

## **Unpacking communication strategies in casual conversation: An exploration of Indonesian EFL learners**

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### **Abstract**

Engaging in casual conversation is essential for EFL learners, as it enhances fluency, boosts confidence, and provides authentic language practice. However, Indonesian learners often face challenges in managing spontaneous interactions effectively, leading them to employ various strategies to manage communication breakdowns. This study aims to explore the communication strategies used by Indonesian EFL learners and examine the factors influencing their strategic choices. This study involved third-semester English education students and adopted a descriptive qualitative method with conversational analysis. Data were collected through audio-video recordings and interviews and analyzed based on Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) framework of communication strategies. The findings reveal that learners utilized all five main types and fourteen sub-types of communication strategies. Stalling or time-gaining strategies are the most frequently used, followed by achievement strategies or compensatory strategies, interactional strategies, self-monitoring strategies, and avoidance or reduction strategies. The frequent sub-types employed include fillers, hesitation devices, and gambits; self and other repetition; code-switching; and meaning negotiation strategies. Conversely, strategies such as message replacement, topic avoidance, all-purpose words, word coinage, and foreignizing were not employed. In addition, learners' strategic choices were influenced by factors such as limited vocabulary and language proficiency, cognitive processing needs, the desire to convey meaning, efforts to ensure mutual understanding, self-awareness of errors, and topic complexity. Finally, this study offers some pedagogical implications for the betterment of EFL teaching and learning.

Keywords: communication strategies, EFL learners, casual conversation

### **1. Introduction**

Engaging in casual conversations is an important part of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as it offers learners authentic opportunities to foster fluency, boost confidence, and practice language in real-life contexts. These informal, spontaneous interactions—typically occurring among friends, family, or acquaintances—serve as a dynamic platform for improving speaking skills, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar while simultaneously polishing communication strategies. Beyond linguistic development, casual conversations foster essential

interpersonal skills such as turn-taking, active listening, and managing disagreements, which are critical for effective communication (Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-murcia, 2007; Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). More than exchanging words, casual conversations function as meaningful acts of social negotiation, shaping and reflecting social identity (Williyan, 2020). They also promote social bonding, relationship building, and information sharing, reinforcing their personal and cultural connection role. By bridging the gap between formal language instruction and everyday communication, participation in casual conversations enables learners to cultivate genuine communicative competence, preparing them for diverse social interactions in real-world settings.

Despite the numerous advantages of engaging in everyday conversations, EFL learners often encounter substantial difficulties in managing these interactions effectively. For Indonesian learners, who are learning English in a context where it is not commonly spoken in daily life, achieving fluency and smooth communication without errors can be especially challenging. Studies have consistently highlighted that Indonesian EFL learners struggle with negotiating meaning and maintaining spontaneity during casual conversations (Hartono & Ihsan, 2017; Ostovar-Namaghi et al., 2022; Yonata & Saptani, 2019). These challenges are rooted in various factors, such as limited exposure to authentic English usage, constraints in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, and anxiety about making mistakes, all of which impede their ability to communicate fluently. In addition, research has found that even when learners possess sufficient linguistic resources, they find it difficult to verbalize their thoughts due to their lack of practice and the absence of effective communication (Fitriani, 2019). Thus, this gap underscores the need for targeted interventions that are tailored to the learners' current level of communicative competence, in order to enhance their conversational skills and boost their confidence.

To address the challenges, learners employ various communication strategies to manage communication breakdowns that reflect their level of communicative competence. Research indicates that the common strategies used by learners in bridging the gaps in their conversations include the use of fillers, repetition, appeals for help and self-repair (Yonata & Saptani, 2019). Among these, fillers are particularly prominent, as they provide the speaker with time to pause and gather their thoughts, helping to maintain the flow of conversation (Fitriani, 2019; Fitriati et al., 2021; Yonata & Saptani, 2019). In addition to fillers, repetition, appeals for help, and self-repair are key strategies, demonstrating the learners' proactive efforts to manage communication breakdowns. These strategies reflect an underlying competence that enables learners to engage in meaningful conversations despite limitations in their language skills.

Strategic competence, defined as the knowledge and application of communication strategies, plays a vital role in facilitating language use and helping learners overcome communication breakdowns. Communication strategies, described by Dornyei and Scott (1997) as conscious or unconscious plans to address communication obstacles, encompass various techniques to resolve linguistic challenges. These strategies are crucial for navigating the complexities of second-language (L2) communication, such as compensating for linguistic limitations, negotiating meaning, and sustaining interaction (Canale & Swain, 1980; Tarone, 1980). For Indonesian EFL learners, mastering communication strategies enhances their conversational competence, enabling them to build meaningful relationships and seize academic and professional opportunities. This comprehensive understanding of oral communication highlights its inherent complexities, emphasizing the need for learners to develop skills in

linguistic accuracy, sociocultural awareness, and strategic interaction to achieve effective communication outcomes.

In exploring communication strategies, several linguists have proposed various taxonomies. Tarone (1980) categorizes CSs into four types: avoidance, paraphrase, conscious transfer, and appeal for assistance. Dornyei, Z. and Scott, (1995a, 1995b) expand this classification into three broad categories: direct, interactional, and indirect strategies. Meanwhile, Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) present a more detailed framework, identifying five types of strategies: avoidance or reduction strategies, achievement or compensatory strategies, interactional strategies, stalling or time-gaining strategies, and self-monitoring strategies. These taxonomies provide valuable frameworks for analyzing how learners navigate conversational challenges and overcome communication barriers. The effective use of communication strategies not only enhances learners' fluency but also boosts their confidence, particularly in casual conversations where spontaneity and adaptability are key.

Linguists have developed various taxonomies to classify communication strategies, providing a framework for understanding how learners navigate conversational challenges. Tarone (1980) identifies four types of communication strategies: avoidance, paraphrase, conscious transfer, and appeal for assistance. Dornyei, Z. and Scott, (1995a, 1995b) expand on this by categorizing strategies into direct, interactional, and indirect types. Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) further refine these classifications, outlining five main types: avoidance or reduction strategies, achievement or compensatory strategies, interactional strategies, stalling or time-gaining strategies, and self-monitoring strategies. Each category encompasses specific techniques that learners use to manage communication difficulties. For example, avoidance or reduction strategies involve modifying messages or avoiding topics to match available linguistic resources. Achievement or compensatory strategies focus on using existing language knowledge to achieve communication goals, often compensating for language deficiencies. Stalling or time-gaining strategies, such as fillers and repetitions, help maintain conversational flow. Self-monitoring strategies, including self-repair and self-rephrasing, address errors or ambiguities, though they may result in over-elaboration. Finally, interactional strategies highlight collaboration, including seeking clarification or negotiating meaning. Mastering these strategies not only enhances learners' confidence and fluency but also equips them to handle casual conversations more effectively.

Over the past decade, the study of communication strategies employed by Indonesian EFL learners has emerged as a compelling topic, highlighting their critical role in effective language use. Research has revealed significant insights into how learners navigate conversations to overcome linguistic challenges and enhance communicative competence (Ardianto, 2016; Romadlon, 2016; Kalisa, 2019; Yonata & Saptani, 2019). Ardianto (2016) identified thirteen commonly used strategies, including circumlocution, word coinage, and code-switching, which enable learners to maintain conversations despite grammatical inaccuracies and limited vocabulary. Romadlon (2016) emphasized circumlocution as the most frequently employed strategy in conversations with a native speaker, noting that learners' strategy choices were influenced by vocabulary gaps and the social context. Kalisa (2019) found that EFL university students often rely on time-gaining strategies such as fillers, along with repetition, literal translation, and non-verbal cues, to manage communication difficulties in informal settings. Similarly, Yonata and Saptani (2019) highlighted fillers as the most frequently used strategy

among Indonesian EFL learners, followed by repetition, appeals for help, and self-repair. While these strategies reflect learners' adaptability and resourcefulness, they also underscore the challenges of articulating ideas fluently, which often stem from insufficient practice and limited linguistic exposure.

Research has also delved into how EFL learners negotiate meaning during conversations, shedding light on the strategies they use to facilitate mutual understanding. (Hartono & Ihsan, 2017), involving six undergraduate students, explored their use of negotiation of meaning strategies in conversational settings. The findings indicated that learners frequently employed strategies such as confirmation checks, repetitions, and self-corrections to aid their interlocutors in comprehending and clarifying meaning. Additionally, the study highlighted the effectiveness of information gap activities in fostering opportunities for negotiation. These activities, which required participants to exchange information and compare the similarities and differences in their respective pictures, encouraged active communication and enhanced their ability to negotiate meaning effectively.

Moreover, most previous studies extended their focus on uncovering communication strategies used by EFL learners in their speaking performances in English classroom settings, shedding light on how learners manage language difficulties during speaking (Nizar et al., 2018; Yuliandri, 2019; Wati & Widyantoro, 2019; Nurliana, 2020; Khurniawan et al., 2022; Sukirlan et al., 2023). These studies present varied findings. For instance, Nizar et al., (2018) observed that Indonesian EFL learners often relied on fillers, self-repetition, retrieval, mime, and self-repair to effectively convey their ideas. Likewise, Wati and Widyantoro (2019) highlighted the frequent use of self-repair, fillers, and hesitation devices to address speaking difficulties. Yuliandri (2019) discovered that learners commonly employed circumlocution and message abandonment strategies, with cultural differences significantly influencing their communication experiences. Furthermore, Nurliana (2020) emphasized the reliance on achievement or compensatory strategies, particularly code-switching, to enhance speaking performance. Khurniawan et al. (2022) identified miming as the most prevalent strategy, noting that learners struggled with speaking despite having strong grammar knowledge. Lastly, Sukirlan et al. (2023) reported that paraphrasing was a frequently used strategy to overcome speaking obstacles. Collectively, these studies illustrate the diverse range of strategies that EFL learners adopt to manage communication breakdowns, improve fluency, and enhance their interactional competence.

While numerous studies have explored the communication strategies employed by EFL learners in structured or classroom-based contexts (Nizar et al., 2018; Yuliandri, 2019; Wati & Widyantoro, 2019; Nurliana, 2020; Khurniawan et al., 2022; Sukirlan et al., 2023), limited research has specifically examined how these strategies are utilized during casual, spontaneous conversations outside formal learning settings. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the types of communication strategies and the factors influencing the frequent use of strategies by Indonesian EFL learners in authentic, informal interactions. Unlike most previous research, which often focuses on academic or task-based communication, this study emphasizes natural conversations where learners face real-time pressures to negotiate meaning, sustain interaction, and manage communication breakdowns. By comparing these findings to established communication strategy taxonomies, such as Celce-Murcia et al. (1995), this study provides a deeper understanding of how learners adapt their strategies in less controlled, more dynamic social environments. This novel approach sheds light on the intersection of linguistic competence

and social interaction, offering practical insights into enhancing communicative competence in everyday language use.

Triggered by the previous research, the researchers are particularly interested in exploring communication strategies used by EFL learners in casual conversations, as these strategies are essential for overcoming language barriers and achieving fluency. Many learners struggle with vocabulary limitations, pronunciation challenges, and grammatical difficulties, yet they employ various strategies to sustain conversations. Understanding these strategies provides valuable insights into how learners navigate communication breakdowns and develop their speaking skills. Additionally, the researchers seek to examine the factors influencing the choice of strategies. By examining how learners adapt their language use in informal settings, the researcher aims to contribute to the development of more effective approaches to language learning and teaching.

## **2. Method**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative framework to explore the communication strategies used by Indonesian EFL learners and the factors influencing their use, utilizing conversational analysis. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for understanding participants' perspectives and experiences in casual conversational contexts. The descriptive design focused on collecting, analyzing, and categorizing textual data using interpretative analysis (Creswell, 2012). Conversation analysis further enhanced the study by examining how language creates meaning in social interactions, utilizing empirical recordings of natural conversations (Flowerdew, 2013).

This study was conducted at a university in Central Java, Indonesia, involving eight English education majors aged 19 to 21 years, grouped into four pairs. These third-semester students, who had completed previous speaking courses, were purposively chosen for their presumed proficiency in English. The study intended to evaluate their competence and fluency in employing communication strategies during spontaneous conversations. Data collection relied on audio-video recordings of 10–15-minute casual conversations outside class and interviews. Participants self-selected their partners and topics to create an authentic and natural conversation. This scenario allows them to feel free without being limited by certain themes to set a casual conversation.

The data analysis was guided by the communication strategies taxonomy proposed by Celce-Murcia et al. (1995), chosen for its comprehensive framework of communicative and strategic competence. Four audio-video recordings were meticulously transcribed and analyzed to identify the communication strategies used. To validate findings, open-ended interviews were conducted after analyzing the recordings, addressing the factors influencing communication strategies use. An interactive model of data analysis by Denzin and Lincoln (1998) was adopted, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Key data were coded, classified into tables for clarity, and interpreted to derive meaningful insights into learners' use of communication strategies.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1 Results**

The findings of the study are presented in two sections based on the formulated research objectives. The first section shows the findings on the types of communication strategies used by Indonesian EFL learners in casual conversations. Subsequently, the second section presents the factors influencing the choice of communication strategies realized by the learners.

### 3.1.1 Communication strategies used by Indonesian EFL learners in casual conversation

The findings of this study reveal that all five main types and fourteen sub-types of communication strategies outlined in the taxonomy proposed by Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) were employed by Indonesian EFL learners during casual conversations. The most frequent strategies used were stalling or time-gaining strategies. Among the sub-types, fillers, hesitation devices, and gambits occurred as the most dominant strategies used. To clarify the findings, a comprehensive breakdown of these types, along with their sub-types, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The occurrence of communication strategies used by Indonesian EFL learners in casual conversations

No	Types	Total	Rank
<b>1</b>	<b>Avoidance or Reduction Strategies</b>		<b>5</b>
	a. Message replacement	0	
	b. Topic avoidance	0	
	c. Message abandonment	4	
		<b>4</b>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Achievement or Compensatory Strategies</b>		<b>2</b>
	a. Circumlocution	4	
	b. Approximation	5	
	c. All-purpose words	0	
	d. Non-linguistic means	11	
	e. Restructuring	4	
	f. Word-coinage	0	
	g. Literal translation	5	
	h. Foreignizing	0	
	i. Code-switching	19	
	j. Retrieval	2	
		<b>50</b>	
<b>3</b>	<b>Stalling or Time-Gaining Strategies</b>		<b>1</b>
	a. Fillers, hesitation devices and gambits	84	
	b. self and other repetition	29	
		<b>113</b>	
<b>4</b>	<b>Self-Monitoring Strategies</b>		<b>4</b>

	a. Self-initiated repair	5
	b. Self-rephrasing	3
		<b>8</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Interactional Strategies</b>	<b>3</b>
	a. Appeals for help	9
	b. Meaning negotiation strategies	12
		<b>21</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>196</b>

Table 1 highlights the use of five main types and fourteen sub-types of communication strategies employed by the learners during casual conversations. Of these, stalling or time-gaining strategies emerged as the most frequently used, followed by achievement or compensatory strategies, interactional strategies, self-monitoring strategies, and avoidance or reduction strategies. The four most dominant sub-types used were 1) fillers, hesitation devices, and gambits, 2) self and other repetition, 3) code-switching, and 4) meaning negotiation strategies. On the other hand, five sub-types including message replacement, topic avoidance, all-purpose words, word coinage, and foreignizing were not employed at all. The dominant use of fillers, hesitation devices, and gambits suggests that participants often relied on these expressions to manage communication breakdowns and maintain the flow of conversation. The frequent use of these strategies reflects the participants' efforts to address linguistic challenges, demonstrating their ability to sustain interaction despite limitations in language proficiency.

a. Stalling or Time-Gaining Strategies

Stalling or time-gaining strategies occurred 113 times throughout this research, highlighting their prominent role in helping speakers manage conversations. These strategies are employed to provide learners with extra time to think, process language, or plan their next utterance. The sub-types of stalling or time-gaining strategies employed by the learners were: (1) fillers, hesitation devices, and gambits, and (2) self and other repetition. Among these, fillers, hesitation devices, and gambits were utilized significantly more often than self and other repetitions. Specifically, learners employed fillers, hesitation devices, and gambits 84 times. This strategy was employed to temporarily hold the floor or maintain the flow of conversation while formulating thoughts. Meanwhile, self and other repetitions were observed 29 times. This sub-type involves learners repeating a word or a sequence of words immediately after it was spoken, either to emphasize the point or to buy time for further speech planning. Excerpts 1 and 2 from the study illustrate these stalling or time-gaining strategies as they appeared in learners' casual conversations (S indicates student/learner/participant of this study).

Excerpt 1

S2 : “*Emm... where is your sister?*”

S1 : “*She is ... she is playing with her friend and yeah like that*”. [Text 1]

In this excerpt, student S2 used the filler “*Emm...*” at the beginning of the question to gain time to think and organize her thoughts before completing the sentence. This is a classic

example of a stalling or time-gaining strategy where fillers help maintain the conversational flow without creating awkward silences.

Similarly, S1 demonstrated self-repetition “*She is ... she is playing*”, which involves repeating a part of the sentence “*she is*” to buy time for constructing the rest of the response. This repetition allows the speaker to process language while keeping the listener engaged. Additionally, the use of “*and yeah like that*” serves as an informal gambit to conclude the response when the speaker may not have more to add.

Excerpt 2

S5 : “*Today ee... the weather is cold.*”

S6 : “*Yes, but I'm not...I'm not wearing a sweater or jacket.*” [Text 2]

In this excerpt, S5 employed a hesitation device “*ee...*” in the middle of the sentence, providing additional time to think about and phrase the statement appropriately. This hesitation signals a brief pause for cognitive processing without disrupting the flow of conversation. Likewise, S6 demonstrated self-repetition “*I'm not...I'm not*”, repeating the phrase for emphasis while also gaining time to structure the rest of the sentence. This repetition also adds a natural rhythm to the speech, making the statement clearer and more engaging for the listener.

b. Achievement or compensatory strategies

Achievement or compensatory strategies ranked as the second most frequently used communication strategies by learners during casual conversations, with a total of 50 instances recorded. These strategies are employed when learners lack the exact vocabulary or structure needed to express their ideas, and they seek alternative ways to convey meaning. Out of the 10 sub-types of achievement or compensatory strategies, students utilized 7, which included circumlocution, approximation, non-linguistic means, restructuring, literal translation, code-switching, and retrieval.

Among these sub-types, code-switching was the most commonly employed, occurring 19 times. This suggests that learners frequently resorted to switching between languages to overcome linguistic limitations. Interestingly, all-purpose words, word coinage, and foreignizing were not used at all, indicating that students might not have relied on these particular strategies during their interactions. The illustrations of achievement or compensatory strategies are presented in the subsequent excerpts.

Excerpt 3

S1: “*Emm... Rabbits can die, if they, they are, apa ya, what is that, emm... I don't know, I'm confused, I'm confused.*” [Text 1]

Excerpt 4

S3 : “*Wah, it's raining.*”

S4 : “*Our motorbikes are in parkirán.*”

S3 : “*Oh, it's ok it's ok.*” [Text 2]

The use of code-switching in these excerpts demonstrates how EFL learners alternate between their native language and English to overcome linguistic challenges and sustain



communication. In Excerpt 3, S1 switched to the Indonesian phrase “*apa ya*” (meaning “*what is that*”) when struggling to find the appropriate word in English, using their first language (L1) as a cognitive tool to maintain fluency. Similarly, in Excerpt 4, S4 integrated the Indonesian word “*parkiran*” (meaning “*parking area*”) into their English sentence to convey meaning effectively and ensure mutual understanding.

The second sub-type employed was non-linguistic means, occurring 11 times. This sub-type strategy involves using physical actions, gestures, facial expressions, or other visual aids to convey meaning when words or language structures are insufficient or unavailable. The evidence is shown in excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5

S7 : “*I think that it is not a criminal word.*”

S8 : “*No! (shaking head), nothing is wrong with falling in love.*”

S7 : “*Yes. (nodding)*” [Text 4]

In this excerpt, the non-linguistic means strategy is evident through the gestures of shaking and nodding the head. S8 shook her head to emphasize her disagreement with S7's statement, reinforcing her verbal response. Similarly, S7 nodded in agreement to confirm understanding and alignment with S8's opinion. These gestures serve as non-verbal cues that complement the spoken dialogue, helping to clarify meaning and enhance the emotional tone of the conversation, particularly in contexts where verbal language alone might be insufficient.

The next sub-type employed is literal translation. This strategy involves directly translating words or phrases from a learner's native language (L1) into the target language (L2/L3), often resulting in non-standard or awkward expressions.

Excerpt 6

S2 : “*The rabbit's skin is usually white.*”

S1 : “*Hmm, yeah.*” [Text 1]

In this excerpt, the literal translation is demonstrated when S2 employed the word “*skin*” instead of the more accurate term “*fur*” to describe the covering of a rabbit. This likely occurs because the learner directly translated from their native language, where “*skin*” may be used more broadly to describe the outer covering of animals. While the intended meaning is clear, the use of “*skin*” instead of “*fur*” reflects how literal translation can lead to minor inaccuracies, but still allows for successful communication.

The approximation strategy was also observed in this study. This sub-type strategy was employed when learners wanted to find the closest meaning of a word to refer to one thing.

Excerpt 7

S6 : “*I'm ready to go to the beach.*”

S5 : “*Emm, by the way, we have to emm... immortalize our moments later.*” [Text 3]

In this excerpt, the approximation strategy was used by S5 when she said “*immortalize our moments*” instead of using a more typical expression like “*capture memories*” or “*take pictures.*” S5 likely struggled to find the exact word but used a close, alternative term that conveys

the intended meaning. This strategy reflects the learner's effort to communicate effectively despite not knowing the precise vocabulary, demonstrating a flexible approach to overcoming language gaps.

This study also identified that the sub-type circumlocution was also realized by learners. This strategy refers to giving definitions or examples of the terms in L2 when learners do not know the L2 terms.

Excerpt 8

S8 : "Do you like him (Zayyan)?"

S7 : "I think, yeah, of course. I think it's wonderful because **he is loyal to his religion in size mostly non-Muslim.**" [Text 4]

In this excerpt, circumlocution is evident in S7's response as they describe Zayyan's loyalty to his religion indirectly rather than using concise terms. Instead of saying "He is a devout Muslim," S7 uses a longer explanation: "he is loyal to his religion in size mostly non-Muslim." This strategy involves using descriptive phrases or explanations to convey meaning when the exact word or expression is unknown, allowing the speaker to express their thoughts and maintain the conversation despite linguistic limitations.

The next sub-type of achievement or compensatory strategies employed by learners in this study is restructuring. The learners restructured most of the sentences they felt were in the wrong grammar, diction or noun phrase. The evidence is shown in the subsequent excerpt.

Excerpt 9

S4 : "I'm go... uh... **I will go** to Malioboro with my parents"

S3 : "Me, too. I went to Malioboro with my parents last holiday." [Text 2]

In this excerpt, restructuring was demonstrated by S4 when she began to say "I'm go..." but quickly adjusted to the correct form, "uh... I will go to Malioboro with my parents." This strategy involves reformulating or reorganizing a sentence mid-speech to produce a more accurate or complete expression.

The last sub-type of achievement or compensatory strategies employed by learners is retrieval. This strategy refers to the efforts to recall a word or expression that the speaker knows but cannot immediately access. This may include pausing, using fillers, or paraphrasing while searching for the correct term. The example is illustrated in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 10

S2 : "Oh my god, kangkung is so delicious, my emm... **fav... favorite** food." [Text 2]

In excerpt 10, the retrieval strategy was demonstrated when S2 initially struggled to recall the word "favorite" and instead used the filler "emm..." while searching for the correct term. After a slight pause, she successfully retrieved the word and completed the sentence by saying "favorite food." This strategy shows how learners may experience temporary difficulty in accessing a word they know but use pauses or fillers to buy time while they search their mental lexicon for the appropriate term.

c. Interactional Strategies

The third most frequent type of communication strategies employed by the learners is interactional strategies. These strategies occurred 21 times. Two sub-types of these strategies utilized by the learners are appeals for help and meaning negotiation strategies, dominated by meaning negotiation strategies (occurring 21 times). The evidence of these strategies is presented in the subsequent excerpts.

Excerpt 11

S7: “*What kind of movies that you watch?*”

S8: “*I don't have some specific movies that I want to watch, I watch movies just because randomly come into my social media.*”

S7: “***You mean FYP?***”

S8: “*Yes.*” (nodding) [Text 4]

In this excerpt, meaning negotiation strategies were used as S7 and S8 worked together to clarify the meaning of “*randomly come into my social media.*” S7 proposed “*FYP*”, which refers to the “*For You Page*” on social media, prompting S8 to confirm the term with a nod and an agreement. This back-and-forth exchange illustrates how meaning negotiation allows speakers to resolve any ambiguity in communication by seeking clarification and ensuring mutual understanding, especially when unfamiliar terms or concepts are introduced.

Another sub-type of interactional strategies used by learners is appeals for help. These strategies are employed when learners attempt to elicit help from other students by expressing the lack of the needed L2 vocabulary nonverbally. The example is displayed in excerpt 12.

Excerpt 12

S1 : “*Wait, can rabbit emm...*”

S2 : “*Eat?*”

S1 : “***No, apasi? What is that? Wash the body, you can wash, can rabbit emm... what is that?***”

S2 : “*Going to the bathroom?*”

S1 : “*Yeah!*” (clapping) [Text 1]

In this excerpt, the appeal for help strategy was demonstrated when S1 struggled to find the right word to express the idea of a rabbit washing its body. S1 used the phrase “*No, apasi?*” (meaning “*what is that?*”), repeated it with “*what is that*” and directly asked S2 for assistance by seeking the correct term. S2 then offered the suggestion “*Going to the bathroom?*” which S1 confirmed with a clap, signalling that the correct word had been found. This strategy highlights how learners rely on others to help them find the right words or clarify meaning during conversations.

d. Self-monitoring strategies

This study figured out that self-monitoring strategies were employed 8 times. These strategies refer to correcting or refining one’s own language use during or after speaking. The sub-types of these strategies used were self-initiated repair (revising previous utterances) and self-

rephrasing (reformulating sentences to improve clarity). The evidence is illustrated in the subsequent excerpts.

Excerpt 13

S1: "Oh, wait, **tomorrow**, eh (shocked) no, no. **I mean yesterday** I couldn't eat anything."  
[Text 1]

In this example, self-initiated repair was reflected when S1 realized a mistake in her speech and immediately corrected herself. S1 started by saying "tomorrow" but then quickly corrected it to "yesterday" following the phrase "I mean" after recognizing the error. This strategy shows how speakers monitor their own language use and make adjustments to fix mistakes without needing external help, allowing for clearer communication and self-correction in real-time.

Excerpt 14

S4 : "Amex is spicy, I like spicy."

S3 : "No, it's not spicy. I mean, the sauce is tomato sauce, so it's not spicy for me." [Text 2]

As illustrated in excerpt 14, self-rephrasing strategy was employed by learner S4 when she initially described Amex as spicy but quickly modified her statement to clarify the meaning. After S3 corrected them, S4 rephrased by explaining her preference for spicy food and implying that the level of spiciness might differ for them. This strategy allows the speaker to restate or adjust their original message for better clarity or accuracy, ensuring the listener understands their point more effectively.

e. Avoidance or reduction strategies

The last strategy employed by learners during the casual conversations was avoidance or reduction strategies. These strategies were rarely used by the learners. It occurred 4 times from only one sub-type, namely message abandonment. On the other hand, message replacement and topic avoidance were not used. The example is shown in excerpt 15.

Excerpt 15

S8: "So, it can be one of your favorite movies or just ... yeah."

S7: "No, I'm a little bored with the movie because it is full of romance." [Text 4]

In this excerpt, message abandonment was illustrated when S8 started to say "So, it can be one of your favorite movies or just ... yeah" but failed to complete the thought, leaving the sentence unfinished. This strategy occurs when a speaker abandons their original message, possibly due to difficulty in finding the right words or feeling unsure about how to continue. Instead of pursuing the incomplete thought, the conversation moved forward with S7's response, which shifted the focus to their feelings about the movie.

Furthermore, the interview results revealed that to address communication challenges in casual conversations, the learners commonly used strategies such as fillers, hesitation devices, gambits, self and other repetition, code-switching, and meaning negotiation strategies. These strategies were preferred because they were easy to implement and effectively helped the students manage communication difficulties. Among these, fillers, hesitation devices, and gambits were

employed particularly when students struggled to recall specific words in English. On the other hand, other strategies were not utilized frequently because they were unfamiliar or less comfortable for the learners.

### **3.1.2 Factors influencing the frequent use of communication strategies**

Based on the analysis of audio-video recordings and interview results, several factors were identified as influencing the frequent use of communication strategies during casual conversations. As previously mentioned, learners of this study frequently employed stalling or time-gaining strategies, achievement or compensatory strategies, interactional strategies, self-monitoring strategies, and avoidance or reduction strategies. The findings reveal that the frequent use of learners' strategic choices was influenced by factors such as limited vocabulary and language proficiency, cognitive processing needs, the desire to convey meaning, efforts to ensure mutual understanding, self-awareness of errors, and topic complexity. Below are the findings along with excerpts from the interview that illustrate these influences.

#### **a. Limited vocabulary and language proficiency**

Learners frequently employed stalling or time-gaining strategies such as fillers, hesitation devices, and gambits to gain time to think, organize their thoughts, and search for appropriate words. As involved in spontaneous speech production, the learners might have no time for much planning. The learners frequently used expressions like “*emm*,” “*ee*,” or “*you know*” during pauses.

*“I sometimes use “emm” or “ee” to keep talking when I forget the word I want to say in English and to think about what I want to say next.”* [Student 2]

#### **b. Cognitive processing needs**

During real-time interactions, learners relied on familiar and easy-to-use strategies like self and other repetition to reduce cognitive effort and maintain fluency in communication. The frequent use of self-repetition strategies enables learners to cope with the mental demands of processing and producing language simultaneously.

*“When I don't know the next word, I just repeat the last word while thinking.”* [Student 1]

#### **c. Desire to convey meaning**

Learners often utilized achievement or compensatory strategies to sustain conversational flow, including substituting or describing unfamiliar words to convey their intended meaning. The dominance of code-switching as a strategy stemmed from the learners' familiarity with using both Indonesian and English in their daily communication. They often switched languages when they lacked the English equivalent of certain words.

*“It is easier for me to switch to Bahasa Indonesia when I forget the English word because my friends still understand.”* [Student 3]

#### **d. Effort to ensure mutual understanding**

Interactional strategies, such as appealing for help and meaning negotiation strategies, were driven by learners' efforts to confirm mutual understanding or clarify meanings during conversations. Meaning negotiation strategies, such as asking for clarification and confirmation,

were the common practice observed in this study. The learners often repeated their own or their partner's words for confirmation or added questions like “*You mean...?*”

*“When I’m not sure they understand me, I sometimes ask, ‘Do you know...?’. Then, when I’m not sure about what they mean, I ask my partner ‘You mean...?’ or I usually repeat his or her words.”* [Student 7]

e. Self-awareness of errors

The use of self-monitoring strategies was driven by the students' awareness of grammatical or lexical errors in their speech. They actively corrected themselves to improve their communication. The learners also commonly used the phrase ‘*I mean*’ before correcting the errors.

*“When I realize I make a mistake, I correct it right away. Sometimes, I also use ‘I mean’ to correct my mistakes.”* [Student 4]

f. Topic complexity

When facing unfamiliar or complex topics, the learners employed avoidance or reduction strategies. They simplified their language, abandoned incomplete thoughts, or redirected the conversation to more manageable subjects.

*“If I don’t know how to say something, I just talk about another thing that is easier.”* [Student 8]

In short, the second finding of this study highlights that limited vocabulary and language proficiency, cognitive processing needs, the desire to convey meaning, efforts to ensure mutual understanding, self-awareness of errors, and topic complexity significantly influenced the use of frequent communication strategies. Learners’ reliance on these strategies reflects their efforts to navigate conversational challenges and maintain effective communication during casual conversations.

### 3.2 Discussion

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the communication strategies employed by Indonesian EFL learners in casual conversations to overcome communication breakdowns and the factors influencing the use of communication strategies. The findings show that stalling or time-gaining strategies were the most frequently used, followed by achievement or compensatory strategies, interactional strategies, self-monitoring strategies, and avoidance or reduction strategies. These findings align with the theoretical framework of communication strategies proposed by Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) and corroborate insights from prior research on EFL learners’ strategic behaviors.

The dominance of stalling or time-gaining strategies, particularly fillers, hesitation devices, gambits, and self and other repetition, aligns with Dornyei and Scott’s (1997)’s assertion that time-gaining strategies are essential for non-native speakers to manage cognitive demands during conversations. These findings corroborate to Kalisa (2019) and Yonata and Saptani’s (2019) study, discovering that stalling or time-gaining strategies, especially fillers, were the most frequent strategies employed by learners during casual conversations. Learners in this study frequently used fillers like “*emm*”, “*ee*” and “*you know*,” as well as repeated words or phrases, to maintain fluency while thinking about what to say next. Such strategies allow learners to create

opportunities to organize their thoughts and retrieve appropriate vocabulary without disrupting communication (Fitriati et al., 2021).

Moreover, achievement or compensatory strategies emerged as the second most frequently used communication strategy, with learners employing 7 out of 10 sub-types, including circumlocution, approximation, non-linguistic means, restructuring, literal translation, code-switching, and retrieval. Among these, code-switching and non-linguistic means were utilized more often by the learners. The frequent use of code-switching aligns with Ardianto's (2016) and Nurliana's (2020) findings that EFL learners often switch to their first language to fill lexical gaps or clarify their ideas in culturally specific contexts when they struggle to express thoughts. Similarly, non-linguistic means served as effective compensatory tools for expressing ideas or clarifying meaning without extensive verbal explanation. Learners in this study were observed using gestures to indicate actions or emotions, nodding or shaking their heads to affirm or negate statements, and pointing to objects or mimicking actions to convey specific meanings. This reflects Tarone's (1980) and Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) classification of communication strategies, which recognize non-linguistic means as vital tools for managing communication breakdowns.

Interactional strategies were also actively employed during the casual conversations to ensure mutual understanding. Defined by (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995) as techniques for negotiating meaning, clarifying misunderstandings, and sustaining interaction, these strategies help minimize communication breakdowns in informal settings. As observed in this study, the learners frequently employed the sub-types meaning negotiation strategies and appeals for help to specifically demonstrate clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks, reflecting their engagement in maintaining conversational flow and addressing ambiguities. For instance, phrases like "*You mean...?*" or "*What is that?*" indicate their efforts to clarify terms and confirm understanding, aligning with Tarone (1980) emphasis on interactive techniques as vital for conversational coherence.

Furthermore, self-monitoring strategies were also employed by EFL learners during casual conversations. In casual conversations, where spontaneity and informality dominate, self-monitoring strategies play a vital role in sustaining communication flow. According to Celce-Murcia et al. (1995), these strategies involve conscious efforts to control and evaluate language use in real time, enabling learners to make adjustments as needed. In this context, learners often corrected their own errors (self-initiated repair) or rephrased their statements (self-rephrasing) to ensure clarity and coherence in communication. Supporting this, Kalisa (2019) corroborates the value of self-monitoring strategies in improving oral proficiency, noting that learners who actively monitored their speech demonstrated a greater ability to sustain conversations.

On the other hand, this study reveals that avoidance or reduction strategies were the least employed communication strategies by EFL learners during casual conversations. These strategies involve message replacement, topic avoidance, and message abandonment. The infrequent use of avoidance or reduction strategies corroborates most previous studies' findings (Ardianto, 2016; Romadlon, 2016; Kalisa, 2019; Yonata & Saptani, 2019), revealing that avoidance or reduction strategies were the least strategies employed by learners during casual conversations and in classroom-based context speaking activities (Nizar et al., 2018; Wati & Widyanoro, 2019; Yuliandri, 2019; Nurliana, 2020). Although these strategies are useful in avoiding communication breakdowns, they may limit language practice and development.

Despite their infrequent use, these strategies reflect an important aspect of learners' communicative behavior when faced with linguistic limitations (Tarone, 1980; Dornyei & Scott, 1997; ).

Another finding of this study reveals that the frequent use of communication strategies among EFL learners in this study can be attributed to several interconnected factors. One significant factor is limited vocabulary and language proficiency. In this study, learners frequently employed stalling or time-gaining strategies, such as fillers, hesitation devices, gambits, and repetition to composite for their linguistic gaps. This finding underscores that learners use these strategies not only to bridge their lexical deficiencies but also to avoid communication breakdowns, reflecting an adaptive mechanism to navigate their linguistic limitations.

Additionally, cognitive processing needs also influenced strategy choice, as learners relied on strategies like self and other repetition to reduce mental effort and maintain fluency. Self-repetition allowed them to manage the cognitive demands of language production while keeping the conversation going smoothly. This confirms Dornyei & Scott's (1997) assertion that cognitive load influences strategy selection. Besides, to convey meaning, learners used achievement or compensatory strategies, such as code-switching and describing unknown words, especially when they couldn't find the English equivalent. This aligns with Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) model, which underscores the use of compensatory strategies to bridge gaps in communication.

Learners demonstrated ensuring mutual understanding through interactional strategies such as appealing for help and negotiating meaning. This reflects the importance of negotiation of meaning in successful communication (Tarone, 1980; Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). Furthermore, learners also showed self-awareness of errors, as evidenced by their use of self-monitoring strategies, emphasizing that self-correction contributes to language development. Lastly, topic complexity influenced strategy use, with learners resorting to avoidance or simplification when faced with unfamiliar or challenging subjects, in line with Tarone's (1980) assertion that learners tend to avoid complex ideas when their linguistic resources are insufficient.

Regarding the research findings, this study provides some pedagogical implications for EFL teaching and learning, particularly concerning students' linguistic perspectives. First, teachers can better tailor their teaching methods to support individual needs by examining how learners at different proficiency levels use strategies in communication. For lower-proficiency learners, teachers can integrate strategy-based instruction to enhance their ability to overcome communication breakdowns, fostering greater confidence and fluency. Meanwhile, for more advanced learners, targeted activities can refine their strategic competence, enabling them to use strategies more effectively in nuanced social interactions. Second, since limited vocabulary and cognitive processing needs were major factors influencing strategy use, teachers should emphasize vocabulary expansion and real-time speaking practice to improve learners' ability to retrieve and apply linguistic resources efficiently. Third, encouraging self-monitoring and interactive tasks can foster learners' awareness of errors and enhance their ability to negotiate meaning in conversations. Lastly, teachers should create a more supportive and interactive learning environment that helps learners develop both linguistic proficiency and communicative competence.



#### 4. Conclusion

This study explored the communication strategies employed by Indonesian EFL learners in casual conversations and the factors influencing frequent communication strategies. In terms of communication strategies used, this study reveals that stalling or time-gaining strategies were the most frequently used, followed by achievement or compensatory strategies, interactional strategies, self-monitoring strategies, and avoidance or reduction strategies. Moreover, the four most frequent sub-types include: 1) fillers, hesitation devices, and gambits, 2) self and other repetition, 3) code-switching, and 4) meaning negotiation strategies. The frequent use of these strategies suggests that learners rely on various mechanisms to navigate communication breakdowns, maintain fluency, and facilitate message comprehension. In terms of factors, several factors influenced the learners' strategic choices, including limited vocabulary and language proficiency, cognitive processing needs, the desire to convey meaning, efforts to ensure mutual understanding, self-awareness of errors, and topic complexity. These findings highlight the dynamic nature of communication strategies and their role in enabling EFL learners to sustain interactions despite linguistic limitations.

Despite its valuable insights, this study has some limitations. First, the data were derived from a specific group of EFL learners in casual conversation settings, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts, such as academic or professional communication. Second, the study primarily relied on audio-video recordings and interviews, which may not have captured all cognitive processes underlying learners' strategy use. Additionally, individual differences, such as personality traits and motivation, were not extensively explored, despite their potential influence on communication strategy preferences. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating a more diverse participant pool, analyzing different communicative settings, and employing a mixed-method approach to gain deeper insights into learners' strategic competence.

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