

*International Conference on Language, Communication and Education
(LANCOMME)*

**THE USE OF FILLERS AND HESITATION DEVICES AS COMMUNICATION
STRATEGIES AMONG MALAYSIAN LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

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ABSTRACT

Communication strategies are the conscious plans taken by speakers in dealing with communication breakdowns, and it can be verbal and non-verbal, in relation to the notion of *strategic competence*; originally proposed by Canale & Swain (1980). There are various types of strategies in different taxonomies, and the use of fillers and hesitation devices is listed in the taxonomies proposed by Dörnyei (1995). This study looks into the use of fillers and hesitation devices as communication strategies among students in group discussion. Using the taxonomy of communication strategies proposed by Dörnyei (1995) as the basis of the study, this qualitative study describes the types of fillers and hesitation devices that the language learners use during group discussion. The findings show that fillers and hesitation devices are commonly used among the speakers for the group discussion task. The findings also revealed that there are differences in terms of the usage of fillers and hesitation devices as communication strategies between the high and low proficiency learners.

Keywords:

Communication Strategies, Fillers, Hesitation Devices, Language Learners, Group Discussion

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the use of fillers and hesitation devices as communication strategies among Malaysian language learners. The patterns of fillers usage among the learners as a part of their strategies in communication are very important to be noted by the English teachers to make sure that they can practice the appropriate usage of communication strategies in the ESL classroom.

Background of the Study

Language learning in educational institution is generally designed to cater the need for the students to be proficient in using the language, and to provide language and communication and service training. Therefore, in language learning courses, students are provided with the exposure and training of integrated language skills, such as writing, reading, listening and

speaking. As for speaking, set of skills and strategies are projected towards producing proficient language users for certain uses, such as professional group communication, as well as academic discussion. Communication will ideally involve information transfer, and problems are bound to occur, and language barrier is one of the most relevant issues when it comes to English as the learners' second language. Nevertheless, some speakers of second language can still communicate effectively in spite of the fact that they lack the knowledge of the vocabulary and the grammar rules. This is when the communication strategies play the role in assisting the speaker to convey his or her messages. Dornyei (1995) discusses about this very example in his study, and relates the idea of strategic competence; where the main focus is given to verbal and non-verbal strategies used to compensate communication breakdown.

With the concern regarding the importance of communication strategies in the teaching and learning of English as the second language, this study is projected towards finding out the extent of usage of fillers and hesitation devices as communication strategies among the learners, specifically during group discussion as the speaking task. The findings will be able to provide the educators with the inside view of learners' knowledge about fillers and hesitation devices as communication strategies, and perhaps become the basis of rectification that can be done to improve the language teaching and learning at the institution.

Statement of the Problem

Communication is inevitably important and it is a major part of what is happening in people's life. In the context of language learning, especially English as the second language to Malaysian students, the problem in mastering the language knowledge, and lack of strategies used to rectify the process of communication become the additional factor that lead to their unsatisfactory achievement in their language proficiency. The awareness and knowledge of communication strategies among language learners, where fillers are listed as one of them are important to assist them in enhancing their ability to use the language and communicate effectively with others. As discussed in Faucette (2001), awareness among the learners about communication strategies could be increased by in-class instruction by the educator.

However, regardless of the importance of communication strategies in achieving successful interaction, little is known about to what extent actually the strategies have been utilised by the learners in the communication, specifically the usage of fillers and hesitation devices during their group discussion. The strategies may have or have not been taught explicitly in class, and the usage of the strategies among the learners could be naturally occurring as the result of the strategies that they have used in their first language communication. As such knowledge and skills regarding communication strategies are made available to the learners; it can assist them in preparing themselves for the future needs, such as the expertise pertaining to professional communication in the workplace.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to find out the usage of fillers and hesitation devices as communication strategies by the learners in group discussion. This study also compares the usage of the strategies between the high and low proficiency learners. The findings from this study exemplify the knowledge and the actual usage of the strategies among the learners, and it can be the benchmark of the future approach by the educators in the context of communication strategies exposure to the learners.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Find out the types of fillers and hesitation devices used among language learners in group discussion
2. Compare the usage of fillers and hesitation devices between the high and low proficiency learners.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follow:

1. What are the types of fillers and hesitation devices used among language learners in group discussion?
2. Is there any difference in terms of the usage of fillers and hesitation devices between the high and low proficiency learners?

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study will be useful in providing the extent of usage regarding fillers and hesitation devices as communication strategies among the students during their speaking task. It will also present the information about the possible connection between the uses of the strategies for students of different proficiencies. Therefore, future teaching for the lesson can be improved with the infusion of such strategies in the language class. This study will also benefit the educators in planning the lesson with consideration given to communication strategies as an approach for the course. Consequently, it could be a descriptive way of gauging the current approach used by the educators, especially pertaining to speaking. In general, the findings from this study could possibly offer some contribution to the improvement of language teaching and learning in the institution and consequently enhance the quality of English education in Malaysia.

Limitation of the Study

This study was implemented using a case study approach, thus it involved a small number of participants. There were only four learners involved in the group discussion which were observed and recorded for the purpose of this study, with two of them representing high proficiency learners and the other two representing low proficiency learners. Furthermore, the participants chosen for the study are all male learners. Moreover, the study also focused on one particular product-based communication strategies taxonomy, the one suggested by Dornyei (1995), and did not include other taxonomies of communication strategies. Apart from that, the instruments used for the group discussion was originally used for the academic evaluation purpose; hence the discussion was formal in nature. Moreover, the controlled situation during the speaking task might have affected the spontaneity of communication among the learners. Last but not least, the data obtained was solely based on the researcher's observation of the

group discussion; therefore, in-depth reasoning for particular usage of communication strategies among the learners was not available for this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication Strategies

Plenty of researches have been done on communication strategies, and that lead to various ways of defining the strategies. However, a definition which is generally working to define the term 'communication strategies' is proposed by Corder (1980; cited in Dornyei, 1995). He defines communication strategy as '*a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his [or her] meaning when faced with some difficulty*'. The definition provided is consistent with the two important concepts proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) and Faerch and Kasper (1983) regarding communication strategies, which are problem-orientedness, as well as systematic and consciousness. Conceptually, communication strategies emerge from communication breakdown that occurs as the result of L2 speakers' failure to convey their intended message because of their limited mastery of the knowledge.

The two important defining criteria for communication strategies in general are 'problem-based' and 'consciousness'. As for the first criteria, it occurs as the result of the clashing between the communicative intention of the speaker and the linguistic resource available. Dornyei and Scott (1997) argue that the notion of 'problem-based' is too general and there is a need to narrow it down to the exact type of problems that arise in the communication. They proposed the following four problem; *resource deficits* which prevent the speaker from verbalizing the message, *own-performance problem* which emphasize on the realization of the speaker upon the problems in his discourse and the way he deal with it, *other-performance problem* which focus on the problems of the interlocutor in the communication, and finally *processing time pressure* which highlight on the importance of sufficient time for the speaker to process and plan the communication.

The second defining criteria; 'consciousness' could occur in many stages during the process of communication. Some of the instances are the speaker's consciousness about the problematic occurrences, the attempts to deal with the problem, as well as the possible ways to rectify the crisis. Therefore, the four aspects which are recommended by Schmidt (1994; cited in Dornyei and Scott, 1997) as the main construct of the term consciousness in communication strategies are intentionality, attention, awareness and control. As for fillers and hesitation devices, they are both generally related to these two important criteria.

Dornyei's (1995) Taxonomy of Communication Strategies

This taxonomy is one of the most employed taxonomies of communication strategies for the related research in this field. Dornyei's (1995) taxonomy is outlined based on the most common and important strategies which consistently appeared in the earlier taxonomies. The following figure illustrates the taxonomy and the strategies, which listed fillers and hesitation devices as a part of it.

Avoidance or Reduction Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Message abandonment ii. Topic avoidance
Achievement or Compensatory Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii. Circumlocution iv. Approximation v. Use of all-purpose words vi. Word-coinage vii. Use of non-linguistic means viii. Literal translation ix. Foreignizing x. Code switching xi. Appeal for help
Stalling or Time-gaining Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> xii. Use of fillers/hesitation devices

Figure 1: Dornyei's (1995) Taxonomy of Communication Strategies

Fillers and Hesitation Devices as Communication Strategies

Dornyei (1995) argues that insufficient processing time for the speaker is the primary source that leads to communication breakdown. Thus, he suggested an extension for the definition of communication strategies with the inclusion of stalling activities. The logic underlying the inclusion of such strategy is for the speaker to have more thinking time while at the same time to keep the flow of the conversation going. As it helps the speaker to keep the communication going as well as for him to plan the discourse, time-stalling strategies such as lexicalized pause fillers and hesitation are also regarded as communication strategies.

Dornyei has originally considered Faerch and Kasper's (1983) conceptualization of communication strategies that highlight on 'problem-orientedness' and 'consciousness' as the central features. He proposed that the use of fillers and hesitation satisfy both stated criteria. Furthermore, this strategy falls under 'production' instead of 'communication' following Tarone's (1980) distinction of strategies; as the former refers to general attempts to use the linguistic system efficiently and clearly while the latter defines the efforts to specifically negotiate meaning by alternative means to convey an intended message.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study was implemented using the qualitative approach, and case study was chosen as the main design. The type selected for the case study is illustrative, as it attempted to describe the fillers and hesitation devices as communication strategies usage among language learners. Furthermore, case study of illustrative type was utilised to provide indepth example and description about the strategies used by the language learners in the communication process; namely group discussion. Detailed account about the exact usage of the strategies among the learners was recorded and analysed. The analysis from the recorded data was employed to illustrate the way the language learners make use of the strategies in meaningful way during the group discussion; which is a major part of the speaking component in the language course.

This particular study is a representative case study, as the findings were made as generalization about the usage of fillers and hesitation devices as communication strategies among language learners for the chosen institution; UiTM Johor. The chosen students for the study represented the other students in terms of language proficiency; both high and low. As the students enrol in the same course in the institution with highly similar approaches in teaching and learning, generalization is deemed appropriate to be made.

The scope of the study is one selected group with four students for the speaking task, which is the group discussion. The students were randomly chosen from one of the faculties in UiTM Johor, specifically the Faculty of Information Management. As differences regarding communication strategies used between language learners of high and low proficiency are highlighted in this study, purposive sampling was done for the four learners involved in the group discussion, as the representatives of both levels of proficiency.

Research Method

For the purpose of this study, direct observation was carried out in investigating the communication strategies used by the language learners during group discussion, namely fillers and hesitation devices. The researcher observed a group of students and identified the strategies that they used when they engaged in the group discussion. For the purpose of noting the data, the instrument used for the observation was the checklist of communication strategies as well as video recording of the group discussion. The checklist is adapted from Dornyei's (1995) taxonomy of communication strategies. The recording was examined by the researcher to support the data collected from the observation.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data recorded from the observation as well as the video recording were analysed with focus given to the fillers and hesitation devices used by each student as communication strategies for both individual presentation and group discussion. The analyses were done to cater the research questions formulated for this study. The discussions were made based on two main focuses, which are:

1. The types of fillers and hesitation devices used among language learners in group discussion.
2. The difference in terms of the usage of fillers and hesitation devices between the high and low proficiency learners.

The analyses were done using thematic coding, based on the framework of communication strategies taxonomy by Dornyei (1995). The analyses were done inductively from the recorded and transcribed data, followed by tentative codes generating, specifically based on fillers and hesitation devices in the checklist. Detailed descriptions about each student; A, B, C and D were provided, and followed by the accounts on the patterns of the usage of fillers and hesitation devices as communication strategies by the students in general. Therefore, similarities regarding the strategies were highlighted among all four students. As the strategies used by students of different language proficiency is concerned, the data was analysed by quantifying qualitative data and was utilised to see the pattern and the differences of usage, as well as to compare the strategies used by the low and high proficiency students.

Participants and Setting

There were four students chosen as the participants for this study, and they are the diploma students from the Faculty of Information Management in their second semester of study in UiTM Johor. For the purpose of this study, two of the participants were chosen among the high achiever for the English course, and the other two from the low achiever. The selection was made based on their examination result for the English course from the previous semester, as well as their speaking test marks. These differences are highlighted to compare the differences of communication strategies usage between language learners of different proficiencies. The selection of the course was made based on the group discussion as the main part of speaking component. Based on the course information and syllabus, each and every student should be able to take part in a discussion, which comprises both individual presentation and discussion in the group. Therefore, the course is deemed suitable to cater the focus of the study which is communication strategies used by the students in group discussion.

FINDINGS

The Types of Fillers and Hesitation Devices Used

The use of fillers and hesitation devices is commonly used among the speakers for the group discussion task. Regardless of their proficiency level, this strategy, which is generally termed as stalling/time-gaining strategy (Dornyei, 1995) is frequently found in their spoken discourse. Naturally, the usage of fillers and hesitation devices are related to processing and thinking time among the speakers. This strategy could be further classified into more subcategories, which are *lexicalized fillers*, *non-lexicalized fillers*, *repetition*, *short pause*, and *long pause*. However, there is only an evidence of lexicalized fillers among the high proficiency learner in the recorded data. In addition, the findings also indicate that only low proficiency learners used long pause during the group discussion. The evidences and examples available from the data are classified under the other three sub-categories, and they are relevant among all speakers of both high and low proficiency.

Lexicalized Fillers

In general, communication strategies based on time-gaining or stalling are the ones mainly used among all speakers during the group discussion. The usage varies between these four sub-

categories of strategies; non-lexicalized fillers, lexicalized fillers, repetition, and pauses, both short and long. However, there are some differences observed between the avoidance/reduction strategies which were used by the speakers of different proficiencies.

First of all, it is found that the usage of lexicalized fillers is uniquely used by the speaker of high proficiency level. The example of usage is as follows:

Table 1: Example of ‘Lexicalized Fillers’ Strategy Usage (as Fillers/Hesitation Devices)

Communication Strategy	Example	Notes
Use of fillers/hesitation (lexicalized fillers)	• I think, it is... how do I say this... profitable.(L117)	• Using lexicalized fillers ‘how do I say this’

The usage of lexicalized fillers indicates the ability of the speaker to utilise his knowledge in the target language, which is English in helping him to deal with the problem that he faced during his attempt to communicate his idea. Thus, it shows that he is a better user of the target language hence proving his high level of proficiency. Rather than using other kind of strategies listed in avoidance/reduction category which portrays inadequacy of language knowledge such repetition of words or simply pauses, he managed to substitute the gap using the target language itself.

Non-lexicalized Fillers

The use of non-lexicalized fillers is indicated by the usage of simple sound fillers such as ‘uh’, ‘uhm’, and ‘err’. Basically, these examples of fillers are just sound without any particular meaning. The speakers used this strategy in order for them to allow some processing time for them, while at the same time keeping the conversation going without defects which could possibly occur if they just pause without filling in the gaps with these non-lexicalized fillers. From the data, all four speakers regularly used this strategy, and these fillers occurred at various positions in their sentences, at the beginning, in the middle, as well towards the end of the sentences, as illustrated by the following examples:

Table 2: Examples of Non-Lexicalized Fillers Used

Position	Examples of non-lexicalized fillers used
Beginning of the sentence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>HP1 : Uhm, why did I say that is because,... (L12)</i> • <i>HP2 : Uhm... I think, business, there’s something in your mind... (L111)</i> • <i>LP1 : Uh... the reason is, because uh... (L6)</i> • <i>LP2 : Uh... the example of job that... (L42)</i>

Middle of the sentence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>HP1 : ... with the certificate we can use it to uh, apply uhm, uh... apply at the many of uh... (L15)</i> • <i>HP2 : ... Ejat's point just now, he, you stated that uh... you highlight the word experience right? (L107)</i> • <i>LP1 : ...so, we are, we are not uh... from the 90's, ... (L49)</i> • <i>LP2 : ...give my opinion that uh, student who did not perform well in their exam,... (L19)</i>
Towards the end of the sentence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>HP1 : ..., but they also seek for uhm... their... skills. (L58)</i> • <i>HP2 : ..., like your point, then, they can... uh, set up a business. (L113)</i> • <i>LP1 : ... soft skill is very needed in uh... in, in order to get a job. (L102)</i> • <i>LP2 : ..., they learn in uh... only theory. (L27)</i>

The nature of these non-lexicalized fillers which makes them easy to use, but at the same time improve the efficiency and clarity of the communication could be the main reason for the frequent usage among all the speakers during the task.

Repetition

Repetition which falls under the category of fillers/hesitation devices simply means the repetition of words or phrases in the speakers' spoken discourse, which occur almost immediately after the first utterance of the word, or combined with other words as well as non-lexicalized fillers. It is different from the repetition that the speakers did when they attempt to highlight the significance of the points, hence repeating it in their sentence. Repetition of word functions to improve the speech production in terms of its clarity. Instead of keeping quiet or filling in the gaps with non-lexicalized fillers, the speakers repeat the words that they have uttered before to keep the conversation going, while allowing them to have some processing time and come up with their ideas after that. Some examples of the usage of repetition among the speakers as fillers are as follow:

Table 3: Examples of Repetition Usages (As Fillers/Hesitation Devices)

Repeated words / phrases	Examples of usage
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office	• LP2 : ...clerk at office, any office, any... lots of office in Malaysia right? (L42)
apply	• HP1 : ..., I think that, when they... apply... apply for the IKBA, they... (L56)
the skill	• LP1 : ... teach their student the skill, the skill about... (L101)
spray	• HP2 : Spray, spray anything that your customers want. (L115)

The usage of repetition as fillers in the communication is frequently recorded among all speakers, thus it is generally an example of a common strategies which occur in communication, regardless of the difference in terms of the speakers' proficiency levels.

Short Pauses

Another sub-category under the use of fillers and hesitation which occurs in all speakers' spoken discourse is short pause. Slightly different than non-lexicalized fillers and repetition, short pause does not involve any use of word or phrase in its usage. The speaker simply stops talking for a brief moment, approximately 1 to 2 seconds, and continue with his points afterwards. It is quite similar with the other fillers/hesitation devices discussed earlier in terms of function, as it provides the speaker with some processing time to deal with his language deficiency or idea development. Some of the examples regarding the usage of short pause recorded in the data are as listed below:

Table 4: Examples of Short Pauses Usages (as Fillers/Hesitation Devices)

Level of Proficiency	Example	Notes
• High	• HP1 : ..., they... do more practical rather than theory. (L16)	Short pause after the word 'they'
• High	• HP2 : ... you've said that... they must... work, right? (L31)	Short pause after the word 'might'.
• Low	• LP1 : ...they might... have a good result. (L7)	Short pauses after the word 'that and 'must'.
• Low	• LP2 : ...looking for a suitable job, why I said this is a best... suggestion that because... (L138)	Short pause after the word 'best'.

The usage of short pause in speakers' spoken discourse can be related to the speakers' attempts to ensure the continuation of the points that they try to explain to the other speakers. Instead of using non-lexicalized fillers, which somehow could interrupt the flow of

the message presented, the speakers paused shortly, about 1 to 2 seconds after certain word, and continue the sentence with the idea that they have thought of. Thus, rather than separating the chunks of idea, they could keep the idea together in one continuous utterance of sentence.

Long Pause

The usage of long pause, which indicates the loss of idea without any attempt of substituting the gaps is only recorded among the low proficiency speakers. A little different from short pause, long pause is indicated by longer duration, which is more than 5 seconds. The following are some of the examples from the data:

Table 5: Example of ‘Long Pause’ Strategies Usage (as Fillers/Hesitation Devices)

Communication Strategy	Example	Notes
Use of fillers/hesitation (long pause)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>So, about my point, uhm... it... (long pause) go back to school...(L103)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long pause indicates loss of idea/words and processing time.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>...lots of graduated person that are... un...employed. (long pause). (L25)</i> • <i>Actually, uh...(L26)</i> 	

Long pause, other than defecting the efficiency and clarity of the message being conveyed, it also shows lack of skills and language knowledge of the speaker. In addition, longer thinking time indicates lack of abilities among the learners in dealing with the problems that occur during the communication, possibly caused by their low level of proficiency in the target language.

Generally, the findings suggest that the communication strategies categorized under the use of fillers and hesitation devices are the high-frequency elements, and learners tend to resort to the strategies in numerous problem-situations in their discourse. Thus, these sets of strategies became routinized; as proposed by Gass and Selinker (1994). Moreover, as suggested by Dornyei and Scott (1997), rather than planning to execute the strategies to handle the difficulties, which the speakers are aware of during the communication, the devices are used most of the time without a conscious decision (p.185). Therefore, it can be concluded that the usage of these devices normally occurred among learners regardless of their level of proficiency; hence became the common strategies used by the learners during the speaking task.

DISCUSSION

All of the learners used fillers and hesitation devices in their communication; specifically non-lexicalized fillers, repetition, and short pause. It suggests that these kinds of communication strategies are the high frequency elements, and learners tend to resort to the strategies in numerous problem-situations in their discourse. Thus, these sets of strategies became routinized; as proposed by Gass and Selinker (1994). Moreover, as suggested by Dornyei and

Scott (1997), rather than planning to execute the strategies to handle the difficulties, which the speakers are aware of during the communication, the devices are used most of the time without a conscious decision (p.185). Therefore, it can be concluded that the usage of these devices normally occurred among learners regardless of their level of proficiency; hence became the common strategies used by the learners during the speaking task.

With regard to the usage of fillers and hesitation devices between the high and low proficiency learners, it differs in terms of the choice of strategies made by the learners in their communication. In general, high proficiency learners used more lexicalized fillers while low proficiency learners used more pauses in their spoken discourse.

As the choice of communication strategies among high proficiency learners is concerned, the strategies that they chose implied the better mastery that they have with regards to the language. The notion about the usage of knowledge language is previously proposed by Nakatani (2006) as a characteristic of good language user. Pertaining to the use of lexicalized fillers as time-gaining or stalling strategies, the learners employed their knowledge of the vocabulary to fill in the gaps while thinking of some ideas to justify their points. It indicates the willingness of the learners to take the risk of using the language while gaining the time to think, rather than opting for non-lexicalized fillers. It is related to the findings from previous research that highlights on the risk-taking nature which is observable among high proficiency learners (Chuanchaisit & Prapthal, 2009).

On the contrary, the communication strategies choices by the low proficiency learners indicate their low ability in terms of the language knowledge as well as usage. Based on the findings, the strategies choice that they made generally stemmed from their low proficiency in the language, and their restricted ability to use the language in their communication. For instance, they used pauses regularly in their communication, which apparently indicate the loss of words or idea, as well as difficulties in explaining it. In addition, the usage of long pause, which caused defect to the flow of the communication were only evident among the learners with low proficiency. It is justifiable by their lack of knowledge and skills in using the language, thus they opted for such strategies. As proposed by Qingquan et.al (2008), such usage of time-gaining strategies among the low proficiency learners is possibly due to the limited knowledge of the learners, hence using the strategies to compensate the defects.

Implication

Direct instruction or explicit training of communication strategies, including fillers and hesitation devices; can be a good practice in language class or course, as it will directly expose these strategies to the learners. Thus, the learners will be more aware of these strategies, getting more related knowledge and skills hence assisting them in improving their language proficiency. However, it is notable for the language practitioners to highlight the role of communication strategies as temporary solution for communication breakdown stemming from language deficit, and not simply using it as the excuse to stop improving their language knowledge and skills.

In a more general view, considering the fact that direct instruction and explicit training of communication strategies are proved to improve language knowledge and skills among the learners, it is a good point to include communication strategies as part of the topics covered in the English language courses syllabuses, especially the courses for beginner students. Early exposure to the strategies can help the learners in building good foundation in the language skills, specifically in speaking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the present study several recommendations can be made for the future research.

1. Research can include more communication strategies in analysing the findings thus more aspects can be discussed
2. Research can include more participants to expand the context of study hence enriching the potential findings with regard to the usage of communication strategies
3. Research can involve variety of task other than group discussion such as public speaking and object description
4. Research can involve participants from both genders to provide deeper insights from wider contexts to the findings
5. Combination of several communication strategies can be used as the framework of the research to justify more aspects in the usage of strategies among the language learners.

CONCLUSION

The present study aims to investigate the usage of fillers and hesitation devices as communication strategies among Malaysian language learners. Qualitative method was used to achieve the objectives of the study. Observation of a group discussion was implemented to obtain the data. The data obtained was analysed thoroughly using thematic coding, chiefly based on the framework of communication strategies taxonomy proposed by Dornyei (1995). The findings show that fillers and hesitation devices are commonly used among the speakers for the group discussion task. The findings also revealed that there are differences in terms of the usage of fillers and hesitation devices as communication strategies between the high and low proficiency learners.

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