COMMUNICATION STRATAGEMM: A LANGUAGE SKILL OR A LANGUAGE PROBLEM?

Paulo Joseph P. Santos, LPT
Major in English
Writer, Philippine Information Agency

We all know that communication is crucial to every living thing that it makes us all united. Since not all humans in the world have synonymous mother language, we need to also learn a second language to link ourselves with different people. Understanding is an essential part of communication. Despite of learning the language, we still encounter various predicaments in communicating with one another. Problems in communication must have solutions. Subconsciously, when we find some difficulties in expressing our thoughts, we are able to do something to eliminate the hindrances that make our words ineligible by conversing with other individuals. We develop communication strategies that really help us at times. The question is- is having communication strategies a language skill or a language problem?

In my own viewpoint, communication strategies are language skills that help us identify and overcome the communiqué gaps. There were various researches that examined different communication strategies. According to Færch and Kasper (1983), studies of learners’ communication strategies have scrutinized the ways learners deal with communication quandaries. Emphasizing the phrase “the ways learners deal with communication problems” is a clear explanation that learners can think of solutions when they experience common and unexpected glitches. The word “strategy” means approaches or ways on how a certain thing can be used in good terms. Some strategies that are commonly used by language learners are paraphrasing, where they are able to use different words or phrases to express their intended meaning; substitution, where they may avoid a problematic word by using a different one; coining new words, where they can invent new words or phrases for words they do not know; borrowing or language switching, where they may insert a word from their first language into a sentence, and hope that their interlocutor will understand or recognize; reduction of messages, where they can abandon messages and move on to a more manageable one; etc.
Through these different communication strategies, I can say that language learners like us are able to be more aware with tight spots in communication and are able to use more alternatives in conveying our ideas to others. Aside from various communication strategies, researchers during 1980’s identified three components of it. The three components of communication strategies are “problematicity,” meaning that a language learner recognizes the problem in communication; “consciousness,” meaning that a person is aware of the problem and consciously employing typical strategies appropriate to resolve it; and “intentionality,” meaning that a person is able to choose between options to overcome a certain communication problem. But there is one thing that Bialystok and other researchers have pointed out. Apparently, communication strategies may be employed by language learners even without the presence of problematicity (there’s no problem at all) and they tend to use it typically and routinely rather than intentionally or consciously choosing strategized communication when dealing with a problem. This is what makes communication strategies a language problem.

For instance, there are two communication stratagems that I find as language problems. The first one is “Foreignize.” Sometimes, the amazing part in this kind of tactic is that listeners tend to understand the words associated by a mother tongue. But this is not accurate and clear at all. There are words that are not understood by foreigners when you are talking to them. For instance, in the example: S1: “You’re so cute. You look like a manikin.” S2: “Huh?” Obviously, both speakers have different first languages. The word “manikin” is a German term meaning a small man. It is not understandable by the second speaker. We may find this as a language problem. The next communication strategy that I find problematic is “Difficulties” that is considered avoidance strategy. This shows lack of vocabulary words within a language learner. A person tends to avoid the question and never speaks of his/her expressions ideally. This can become more problematic if the language learner will not overcome this line of attack. We may say that different communication strategies are helpful at times we badly need these. But we cannot use it routinely. Sometimes, we need to work hard for ourselves to learn more about the language to better understand each other when we are conversing. We need to boost our self-confidence when using various communication strategies so that it is not obvious in our part that we are suddenly facing troubles in communication. It gives us arduous times whenever we are talking to other people especially when they are aliens in our native land. If we want to be connected and if we want to be
understood, we need to make sure that we observe appropriateness of words, conciseness, accuracy, and clarity.

Stated in an article, Rod Ellis suggested that communication strategies learners utilize may be characteristic of the stage of development which they have reached. In some points, it is agreeable. Language learners are capable of strategizing and providing solutions to some communication problems by considering the level of their communication skill. James Thurber once quoted that, "Precision of communication is important, more important than ever, in our era of hair trigger balances, when a false or misunderstood word may create as much disaster as a sudden thoughtless act." For me, communication strategies somehow prevent misunderstood messages or eliminating most barriers in communication.

~The End ☹~

References:
http://www.leadershipnow.com/communicationquotes.html