Oral English Communication Difficulties and Coping Strategies of Diploma of Hotel Management Students at UiTM

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ABSTRACT

Being able to communicate effectively is a much sought after skill by employers in today's globalised work contexts. This article examines the types of oral communication difficulties faced by Diploma level ESL learners. This study also analysed the types of communication strategies used by the students to cope with speaking and listening problems during English oral communication activities. With these research objectives, a questionnaire known as the Oral Communication Strategies Inventory (OCSI) was distributed to 100 Diploma of Hotel Management students at the UiTM branch campus in Penang. Following that, 16 students from the total population were interviewed and they also took part in a journal writing activity to explain the difficulties they encounter when engaging in English conversation with others. The results revealed that difficulties occurred due to learners' lack of English language knowledge. It was also found that learners are keen to get involved in English oral communication activities and most of them negotiate meaning with the interlocutors to understand the intended messages. The implications of this study suggest that teachers should be more creative in constructing interactive learning experiences for their students and teach coping strategies as part of students' repertories of oral communication skills.

Keywords: oral communication difficulties; coping strategies; ESL learners; hotel management; interactive learning

INTRODUCTION

The main goal in language learning for English as Second Language (ESL hereafter) learners is to be able to communicate effectively in the target language (Lazaraton 2001). In the global context, English has become widely accepted as the major language that is learned to meet the demands of current job markets in equipping graduates with content knowledge as well as communication skills and competencies (Maes, Weldy & Icenogle 1997, Moslehifar & Noor Aireen Ibrahim 2012). However, communicating in a language that is not one's own mother tongue can be difficult (Somsai & Intaraprasert 2011). Mastering a new language is not a work of several hours but it takes more than a decade for ESL learners to achieve an acceptable level of communicative competence (Kongsom 2009, Khan 2010, Teng 2012). In some instances, a message is not well communicated in the target language due to the lack of knowledge about lexical items and the purpose of listening to spoken language (Dobao & Martinez 2007). Thus, learners communicate orally in different ways depending on the purpose, whether to get information, seek clarification or for enjoyment (Sum 1990). Some learners use body language or repeat familiar words and some switch back and forth between the first language and the target language. Such attempts and strategies used by learners in conveying messages are known as communication strategies. According to Faerch and Kasper (1983, p. 5), communication strategies "are the systematic attempts by learners of a second and foreign language to express or decode meaning in the target language". Learners try to convey messages with the help of various means such as hand gestures, asking for clarification, code switching and message alteration (Tarone 1981, Dornyei & Scott 1995).

Communication strategies are applied when learners lack the target language knowledge such as lexical items or grammatical structures. This lack of linguistic knowledge often leads to other difficulties such as the uncertainty of using suitable vocabulary according to context, time constraints in processing information that is going to be said or being unclear about the interlocutor's speech production.

Malaysian ESL learners are also reported to have similar difficulties in English oral communication activities. Hie and Phan (2008) are of the opinion that less proficient learners tend to code switch between the first and the target language in order to ensure they produce the correct message. In 2009, a study that explored the communication ability of UiTM Sarawak graduates reported that students frequently made lexical and grammatical errors when performing in oral English communication activities (Sharifah Zakiah Wan Hassan et al 2009). Notwithstanding these reasons, some other learners are reported to hesitate, make a lot of repetitions and produce incomplete and redundant sentences. In another study conducted by Wan Zumusni Wan Mustapha, Noriah Ismail and Singh (2010), it was reported that UiTM students with average levels of communication apprehension are often undecided about whether or not to speak in English and they always keep silent when attending meetings. As a result, UiTM graduates are identified as having problems performing many job tasks, particularly those which involve speaking and writing in English (Lan, Khaun & Singh 2011).

In view of the abovementioned oral communication problems faced by Malaysian ESL learners, this study attempts to investigate the types of English oral communication difficulties and coping strategies of the Diploma of Hotel Management students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM hereafter). Over the last five years, a few studies have identified the communication strategies used by Malaysian undergraduate ESL learners in several conversational contexts (Ting & Phan 2008, Halizah Omar, Mohamed Amin Embi & Melor Md Yunus 2012, Raed Latif Ugla, Nur Ilianis Adnan & Mohamad Jafre Zainol Abidin 2013). However, these scholars were mainly researching on the types of communication strategies and did not identify the specific oral communication difficulties faced by tertiary learners in English oral communication activities. In addition, this study also investigates the types of oral communication strategies with regard to two important language skills, which are speaking and listening.

COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES AND COPING STRATEGIES

The process of oral communication involves at least one speaker and one listener. Oral communication covers face-to-face interactions as well as long distance interactions such as telephone conversations. In oral communication, speakers and listeners might share the same interest yet it is difficult for them to communicate satisfactorily using their second language. Barna (1985) stated several factors that cause communication difficulties which include false assumptions, language differences and nonverbal misunderstanding. However, the important difficulty is that both speaker and listener do not share the same value while communicating.

In the field of second and foreign language acquisition, the Interlanguage theory has explained the dissimilarity of learners' pronunciation of the target language from the native speaker's pronunciation (Selinker 1972).The theory concerns the ability of bilinguals who manage to produce two languages separately with correct pronunciation. However, this theory analyses only the learner's production (speaking) and does not look into how learners perceive speakers' production in the target language (Nakatani 2010).

On the other hand, collaborative theory discusses the way speakers and listener collaborate actions in conversation to derive meaning (Clark & Schaefer 1989). Through grounding process, speakers and listeners negotiate meaning to achieve mutual understanding

(Clark 1994). According to this theory, the speaker does not only contribute utterances to a conversation but the speaker also invites the listener to participate in the conversation by listening, registering and understanding the speaker's utterances (Clark & Brennan 1991). Conversation is basically divided into two phases. The first phase is known as *Presentation phase* where the speaker presents utterances and expects the listener to understand the utterances. Meanwhile, the second phase which is known as *Acceptance phase* is the phase where the listener accepts the speaker's utterances by giving evidence (show response) that the listener has understood the utterances (Clark & Brennan 1991 p. 30).

Mutual understanding between speaker and listener is realised when the acceptance phase is achieved (Clark & Brennan 1991, Schaefer 1992). The speaker may ask the listener to provide a response so that the speaker can know whether the utterances are understood or not. Based on the response, the speaker can know if repairs of the utterances are needed or not.

The applications of collaborative theory can be widely seen through several studies around the world. The application of this theory is conducted on disfluency in spontaneous conversation (Clark & Shaefer, 1989). Clark and Wasow (1998) reported that pauses, fillers, self corrections and repeated words are among of the strategies that were made by the speaker to realise the mutual understanding with the listener. Bavelas, Coates and Johnson (2002) explained the theory through listener's responses. Rather than verbal responses, the listener is expected to also produce nonverbal expressions as responses to the speaker's utterances. In this study, gazing is considered as one of the responses that can help the speaker to notice the listener's understanding towards the message conveyed. While speaking, the listener's gaze contributes to coordination of actions between the two. Thus, the collaborative act recognises both verbal and nonverbal expressions as strategies to achieve mutual understanding (Clark & Krych 2004).

According to Dornyei and Scott (1995), communication breakdowns are usually caused by four problems which they classified as *resource deficit*, *processing time pressure*, *own-performance problems* and *other-performance problems.* These difficulties are referred to as problem-orientedness in which they are valid in defining problems that occur during communication. *Resource deficit* is a problem faced by learners due to insufficient knowledge of the target language (Jamshidnejad 2011). Due to this lack, the learners' target language speech system is said to be incomplete compared to the speech system of the learners' native language (Dornyei & Scott 1995, Dornyei & Kosmos 1998). The *processing time pressure* concerns with the difficulty of having too much time in constructing sentences in the target language (Dornyei & Scott 1995). According to Jamshidnejad (2011), this problem happens when learners are having spontaneous communication with the native speaker of the target language. Learners will usually apply fillers as their hesitation device and repeat the target language words for several times (Dornyei & Scott 1997). The *own-performance problems* are detected when learners realise mistakes in their own target language productions (Dornyei & Scott 1995, Dorneyi & Scott 1997). Usually, this difficulty is covered by paraphrasing, self-repairing and editing. The *other-performing problems* include the difficulties of perceiving what is said by the interlocutors (Dornyei & Scott 1997, Jamshidnejad 2011). Since learners have not yet acquired the words, structure system and idioms of the target language, they will find interlocutors' speeches confusing (Jamshidnejad 2011). The result is they perceive wrong meaning from the interlocutors' utterances.

Communication strategy is best explained when it is compared to other notions that are similar to it. Tarone (1981) compared communication strategies with production strategy and learning strategy. According to her, communication strategy is the attempt by two speakers to agree on a meaning in target language. Communication strategies according to Tarone's (1981, p.281) definition consists of three characteristics:

i)   A speaker desires to communicate meaning x to a listener;

ii)   The speaker believes the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure desire to communicate meaning x is unavailable; thus

iii)   The speaker chooses to

     a.   Avoid from attempting to communicate meaning x or

     b.   Attempt alternate means to communicate meaning x

Production strategy is the attempt to use the linguistic system of the native language efficiently and clearly while learning strategy is the attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language (Tarone 1981). Production strategy is not a communication strategy because element (iii.b) is absent and this makes it a non-communication strategy. Meanwhile, element (i) is not necessary for the definition of learning strategies and this makes learning strategies different from communication strategies.

Functionally, communication strategy is used to overcome oral communication difficulties. Speakers use communication strategies spontaneously to make sure messages can be conveyed to the other participants successfully (Dornyei & Scott 1995, Nakatani 2006). Dornyei (1995) argued that the major problem facing learners is the insufficient processing time to produce target language speech. Thus, speakers automatically use fillers to delay the communication time to think and search for suitable words and structures (Dornyei 1995, Clark & Wasow 1998, Bavelas, Coates & Johnson 2002). According to Dornyei and Scott (1997), the taxonomy of communication strategy can be divided into *direct, indirect and interactional* strategies.

Among the three categories, interactional strategies play important roles in problem management because the strategies tend to prevent breakdown and maintain the communication flow to both participants. This is parallel to Clark's (1994) ideas that mutual meaning is negotiated through verbal expressions. Although Dornyei (1995) trained learners on how to use communication strategies, the strategies trained excluded the type of meaning negotiation (Nakatani 2005). This study used the Oral Communication Strategies Inventory (OCSI hereafter) developed by Nakatani (2006) which focuses on coping strategies for speaking and listening problems faced by learners during oral communication activities.

The OCSI is essentially a questionnaire that comes in two parts. Nakatani (2006) listed eight strategies for coping with speaking problems and seven strategies for coping with listening problems as shown in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1. Strategies for Coping with Speaking and Listening Problems

Strategies for coping with speaking problems	Strategies for coping for listening problems
Social Affective	Negotiation for Meaning
Fluency-Oriented	Fluency-Maintaining
Negotiation for Meaning	Scanning
Accuracy Oriented	Getting the Gist
Message Reduction and alteration	Non-verbal
Non- verbal	Less Active Listener
Message Abandonment	Word-oriented
Attempt to Think in English	

The OCSI was adopted in the present study because it covered the interactional strategies used by speakers as well as listeners, and it includes meaning negotiation strategies for handling communication difficulties.

This study was guided by the following three research questions:

i) What are the oral communication difficulties faced by the Diploma of Hotel Management students at UiTM when they communicate in English?
ii) What are the types of coping strategies for speaking problems used by the students when they engage in English oral communication activities?
iii) What are the types of coping strategies for listening problems used by the students when they engage in English oral communication activities?

METHODOLOGY

Using a convenience sampling method, the research subjects were selected based on their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researchers. A total number of 100 Diploma of Hotel Management students at the UiTM Pematang Pauh campus in Penang participated in this study. The questionnaire was completed by all students. Out of 100 students, 16 students volunteered to participate in both the focus group interviews and the journal writing activity. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents during their usual class hour while two focus group interviews and a journal writing activity were done separately. The researchers consulted the students prior to arranging the focus group interview sessions which were held in a meeting room at the UiTM campus. The students handed in their journal writing entries to the researchers a week after the focus group interview sessions. Out of a total of 100 students, 16 students volunteered to participate in the focus group interviews (two focus groups comprising eight students in each group). While the researchers conducted the interview sessions in English, the students were told that they were free to provide their responses either in English or Malay. After completing the interview sessions, the students were handed the questions for the journal writing activity. Similar to the focus group interview questions, the journal writing questions were constructed in English and the respondents were told they were free to provide their written responses either in English or Malay. In this regard, some students wrote their responses in Malay as they felt comfortable expressing their views in their mother tongue while some students wrote in English.

INSTRUMENTATION AND PROCEDURE

This research employed a mixed methods approach whereby it combined qualitative and quantitative methods in collecting data. This design was chosen because it provides a clear framework for collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting data to address specific research objectives (Creswell & Clark 2011). For the quantitative instrument, a questionnaire was used to investigate learners' use of communication strategy during oral communication activities. This study adopted the Oral Communication Strategies Inventory (OCSI) developed by Nakatani (2006). For the qualitative instruments, focus group interviews and a journal writing activity were used to collect data on the oral communication difficulties faced by learners.

The OCSI investigates the types of oral communication strategies used by learners with regard to two important skills in oral communication activity which are speaking and listening. The questionnaire comes in two parts: the first part focuses on the strategies for coping with speaking problems and the second part focuses on the strategies for coping with listening problems. The questionnaire consists of 32 items that address these coping strategies. Each item in the questionnaire is followed by a 5-point Likert scale whereby 1 indicates 'Never or almost never true of me' and 5 indicate 'Always or almost always true of me'. This questionnaire has been tested in terms of its reliability and validity. Using

Cronbach's alpha, the alpha for the items was .86, which indicates a highly acceptable consistency and the mean and standard deviation were 3.22 and 0.97 respectively. The questionnaire responses were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0.

The qualitative approaches used in this study were focus group interviews and journal writing activity. This study used Dorneyi and Scott's (1997) types of communication difficulties in organising questions for both interviews and the journal writing activity. According to Kruger and Casey (2000), focus group interviews are very beneficial in investigating respondents' personal experiences. Thus, to identify the usual oral communication difficulties faced by these students, two focus group interview sessions were done with 16 students from the total number of respondents. The students were divided into two groups because eight persons per group is the ideal number for a researcher to conduct this kind of interview (Kruger 2002). Ten persons might be reasonable but twelve will provide the researcher with invalid data since respondents have limited chances to talk. The questions posed were open-ended and the discussions were recorded using an audio and video recorder after securing consent from the respondents. The researchers conducted the interviews using simple English so that the respondents can understand the intended meaning of the questions. The students were able to understand the questions posed to them but they were informed that they could reply in Malay as this study did not intend to measure the learners' English language proficiency. Majority of learners used Malay in the interviews but some students answered in English. With the use of learners' native language, it was felt that the information could be conveyed comprehensively with detailed examples from the students. The interviews required learners to discuss and explain the difficulties they face when engaging in English oral communication activities. The researchers guided the discussion with regard to four difficulties provided by Dornyei and Scott (1997). Each session lasted between 20-30 minutes on average. The second instrument for the qualitative approach (the journal writing activity) was conducted to cover the lack of respondents' voice since some learners tend to forget things or are discouraged to speak in front of others. After the respondents completed the focus group interview sessions, they were given a booklet containing questions for the journal writing activity. There were four questions posted which began with general questions and ended up with more specific questions. Written responses in the journal writing activity served to assist shy respondents who might have been discouraged to speak during the focus group interview sessions.

In analysing the data from the focus group interviews, the researchers used a method introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006) which is known as 'thematic analysis. This is a systematic analysis of frequency counts based on theme clusters. Since this study used the four types of communication difficulties identified by Dornyei and Scott (1997) to guide the interview questions, the researchers utilised the four types of communication difficulties as the main themes to analyse the qualitative data as these themes are relevant to the research questions and the results are represented from the data set (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 17-24). Before the analysis was made, the interview recordings were transcribed and coded for referencing purposes. For example, 'I1:R1' means 'Interview 1: Respondent 1' and the codes go numerically until the second interview session and the last respondent. The information collected was based on learners' experiences when they are involved in English oral communication activities. In the first step, the researchers read and re-read the interview transcriptions and took notes of the data. While reading, the researchers paid close attention to similar responses from different respondents and grouped them into factors that could be grouped into the identified themes. At this stage, the researchers grouped data according to factors that contributed to each theme. Then the researchers developed the coding system for all factors in order to avoid confusion. The coding system used was as follows: 'RD1' refers

to the first factor in the *Resource Deficit* theme, 'TP1' refers to the first factor in *Processing Time Pressure* theme, and 'OWP1' refers to the first factor in *Own-performance Problems* theme and 'OPP1' refers to the first factor in *Other-performance Problems* theme The coding proceeded numerically (RD2, RD3 and so forth) as the next factors were identified in the interview data.

The first factor of the *Resource Deficit theme* (RD1) was categorised when learners stated that they do not know how to use English words appropriately and construct English sentences properly (Jamshidnejad 2011). This problem refers to the fact that learners' target knowledge system of speech production is not as complete as the learners' first language system. The second factor of this theme (RD2) was developed based on learners' doubts on how to apply English words and grammatical rules into sentences (Dornyei & Kosmos 1998). This problem refers to the fact that there is deficiency in the learners' target language linguistic knowledge which is also the reason why learners are unable to apply appropriate words according to the conversational context. The third factor (RD3) was constructed when learners made the claim that they were unable to recall words, rules and the system of the target language when they wanted to use them during conversation. This refers to the process of retrieving the words or structures of the target language and this process is not as automatic as the learners' first language.

The second theme, *Processing Time Pressure* was identified to be represented by two factors. The first factor (TP1) refers to learners' statement that they have to think for Malay words, translate and organise those words into English sentences. This problem refers to the time needed in order to process and plan the target language speech. The second factor (TP2) was developed when learners said that they needed time to think of suitable English words and their corresponding pronunciation so that their interlocutors can understand them (Dornyei & Scott 1995). This problem refers to the fact that learners are unable to process the production of target language on time.

The third theme, *Own-performance Problems*, consists of three factors related to the learners' problems. The first factor (OWP1) was identified when the learners mentioned that they usually use wrong words to express their idea or message. This problem refers to the fact that learners are using incorrect speech during English oral communication activities. The second factor (OWP2) was established when learners claimed that they are unable to pronounce words exactly as English native speakers do. This problem refers to the fact that learners are expressing less than perfect target language speech. The third factor (OWP3) was developed when learners expressed that they were confused about the correctness of using appropriate words. This problem refers to the learners' uncertainty about using the right words when communication orally in English.

The last theme, *Other-performance Problems* involves three factors. The first factor (OPP1) was classified for the problem of unclear message sent by the interlocutors. This is because, the interlocutor failed to utter the message clearly such as using different terms to refer to the same thing. The second factor (OPP2) was constructed based on the problem of unfamiliar words uttered by the interlocutors. This problem was attributed to the speakers' use of words, idioms or grammatical structures that were not available in the learners' English language repertoire. The third factor (OPP3) was developed based on the learners' statements that refer to the misinterpretation of the interlocutors' speech. This is because learners claimed that speakers use words that have more than one meaning and it confused learners to interpret the interlocutors' intended message.

For the journal writing activity, the data were analysed using Narrative Data Analysis and Interpreting which was developed by Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003). Since the data from this instrument aimed to complement the data gathered from the focus group interviews, the questions constructed were also guided by the four types of oral communication

difficulties identified by Dornyei and Scott (1997). The students were asked to answer four questions and these questions investigated the learners' experiences in dealing with difficulties encountered during English oral communication activities. In this method of analysis, the researchers read all the students' answer booklets repeatedly. This helps to identify the consistencies of the students' responses. At this stage, the researchers identified the problems and proceeded to group them into factors that connected to the main themes. As this method also requires the researchers to code the data, the researchers used the established factors previously identified in the focus group interview analysis.

RESULTS

RESULTS FROM QUALITATIVE DATA

This section presents the results obtained from the focus group interview as well as from the journal writing activity. Since the results originated from qualitative approaches, the results are presented according to the instruments used. The first section presents the results from the two focus group interview sessions. The data were coded as 'I1' for the first interview and 'I2' for the second interview. Meanwhile, the respondents were coded as 'R1' for the first respondent, 'R2' for the second respondents, and the code goes numerically to 'R8' for the last respondent. The qualitative data gleaned in this research aimed to answer the first research question. Since this study refers to the types of communication difficulties listed by Dornyei and Scott (1997), this research takes the four types of communication difficulties as the main theme for analysing the qualitative data. The main themes are as follows: *Resource Deficit, Processing Time Pressure, Own-performance Problems* and *Other-performance Problems*. Since the respondents responded in Malay, English translations for the extracts are provided. Table 2 below shows ten interview extracts taken from the interview sessions which are coded under the theme of Resource Deficit:

TABLE 2. Results for Communication Difficulties (Theme 1: Resource Deficit)

Data Extract	Coded for
Kadang-kadang tak tahu macam mana nak express words tu dalam discussion. (I1 : R5) *[sometimes I don't know how to express words during discussion]*	RD1) L2 system of speech production is not as complete as the L1 system.
Bagi saya kadang-kadang susah juga especially nak buat ayat. Tak tahu nak susun dia macam mana. (I1 : R3) *[Sometimes it's hard for me especially to construct sentences. I don't know how to organise them]*	RD1) L2 system of speech production is not as complete as the L1 system.
Masalahnya dia banyak, macam past tense, present tense, past continuous tense, dia ada banyak, tak tahu nak guna. (I1: R5) *[There are too many problems like past tense, present tense, past continuous tense, it's a lot (and) I don't know how to use them]*	RD2) Deficiency in the speaker's L2 linguistic knowledge.

(continued)

Data Extract	Coded for
Sebab kami macam risau takut benda yang kami cakap tu silap, macam past tense, present tense nak guna time bila. (I1 : R7) *[We worry what we say might be correct, for example when do we need to use the past tense and present tense]*	RD2) Deficiency in the speaker's L2 linguistic knowledge.
Sometimes when we want to talk but we do not know how to use the words in English. (I1 : R6)	RD1) L2 system of speech production is not as complete as the L1 system.
Kalau nak susun ayat, itu yang jadi problem. Tapi bila macam diberi instruction dalam bahasa Inggeris, saya boleh faham Cuma bila nak reply balik, susnan ayat tu, grammar, saya tak tahu. (I2 : R4) *[It is a problem when it comes to constructing sentence. But when instruction is given in English, I can understand it. It's just when I want to reply back, the sentence construction, the grammar, I don't know]*	RD1) L2 system of speech production is not as complete as the L1 system.
Dia jadi susah sebab lupa. Bahasa Melayu ingat, tapi bahasa Inggeris lupa. (I2 : R3) *It becomes difficult because I forgot (the word). I remember (the word) in Malay but not in English]*	RD3) The process of retrieving the words or structure is not as automatic as L1 speaking.
My grammar and the correct words to describe something (make people do not understand my speech). (I2 : R5)	RD2) Deficiency in the speaker's L2 linguistic knowledge.
Saya tak dapat nak translatekan balik satu-satu ayat tu. (I2 : R6) *[I did not manage to translate back the sentence one by one]*	RD2) Deficiency in the speaker's L2 linguistic knowledge.
Bila nak sebut perkataan yang lebih tinggi, bahasa yang lebih tinggi, yang itu tak retilah. (I2 : R4) *{I have no idea when it comes to sophisticated words and language}*	RD2) Deficiency in the speaker's L2 linguistic knowledge.

Table 2 shows that learners felt they did not know how to construct English sentences because of their limited vocabulary. Therefore, they think in Malay and translate each word into English. Table 3 below presents the results for the oral communication difficulties in the second theme of Processing Time Pressure. Seven extracts were identified for this theme:

TABLE 3. Results for Communication Difficulties (Theme 2: Processing Time Pressure)

Data Extract	Coded for
Nak susun siap-siap then baru boleh cakap. (I1 : R7) *[I have to organise (the words into sentence) only then I can say it]*	TP 1) Time to process and plan L2 speech.

(continued)

Sebab nak fikir ayat tu dulu, nak translate, then nak masukkan lagi sebab selalu kita gunakan simple English. Kalau kita nak gunakan yang macam advance tu, kita terfikir macam mana nak cari words. (I1 : R3) *[Now that I have to think first, translate it then join them because usually we just use simple English. If we are going to use an advanced English, we will always think on how to find words]*	TP 1) Time to process and plan L2 speech.
I need time to think how to pronounce the word. (I1 : R5)	TP 2) Speaker unable to process language on-time.
I can reply, but it takes time. I have to think first. (I2 : R2)	TP 1) Time to process and plan L2 speech.
I need to think what to say. (I2 : R3)	TP 1) Time to process and plan L2 speech.
Nak susun ayat tu. Nak susun bagi jadi satu ayat full. (I2: R1) *[I need to construct a full sentence first]*	TP 1) Time to process and plan L2 speech.
Sebab nak cari perkataan yang betul supaya orang mudah faham. (I2: R5) *[I look for the correct words so that people can understand me]*	TP 2) Speaker unable to process language on-time.

Results from Table 3 show that learners take too much time before producing English sentences. As shown in the table, learners usually think of words first then try to organise them into phrases and sentences before they converse the full sentence. In addition, limited vocabulary prevents learners from speaking in English. Table 4 below shows the data extract for these problems which are categorised under the theme of Own-performance Problems:

TABLE 4. Results for Communication Difficulties (Theme 3: Own-performance Problems)

Data Extract	Coded for
Mungkin sebab guna ayat yang salah atau tak pandai susun ayat. (I1: R1) *[Maybe I use the wrong words or I don't know how to organise the words]*	OWP1) Expressing incorrect speech.
Maybe because of the dialect. Macam Malaysia, kita punya pronounce bunyi lain. (I1: R4) *[Maybe because of the dialect. Malaysians produce different pronunciation]*	OWP2) Expressing less than perfect speech

I'm afraid that I'm using the wrong vocabulary. (I1 : R2)	OWP1) Expressing incorrect speech.
Bila kita salah cakap, orang akan mengata so kita takkan confident nak cakap benda tu. (I1: R6) *[People laugh when we use it (English words)wrongly so we lose confidence to speak (in English)]*	OWP1) Expressing incorrect speech.
Tapi kadang-kadang takut juga sebab kita tak tahu apa yang kita pronounce tu betul ke tak. So mungkin diorang tak faham. (I1: R6) *[We are not sure whether our pronunciation is right or wrong. People may not understand]*	OWP1) Expressing incorrect speech.
We are having difficult to translate the new words. (I2 : R1)	OWP3) the speakers' uncertainty about correctness or meaningful words
Because my pronunciation is incorrect. (I2 : R4)	OWP1) Expressing incorrect speech.

The researchers managed to ask the learners to provide details on why their interlocutors did not understand their speech. Based on their responses, the listeners usually faced difficulties in understanding them when they were giving presentations in class. According to the respondents, they frequently used incorrect sentence structure and pronunciation. Thus, people usually have problems in understanding what they were trying to say. Some of them used inappropriate words for certain contexts. On the other hand, it was identified that learners faced problems in trying to understand what their interlocutors say. Table 5 below depicts five extracts from the interview about other-performance problems:

TABLE 5. Results for Communication Difficulties (Theme 4: Other-performance Problems)

Data Extract	Coded for
Subjek kira-kira kan, kalau dalam Malay, word dia lain. Dalam English lain. And then ada istilah-istilah dia, ada satu term and then dia guna term yang lain pula. (I1: R5) *[Some English words have different reference in Malay especially in calculation subject. Lecturer use two different terms to refer to the same thing]*	OPP1) sender's problem in sending clear message.
Sometimes (cannot understand) when the bahasa Inggeris yang tinggi-tinggi tu. (I2: R3) *[Sometimes I cannot understand the advanced English]*	OPP2) L2 speaker has not acquired the words, idioms or grammatical structure that the conversational partner is using.
(cannot understand when) The bombastic word is used. (I2 : R4)	OPP2) L2 speaker has not acquired the words, idioms or grammatical structure that the conversational partner is using.

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(comtinued)

Sometimes when they come with slang and accent, I cannot understand. (I2 : R8)	OPP2) L2 speaker has not acquired the words, idioms or grammatical structure that the conversational partner is using.
Kadang-kadang ada words yang sama maksud, saya confuse. (I2: R3)	OPP3) L2 learner interprets a different meaning to the intended message.
[There are words that share similar meaning, I confuse]	

Data from Table 5 show that learners sometimes get confused with the words used by the interlocutors. Since they were identified as having limited vocabulary, new and sophisticated words used by the interlocutors might not be part of their linguistic repertoire. Learners also revealed they have difficulty with the interlocutors' various accents.

The journal writing reports provided by the 16 students revealed that learners usually faced difficulties with their lack of target language knowledge. The data identified several claims on uncertainty in using English vocabulary, grammar and structure. Entries from the journal writing activity were coded as 'JR1' to refer to "Journal of Respondent 1" and it goes to 'JR16' for "Journal of Respondent 16". Other than that, processing time pressure and other-performance problems were also among the difficulties encountered by the learners. Table 6 below shows data extracts of students' communication difficulties:

TABLE 6. Results for Communication Difficulties (Theme 1: Resource Deficit)

Data Extract	Coded for
Saya sukar berkomunikasi secara lisan dalam Bahasa Inggeris terutama dalam penggunaan kata dan makna, verb dan structure ayat yang ingin dibicarakan. (JR1)	RD1) L2 system of speech production is not as complete as the L1 system.
[It is difficult for me to communicate orally in English especially when it comes to the use of words and meaning, verb and sentence structure that are used]	RD2) Deficiency in the speaker's L2 linguistic knowledge
Kesukaran memahami maksud perkataan yang digunakan serta perkataan yang hendak digunakan. (JR2)	RD2) Deficiency in the speaker's L2 linguistic knowledge
[The difficulties in understand the meaning of the used words as well as the words that are going to be used.	RD3) The process of retrieving the words or structure not being as automatic as L1 speaking.
Kesukaran untuk memahami sesuatu perkataan yang baru. (JR3)	RD1) L2 system of speech production is not as complete as the L1 system.
[Difficult to understand new words]	
Suka translate ayat Bahasa Melayu kepada Bahasa Inggeris. Tidak pasti grammar. Lack of words to say. (JR4)	RD1) L2 system of speech production is as complete as the L1 system.
[Prefer to translate Malay sentences into English. Not sure of grammar. Lack of words to say]	RD2) Deficiency in the speaker's L2 linguistic knowledge
	RD3) The process of retrieving the words or structure not being as automatic as L1 speaking.

(continued)

Kesukaran untuk menyusun ayat dengan betul serta menyebut sebutan yang betul. (JR8)	RD1) L2 system of speech production is not as complete as the L1 system.
[Difficult to organise sentence correctly and pronounce with the exact pronunciation]	
	RD2) Deficiency in the speaker's L2 linguistic knowledge.
Kesukaran untuk menyusun ayat dengan betul dan menyebut sebutan yang betul. (JR9)	RD1) L2 system of speech production is not as complete as the L1 system.
[Difficult to organise sentence correctly and pronounce	RD2) Deficiency in the speaker's L2 linguistic
with the exact pronunciation]	knowledge.
Kesukaran ingin menyususn ayat dalam Bahasa Inggeris kerana takut berlaku kesilapan dalam tatabahasa dan maksud. Kadang-kadang saya juga takut tersalah sebut kerana boleh menyebabkan maksud yang lain.(JR10)	RD1) L2 system of speech production is not as complete as the L1 system.
	RD2) Deficiency in the speaker's L2 linguistic knowledge.
[Difficult to organise English sentence due to grammatical errors and meaning. Sometimes I'm afraid my pronunciation is wrong because it leads to another meaning]	
Problems that always occur when I communicate are sometimes, I forget the vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. (JR 11)	RD2) Deficiency in the speaker's L2 linguistic knowledge.
	RD3) The process of retrieving the words or structure is not as automatic as L1 speaking`
Terlupa tentang satu atau dua perkataan. Yang menjadi kesukaran ialah tatabahasa dan sebutan. (JR 12)	RD2) Deficiency in the speaker's L2 linguistic knowledge.
[Cannot remember some words. The difficulty is on the grammar and pronunciation]	RD3) The process of retrieving the words or structure is not as automatic as L1 speaking.

The results show that the learners have difficulties in constructing words into sentences during oral conversations with interlocutors. The learners delayed their English productions because they wanted to produce accurate pronunciations of English words. Some of them reported that they were uncertain of their word choice and grammar when speaking. Table 7 below presents the data extract for the theme on Processing Time Pressure:

TABLE 7. Results for Communication Difficulties (Theme 2: Processing Time Pressure)

Data Extract	Coded for
Ambil masa yang lama untuk menyusun ayat. (JR4)	TP 1) Time to process and plan L2 speech.
[Took a longer time to organise sentences]	

In contrast with the data from the resource deficit theme, only one claim was found from the journal writing activity which stated that the learner took a long time to process and plan for English speech. The learner claimed that he/she needed time to organise English

sentences before producing them. Table 8 shows the evidence for the theme on Own-performance Problems in English oral interaction:

TABLE 8. Results for Communication Difficulties (Theme 3: Own-performance Problems)

Data Extract	Coded for
Grammar saya tidak teratur sewaktu berkomunikasi dengan pihak lain. (JR5) *[My grammar is unorganised when I communicate]*	OWP2) Expressing less than perfect speech
Apabila ingin bercakap dalam Bahasa Inggeris, saya merasakan susunan ayat saya salah dan tunggang-langgang. (JR7) *[Whenever I feel like communicating in English, I feel that my sentence structure is incorrect and not organised]*	OWP1) Expressing incorrect speech.

Table 8 also includes the claims made for deficiency in self-expressions. The respondents refer to the incorrect expressions made by them. On the other hand, Table 9 below illustrates results for the theme on Other-performance Problems:

TABLE 9. Results for Communication Difficulties (Theme 4: Other-performance Problems)

Data Extract	Coded for
Tidak faham, confuse atau soalan yang diberikan terlalu laju. (JR4) *[Cannot understand, confuse or the question given is too fast]*	OPP1) sender's problem in sending clear message. OPP2) L2 learner has not acquired the words, idioms or grammatical structure that the conversational partner is using. OPP3) L2 learner interprets a different meaning to the intended message.

The last difficulty identified from the journal writing activity is that learners do not understand the interlocutor's speech. This is because the message sent by the speaker is not clear. As a result, learners are usually confused when they try to understand the message. This difficulty is identified as the interlocutors using words that are not within the learners' linguistic repertoire.

RESULTS FROM QUANTITATIVE DATA

Of all the coping strategies available for speaking problems, the findings reveal that *social-affecting strategies* have the highest mean score (M = 21.88), followed by *fluency-oriented strategies* (M = 20.22) and *accuracy-oriented strategies* (M = 15.99). Following this, *message abandonment strategies* (M = 13.23) and *negotiation for meaning strategies* (M = 13.17) are used averagely by the students. On the other hand, *attempt to think in English strategies* have the lowest mean (M = 7.07) followed by *nonverbal strategies* (M = 7.26) and *message reduction and alteration strategies* (M = 11.02). The mean, standard deviations and rank of the strategies are shown in Table 10 below:

TABLE 10. Mean, standard deviation and rank of strategy use in coping with speaking problems

Strategies	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Rank
Social-affecting strategies	21.88	3.328	1
Fluency-oriented strategies	20.22	3.335	2
Negotiation for meaning strategies	13.17	2.636	5
Accuracy oriented strategies	15.99	2.840	3
Message reduction & Alteration strategies	11.02	1.645	6
Nonverbal strategies	7.26	1.679	7
Message abandonment strategies	13.23	2.273	4
Attempt to think in English strategies	7.07	1.335	8

The findings from the second part of the questionnaire reveal the use of coping strategies for listening problems. The findings show that *negotiation for meaning strategies* have the highest mean (M = 17.43), followed by *fluency-maintaining strategies* (M = 16.62) and *word-oriented strategies* (M = 14.29). *Less active listener strategies* scored the lowest mean (6.85), followed by *nonverbal strategies* (M = 6.85) and *getting the gist strategies* (M = 12.41). The *scanning strategies* (M = 14.17) ranked number four of all coping strategies for listening problems. The mean, standard deviation and rank of the coping strategies with listening problems are presented in Table 11 below:

TABLE 11. Mean, standard deviation and rank of strategies use in coping with listening problems

Strategies	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Rank
Negotiation for meaning	17.43	3.105	1
Fluency-maintaining	16.62	2.852	2
Scanning	14.17	2.090	4
Getting the gist	12.41	2.331	5
Non-verbal strategy	6.93	1.552	6
Less active listener	6.85	1.452	7
Word oriented	14.29	2.388	3

DISCUSSION

The communication difficulties faced by the UiTM Diploma of Hotel Management students are similar to the four categories of communication difficulties stated by Dornyei and Scott (1997) which are (i) Resource Deficit, (ii) Processing Time Pressure, (iii) Own-performance Problem and (iv) Other-performance problems. Based on the thematic analysis, narrative data analysis and interpreting methods, the results revealed that the reason why learners faced the first category of oral communication difficulties is because they have limited English vocabulary. According to Ting and Lau (2008), this limitation can lead learners to encounter sentence structure deficiency. This lack also affects the correct use of grammatical structure (Raed Latif Ugla, Nur Ilianis Adnan & Mohamad Jafre Zainol Abidin 2013). Insufficient knowledge of the target language impairs learners' pronunciation and this leads to the misinterpretation towards the intended message (Huang 2010, Halizah Omar, Mohamad

Amin Embi & Melor Md Yunus 2012). All these circumstances provide proof that ESL learners usually face the problem of resource deficit during English oral communication activities.

Other than resource deficit, it was found that learners take a longer time before producing English sentences. Based on the results, learners require time to process and plan for their second language speech (Jamshidnejad 2011). Extracts from the previous section show that learners search for Malay words and create sentences; only then do they translate them into English sentences. This shows that learners are unable to process the target language on time (Dornyei & Scott 1995).

The third difficulty identified was when learners constructed English sentences wrongly. The data show that learners admitted that they used incorrect pronunciation and vocabulary when constructing English sentences. According to Halizah Omar, Mohamad Amin Embi and Melor Md Yunus (2012), when learners use inappropriate words, they fail to connect words into the context that they are involved in. This indicates the learners' weakness in expressing correct speech and using meaningful words (Dornyei & Scott 1995).

The learners' limited knowledge of English language hindered their ability to understand what their interlocutors have said. The findings show that interlocutors sometimes used sophisticated English words that the learners have not heard before. Therefore, the learners cannot understand the message because their vocabulary, knowledge of idioms and sentence structure of the target language have not yet reached the level of the interlocutors (Jamshidnejad 2011). It could also mean that the interlocutors have failed to use simple expressions and this leads to the problem of sending unclear messages (Dornyei & Scott 1995).

The quantitative data analysed the coping strategies used for speaking and listening problems during learners' English oral communication activities. The strategies were discussed according to the ranking obtained from the SPSS analysis because this study aimed to show the pattern and preferred strategies used by the respondents. According to the mean, *social-affecting strategy* is the preferred strategy used by the learners in handling communication breakdowns. This strategy includes the learners' efforts to enjoy themselves in oral English communication activities. O'Malley and Chamot (1999) stated that second language learners should get involved and must not be afraid of making mistakes in producing target language speech. The second strategy employed by the learners is *fluency-oriented strategies*. According to Dornyei and Scott (1995), the desire to produce accurate target language pronunciation or foreignising, is one of the strategies that learners should try in target language conversation. The *accuracy-oriented strategy* is the third strategy employed by the learners during communication in English. Siti Rohani (2013) reported that Indonesian learners also prefer this strategy for oral communication activities during their English class. The fourth strategy used by the learners is *message abandonment strategy*, a strategy that is used by the low achievers and has been classified as the negative strategy (Nakatani 2006). Ting and Phan (2008) also reported that *message abandonment* was among the favourite attempts made by learners if they fail to repair their utterances. The fifth strategy used by the learners is known as *negotiation for meaning*, a strategy that includes learners' attempt to give example in clarifying the listeners' understanding. Halizah Omar, Mohamed Amin Embi and Melor Md Yunus (2012) reported that second language learners clarify concepts by giving examples through pictures and videos. The next coping strategy for speaking problems used by the learners is *message reduction and alteration strategy*. This strategy sees learners altering the original message by using simple expressions. As this strategy was the least used strategy, it indicates that the learners rarely use the strategy; thus their communication stops halfway because mutual understanding is not achieved (Clark 1994). Raed Latif Ugla, Nur Ilanis Adnan and Mohamad Jafre Zainol Bidin (2013) reported

that the same strategy was used by ESL learners in a public university. The seventh coping strategy employed by the learners is *nonverbal strategy* where learners employ gestures, facial expressions and other body language as a way of providing hints to their interlocutors. This strategy is seen as an effective attempt to achieve mutual understanding between the speaker and listener (Bavelas, Coats & Johnson 2002, Clark & Krych 2004, Huang 2010). The least preferred strategy applied by the learners is the *attempt to think in English.* Almost all the respondents stated that they never tried to think in English while engaging in English conversations. Huang (2010), Larenas (2011) and Siti Rohani (2013) also reported that this strategy is not the first choice of language learners to cope with speaking problems.

For the coping strategies used by learners to overcome listening difficulties, the results revealed that the most preferred strategy is *negotiation for meaning*. This is in line with what was stated by Wilkes-Gibbs and Clark (1992) who said that mutual understanding is achieved when interlocutors negotiate and coordinate the things that are discussed. The second strategy used by the learners is known as *fluency-maintaining*. This strategy allows learners to pay attention to speakers' pronunciation and sometimes a question is asked to assist learners' understanding. The results of this study concur with Siti Rohani's (2013) findings that this strategy is applied in order to overcome communication difficulties. The next strategy used by the students is *word oriented*. This result contradicts with Siti Rohani's (2013) findings where according to her study, Indonesian learners did not favour this strategy and it has become among the least used strategy by them. The fourth strategy employed by the learners is the *scanning strategy*. It was selected in order for the listener to acquire some hints of the speakers' intended message. This result concurs with Clark and Krych's (2004) statement where understanding is achieved through voices. Both participants pay attention to each other's utterances in order to understand the main points of the message. Following this, the *getting the gist strategy* was ranked number five. Compared to the previous strategy, this strategy looks at the general ideas of speakers' messages. Rather than paying attention to each word, learners try to guess the overall meaning from what was heard. Dornyei and Scott (1995) also mentioned that guessing is a strategy that is usually performed by learners in understanding the message. The *nonverbal strategy* is the sixth strategy chosen by the learners and includes actions like facial expressions, hand gestures and other body languages to show that the learners do not understand the speech. It believed that nonverbal expression matters in achieving the intended meaning during a conversation (Bavelas, Coates & Johnson 2002, Clark & Krych 2004). Finally, the lowest ranking selected by the learners to overcome their listening problems was accorded to the strategy labelled *less active listener strategy*. This strategy represents the negative behaviour of the low achievers whereby they try not to think and instead they rely heavily on familiar words they encounter to figure out the meaning. This result is also reported by Siti Rohani (2013) in her study on investigating the choice of communication strategies used by Indonesian language learners.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the coping strategies from the two language skills (speaking and listening), it is suggested that ESL teachers create situations that can encourage learners to produce English oral interactions because such interactions can provide learners with opportunities to explain concepts and help them to vocalise concrete meaning. This is because, by vocalising concrete meaning, learners can lean their tendency towards English oral communication activities (Huang 2010). In addition, the current method to get the learners to approach oral communication activities is by producing a task-based learning style of teaching. Traditional learning methods (by posting comprehension check questions) limit

the learners' opportunity to have two-way communication between learners and the instructor (Mohamed Ismail Ahmad Shah & Normala Othman 2006). Task-based learning is the ideal approach that can enhance learners' communication ability and through problem solving activities, teachers get the chance to observe how learners construct and reconstruct their interlanguage (Ellis 2003).

Learning about communication strategies enables learners to become both the active speaker and listener. Therefore, the teaching should be done directly by explaining the types of each strategy (Celce-Murcia, Dorneyi & Thurrell 1998). By doing this, teachers are creating awareness towards the availability of strategies that can help learners to not give up in English conversation (Dornyei 1995, Faucette 2001). Apart from that, the practice of using communication strategies should be regarded as a natural learning process because strategies in handling communication breakdowns is communicative itself (Clark & Wasow 1998).

The current study investigated the types of oral communication difficulties and coping strategies faced and used by the Diploma of Hotel Management students at UiTM. The study looked at two important skills in oral communication which are speaking and listening. It is hoped that there will be more researchers who will investigate the use of communication strategies by focusing on these skills in future in order to support the findings above. It is also hoped that further in-depth studies on oral communication difficulties, both in linguistic and non-linguistic problems, can be conducted. Lastly, it is hoped that the findings of this study can prompt other researchers who are interested in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) to further validate and verify the results on a larger scale, across various levels and fields of studies.

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