

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Language learning evolves out of learning how to carry on conversation."

(Hatch, 1978)

1. ORIGIN OF THE STUDY

The origin of the present study may be traced back to the researcher's experiences with learners of English in an ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom. The researcher was associated with designing, teaching and evaluating a course in English for students enrolled for the Bachelor of Science degree at the Faculty of Home Science, the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. The researcher's perceptions, based on experiences in the actual classroom setting, were corroborated by the findings of the evaluation conducted at the end of the course. Insights gathered from the researcher's own experiences, as well as those of the other colleagues involved in teaching the course, suggested that in addition to the learners' academic needs for learning English, they had an equally strong need to develop competence in English for social purposes.¹ Observations of

learners' interactions and of learner talk in the classroom indicated that the nature of classroom interaction and classroom talk was related to the process of language learning. This belief found support in the discussion by Jackson (1968) and by Barnes (1976) of the "hidden curriculum." These observations were confirmed by learner responses to a questionnaire administered for course evaluation. Learners indicated an overwhelming preference for groupwork rather than individual work; a majority of learners stated that they preferred groupwork because they found it beneficial in language learning (see Table 1). Such an overwhelming preference was perhaps due to the fact that groupwork as a methodology allowed for considerable interaction even within the confines of the classroom. The social pressures of working in small groups provided the learners with opportunities to develop the communicative competence they would require to carry on conversations outside the classroom. The small group setting represents, in microcosm, the outside world of social interaction. It is in this context that the emphasis placed by Hatch (1978) on "learning how to carry on conversations," and by Halliday (1975) on "learning how to mean" acquires significance.

The findings of the course evaluation prompted a closer examination of learner talk. It was found that the use of groupwork required learners to adopt a variety of

TABLE 1

LEARNER RESPONSES TO GROUP WORK

	Semester		
	I (N=155)	II (N=126)	III (N=148)
	% of Learners	% of Learners	% of Learners
Question 1:			
Do you prefer group work to individual work?			
a) Yes	85.3	85.0	93.0
b) No	14.7	15.0	7.0
Total :	100%	100%	100%
Question 2 :			
Do you feel that group work is beneficial?			
a) Yes	83.6	83.5	93.1
b) No	16.4	16.5	6.9
Total :	100%	100%	100%

Source : Based on Learner responses to a questionnaire administered for evaluation of a course in English for students enrolled for the Bachelor of Science degree at the Faculty of Home Science, the M.S. University of Baroda.

strategies to cope with the communicative pressure generated by the group. The learners' implementation of these strategies was an essential feature of the process of communication within the group; in fact, their use of various communication strategies seemed to be integral to the process of interaction.

2. NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is the relationship between the learners' use of communication strategies and their patterns of interaction within the group, that forms the focus of the present study. The notion of "communication strategy" adopted here is a part of the general concept of strategic behaviour. It is in this sense that communication strategies and social interaction are related : both represent a process of negotiation, a maximisation of available resources towards a goal - either linguistic/communicative, or purely social.

The study begins with the assumption that second language acquisition, and the strategies developed by the learner to cope with the L2 (second language), are largely determined by the role of that L2 within the sociocultural context of a bilingual/multilingual setting. The discussion of the learner's use of communication strategies therefore begins with a consideration of the ESL context in India. The intermeshing of cultures, roles, languages and functions

in the multilingual setting in India, has been accompanied by the development of a non-native model of English peculiar to the language ecology in India (Weinreich, 1953; Haugen, 1953; Gumperz, 1982; Smith, 1983; Kachru, 1983; Kachru, 1985a; Kachru, 1985b; Kachru, 1985c; Quirk, 1985; Greenbaum, 1985a). It has also led to greater acceptance of non-native models (Gardner and Lambert, 1969; Mehrotra, 1982; Smith, 1983; Shaw, 1983; Crystal, 1985; Kennedy, 1985; Phadnis, 1986). Acceptance of a non-native model accommodates variation/deviation as a deliberate sociocultural device. The model of English is viewed as emerging from a process of interaction between individuals in society, rather than as an externally imposed norm.

Acceptance of a non-native model of English is related to a view of communicative competence that includes the linguistic, sociolinguistic, interactionist and ethnographic perspectives (Chomsky, 1965; Hymes, 1970; Halliday, 1973; Cicourel, 1973; Goffman, 1974; Widdowson, 1978; Canale and Swain, 1980; Milne, 1981; Saville-Troike, 1982; Brumfit, 1984). An emphasis on interaction as being central to communication, leads to the view that development of a non-native model reflects an ongoing process of negotiation at the interpersonal level in a given sociocultural ethos. Within the ESL context in India, English serves a range of social functions. The speaker selectively exercises options

regarding not only lexis and register, but also the choice of code, formality/informality, and even the degree of accuracy. In the ESL setting therefore, the notion of communicative competence involves the operation of differential or variable competence (Hymes, 1970; Ellis, 1984; 1985), where the individual demonstrates different types and degrees of competence on different occasions, in response to the social/interactional demands of the interlocutor.

This feature of selecting from a range of available options represents the essence of the view of communicative competence adopted in the present study. Central to the individual's communicative competence is the notion of strategic competence (cf. the definition of communicative competence offered by Canale and Swain, 1980). In all communication, the learner uses strategies for meeting the communicative demands of a situation. Such communication strategies are more obvious and readily identifiable when they involve the use of non-native forms; traditionally, communication strategies referred to instances of communicative behaviour that deviated from the target language norm (Selinker, 1972; Richards, 1973; Tarone, Cohen and Dumas, 1976; Varadi, 1980; Bialystok, 1983). The view adopted in the present study extends the notion of communication strategy to include all strategic behaviour; thus communica-

tion strategies refer to the manipulation of resources for communicative effectiveness during the process of interaction. The interactants may in fact, deliberately choose to display inaccuracy/incompetence in target language terms, for socio-cultural reasons. The three features of communication strategy central to this study are : effectiveness, manipulation, and interaction. These form the basis for the typology developed to identify and analyse communication strategies. The case-study approach is used to analyse learner talk in detail; the individual's use of communication strategies is examined in relation to learner profiles of communicative competence, interactional skills and social coping strategies. It is hoped that information on the learner's use of the L2, and its relationship to the learner's social interaction will be used for further research on second language learning; this in turn would influence the designing and teaching of language courses in the ESL context. The implications of the study are, therefore, both theoretical and pedagogic in nature.

3. OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

This study is divided into seven chapters. This chapter traced the origin of the study; it also described the nature and significance of the study.

Chapter II discusses the nativisation/accluturation of English in the Indian sociocultural context, and

emphasises acceptance of non-native models of English with reference to the process of second language learning in an ESL context.

Chapter III places the model of English in an ESL context within the framework of the notion of communicative competence. It emphasises the interactionist perspective, and discusses communicative competence, with reference to the ethnography of communication, and in relation to the teaching-learning context. The notion of strategic competence is considered to be central to the use of English in an ESL context.

Chapter IV provides a discussion of strategic competence in relation to the ESL context and as a central feature of the notion of communicative competence. It highlights three features of communication strategy - effectiveness, manipulation and interaction - which form the basis for the typology developed to analyse communication strategies.

Chapter V describes the research methodology used in the study, which is based on a case-study approach. The objective of the study is to trace the range, frequency and patterns of use of different types of communication strategies by different learners, in relation to their communicative competence, their social coping strategies and their interpersonal skills.

Chapter VI provides an analysis of data collected for the study. It also provides an interpretation of the findings of the study.

Chapter VII discusses the implications of the findings of the study.

FOOTNOTE

1. For a discussion of instrumental and integrative motivation in relation to learner needs, see Gardner and Lambert, 1969; Lukmani, 1972 and Shaw, 1983.