefully listened to and strategies were counted. If the researchers disagreed on the use of a strategy, it was discussed until both parties came to a consensus. The researchers identified occurrences of misunderstandings and catalogued how the misunderstanding was resolved, then the resolutions were grouped into categories with similar characteristics and given labels based on previous research (e.g., Pietikainen, 2018; Poreba, 2009). However, the data revealed that not all strategies are used after a misunderstanding. There were conversations where very few misunderstandings were counted. These conversations were carefully explored and the speakers' uses of negotiation strategies to avoid misunderstandings were revealed. Therefore, the negotiation strategies explained in this section were created through data analysis and not predetermined categories.

The data revealed preemptive and post-utterance repair strategies. Preemptive strategies are those that a speaker uses to avoid a miscommunication. A speaker employs these strategies when he/she believes a miscommunication could occur. On the other hand, post-utterance repair strategies are employed after a speaker is aware of a miscommunication. These strategies serve to clear up misunderstandings and correct miscommunications. If speakers are not aware there has been a misunderstanding, no strategy would be used. Furthermore, a speaker may also

abandon the use of strategies if they are not effectively rectifying the misunderstanding. The

researchers classified the abandonment of strategies and the overall absence of strategies in clear

cases of misunderstandings as strategies themselves. If a negotiation strategy could fulfil two

functions, it was listed twice. The categories of negotiation strategies revealed through the data

are summarized below.

Post-utterance strategies:

- Repair/recast: A speaker repeats their interlocutor's utterance with prescriptively correct

   English form.

- Code switch: Interlocutors switch to their L1 to clear up a misunderstanding.

- Direct clarification request: Interlocutor does not understand a previous utterance and

   requests elaboration with a direct request ('Can you say that again?' 'I don't understand.'

   etc.). These misunderstandings cannot be resolved with yes or no response. One way.

- Indirect clarification request: Interlocutor does not understand a previous utterance and

   requests elaboration with an indirect request ('huh?' etc.). These misunderstandings

   cannot be resolved with yes or no response. One way.

- Repetition as clarification request: Interlocutor does not understand a previous utterance

   and requests elaboration by repeating the utterance in question with rising intonation.

   These misunderstandings cannot be resolved with yes or no response. One way.

- Self comprehension check: One interlocutor is unsure of their own comprehension and

   seeks to confirm with a yes or no response by utilizing question words and markers

   ('what?' 'huh?'). (Both ways.)

- Repetition as comprehension check: Interlocutor is unsure of their own comprehension and seeks to confirm with a yes or no response by repeating the utterance in question with rising intonation.

- Word replacement: Interlocutor replaces a word which their conversation partner has expressed difficulty in understanding with a similar word.

- Co-construction: The interlocutors work together to define an unknown term.

- Metalanguage: Interlocutor defines a word or it's pronunciation in order to establish mutual understanding of an utterance in question.

- Absence of a strategy (letting it drop): Interlocutor refuses to respond to their own misunderstanding or give up on establishing meaning after multiple attempts.

Preemptive strategies:

- Self repair: Interlocutor repairs their own utterance during that same turn

- Summarization: Interlocutor paraphrases their understanding of content in the conversation. The other interlocutor has the opportunity to agree or disagree.

- Metalanguage: Interlocutors define words or pronunciation before a misunderstanding has occurred. This also includes the use of cell phones or dictionaries to define terms before discussing them.

- Elaboration: Interlocutor paraphrases a difficult question before the conversation partner prompts it.

- Modified output: An interlocutor uses one or a combination of the following: slow, simplified speech; awareness of possibly difficult words as indicated by slight rising intonation on those words; attention to pronunciation; added hedges to slow speech; simplified, ungrammatical speech

Results

Since C2 and C3 both had conversations with a Chinese L1 speaker, E1, and V1, their use of negotiation strategies can be compared. Overall, C2 used more negotiation strategies than C3 in all conversations. C2 employed a variety of clarification requests in two conversations, while C3 did not use any clarification requests in any of the conversations. Furthermore, C2 used the preemptive strategy of summarizing in one conversation, and C3 did not show any use of preemptive strategies. In fact, C2 employed an average of 3.75 strategies per conversation while C3 employed only an average of 1.6 strategies per conversation.

Even though C2 and C3's strategy use differed across the board, they were similar in that the type of strategies used differed depending on the interlocutor. Both primary participants used the most strategies when talking with each other, followed by the conversations with V1, while using the least number of strategies with E1.

In both conversations between the Chinese L1 speakers, code-switching was used by all participants. In addition, C2 and C3 both used co-construction and metalanguage, with C2 using additional clarification requests, comprehension checks, and summary. In the conversations with V1, the primary participants both used a self comprehension check. However, that was the only similarity. C2 employed a direct clarification request and the absence of strategy, while C3 used word replacement. Lastly, in the conversations with E1, both C2 and C3 did not use any post-utterance repair strategies. C2 used the preemptive strategies of self-repair and modified output, while C3 was not observed using any strategies in his conversation with E1.

Overall, language background correlated most closely with frequency of strategy use. V1 and C2 showed the highest frequencies of post-utterance strategy use across all conversations followed by C3, while C1 and E1 tied in last place. V1 employed the most post-utterance

negotiation strategies of all participants (average of 6.66 per conversation). Many of the

strategies were used in the conversation with C3, which involved frequent misunderstandings. In

this one conversation, V1 utilized 2 recasts, 4 direct clarification requests, 1 indirect clarification

request, 3 repetition clarification requests, 3 self comprehension checks, and 2 instances of

metalanguage. V1 only used self comprehension checks and preemptive strategies in his other

conversations with C1 and C2. The results described here are summarized in Appendix B.

Relevance to PIE and Second Language Learning

The data illustrate a clear link between the use of preemptive strategy and decreased

misunderstandings necessitating usage of post utterance strategies. Therefore, explicit instruction

of preemptive strategies may be a profitable use of instruction time. A strategy such as

summarizing may help to collaboratively define the parameters of the conversation topic.

Similarly, speaking slowly as a preemptive output modifying technique was seen to be highly

effective in promoting mutual understanding and may be useful in situations which are likely to

result in misunderstandings.

Additionally, educators should be aware of the impact conversational style and

personality will have on strategy usage. As individual students will differ in their willingness and

comfort using specific strategies, instructors should explicitly introduce all preemptive, post-

utterance strategies, and their pragmatic usage in various environments so that students are able

to pick and choose strategies which they are most confident using.

References

Beldad, A. & Steehouder, M. (2012). Not that button but the other: Misunderstanding and non-

understanding in helpdesk encounters involving nonnative English speakers. *Technical

Communication, 59*(3), 94-179.

Deterding, D., Jenkins, J., & Baker, W. (2013). *Misunderstandings in ELF: An analysis of ELF

interactions in South-East Asia*. Boston, MA: De Gruyter.

Firth, A. (1996). The discursive accomplishment of normality: On 'lingua franca' English and

conversation analysis. *Journal of Pragmatics, 26*, 237-259.

Firth, A. & Wagner, J. (1997). On discourse, communication, and (some) fundamental concepts

in SLA research. *Modern Language Journal, 81*, 285-300.

Ghanem, R. (2017). Nonnative speakers' use of grammatical features with different

interlocutors. Retrieved from: https://nau.edu/uploadedFiles/Academic/CAL/PIE/2014-

2015_Research/NONNATIVE_SPEAKERS%E2%80%99_USE_%20GRAMMATICAL

_FEATURES.pdf

Matsumoto, Y. (2011). Successful ELF communications and implications for ELT: Sequential

analysis of ELF pronunciation negotiation strategies. *The Modern Language Journal, 95*,

97-114.

Mauranen, A. (2006). Signaling and preventing misunderstanding in English as lingua franca

communication. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 177*, 123–150.

Pietikainen, K. S. (2018). Misunderstandings and ensuring understanding in private ELF talk.

Applied Linguistics, 39, 188-212.

Poreba, J. (2009). Negotiation strategies in short-term two-way conversation partnerships: Their

use and usefulness. *The CATESOL Journal, 21*(1), 103-124

Seidlhofer, B. (2004). Research perspectives on teaching English as a lingua franca. *Annual*

    Review of Applied Linguistics, 24, 209-239.

Appendix A

Participant Codes: ___ & ___
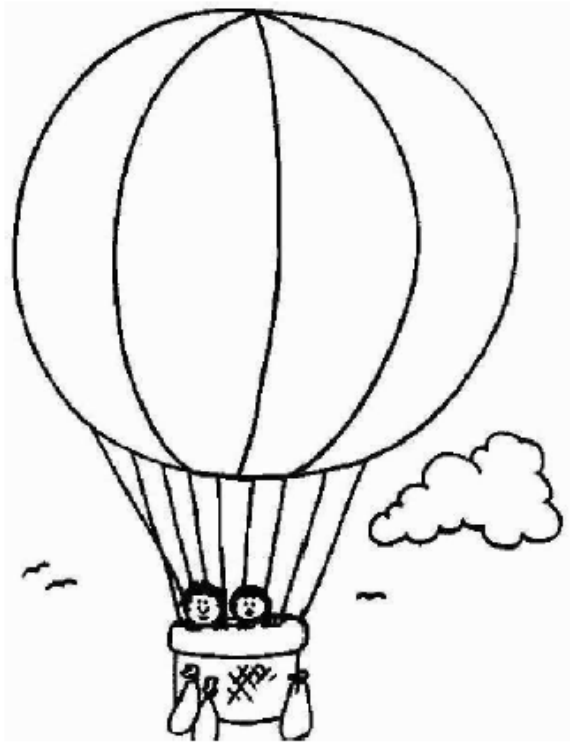
You are in a hot air balloon which is losing height rapidly and will soon crash because it is overweight; therefore you have to get rid of six of the passengers and only **one** person can remain on the balloon. Who would you choose? The passengers are:

1.   Nurse

2.   Artist

3.   Engineer

4.   Research Scientist

5.   Journalist

6.   Police Officer

7.   School Teacher

Appendix B

Strategy Usage by Participant

Participants	C2-C3		C1-C2		E1-C2		E1-C3		V1-C1		V1-C2		V1-C3	
	C2	C3	C1	C2	E1	C2	E1	C3	V1	C1	V1	C2	V1	C3
Post Utterance														
Recast													2	
Code switch	1	1	1	1										
Comprehension req (direct)	2											1	4	
Comprehension req (indirect)	1												1	
Comprehension req (repitition)	2			1									3	
Absence of strategy					1							1	1	
Comprehension check (self)	1		1						2		2	1	3	1
Comprehension check (repitition)	2													
Word replacement														1
Co-construction	1	1												
Metalanguage	1	1											2	
Pre-emptive														
Self-repair						1			1					
Summarizing	1		1						2	1				
Metalanguage									1	2				
Ellaboration											1			
Modified output					1	1	1							