

*English as the World's Lingua Franca and the Challenges of Developing Strategic Competence*

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**Abstract**

A common theme in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) research is a tendency to focus on pragmatics and accommodation with regards to turn-taking, the status of the interlocutors, and contextual usage. There tends to be less research on the usage of directives for task-specific purposes where a common outcome is sought. Such task-based communication requires that the participants be able to facilitate understanding to achieve such specific results. This paper will discuss a research plan which proposes the implementation of a pedagogy for communication strategies where international university students are the target recipients. The plan posits the relevance of strategic competence within English as a Lingua Franca while exploring a pedagogy of communication strategies to be adapted to university classrooms. The pedagogy focusses on achievement strategies through direct methods such as circumlocution, approximation, and retrieval. Interactional Strategies such as comprehension checks and expressing misunderstanding will also be taught. Through a task-based assessment based on Yule's theory of *Referential Communication*, the researcher intends to discover which strategies enhance communicative performance. The paper concludes by highlighting the relevance of developing the strategic competence of students in an increasingly competitive global market while offering recommendations for further integration into foreign language classrooms.

Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca, Strategic Competence, Task-based Communication

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## **Introduction**

In making a case for the improvement of strategic competence regarding university education and the use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), it is worth remembering that strategic competence is an integral component of communicative competence, interactional competence, and the resulting communicative performance. Communicative competence is a theory as described by Canale and Swain (1980) to consist of the three necessary competencies that are grammatical, social, and strategic. Because of these three competencies, most students can communicate with ease in their L1, and the necessity of strategic competence where communication strategies are used to maintain dialogue is less apparent. When speaking their L1, most interlocutors have an easier time co-constructing meaning based on shared linguistic and social norms that allow the conversation to flow. Thus, interactional competence comes more naturally with regards to initiating and maintaining conversations within the speech communities of the speaker's L1 and is easier to manage.

When speaking a second language, the risk of communication breakdown increases depending on the language skills of the interlocutors involved. Each interlocutor is unique, and in L2 dialogues they may lack the shared linguistic and cultural resources that they would have when communicating in their L1. The L2 hindrances to communication could be physical with regards to the way one articulates pronunciation, or cognitive with regards to processing meaning and understanding, or some combination of both. These types of breakdowns require specific strategies to be implemented to keep the communication going. If such hindrances are perceived to be too great, it creates obstacles in adapting and integrating across linguistic and cultural boundaries, and as a result, communicative performance is affected. The stakes become even higher when traversing these limitations requires a task to be performed or a problem to be solved. Such interactions require achieving the desired result which will depend on an even greater understanding of one another and a higher degree of strategic competence.

As English continues to dominate the world stage, foreign language learners studying in an international university need to demonstrate confidence in being able to negotiate meaning or express nonunderstanding in situations where the difference between understanding and misunderstanding could be vital to job performance or have other real world consequences. With regards to this research, the directive and informative functions of language are of the utmost importance because of the roles they play in problem-solving as it relates to task-based communication. Through an awareness of and instruction in methods for negotiating meaning, strategic competence, and as a result, both communicative competence and communicative performance can be improved. These improvements will lead to the better usage of ELF by students at Assumption University (AU) where this research will take place.

## Background

International universities are a microcosm of multilingual interactions among students and faculty alike. On any given day, it is possible to hear a variety of languages being spoken. This array of cultural diversity is no different for a university like AU where students and faculty are drawn from all over the world. Some features distinguish AU from other international universities. For one, AU is located in Thailand, and as a result, the majority of its students are Thai. For years 2014 to 2016, AU had 11,115 students enroll with 1,640 of them being international students from outside of Thailand. Even with a predominance of Thai Students, according to the Assumption University Undergraduate Bulletin (2011: 11), “English is the officially approved medium of instruction at Assumption University. Five courses are in the Thai language but only for Thai speaking students. Students whose native tongue is not Thai follow the same courses in English.” Therefore as a requirement to be considered an international university, and to be able to accommodate a culturally diverse student body and faculty, English is the lingua franca used to bridge the communication gap. As English is the official medium of communication, there is a necessity for remedial English to be taught to those students who may not meet the language requirements needed to perform in an international academic setting. Such instruction is the responsibility of the *Institute for English Language Education* (IELE). In 2016, there were approximately 8,413 students enrolled in IELE courses. According to the IELE (2016) website, the two core ideals of the IELE are its *Vision* and *Mission*.

According to their vision, the IELE prides itself in being a “leading institute in English language education and research in Thailand known for its excellence” with “professional instructors, motivated and proficient students, state of the art courses and technologies” and an international environment. The students of IELE are seen as “individuals who are linguistically competent and able to communicate effectively in English both in speech and in writing” while seeking to improve competency and have critical thinking skills. The mission of the IELE is about enabling the students “to acquire English language skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and critical thinking” while being “exposed to World Englishes” to “function successfully in a multicultural environment using global English.”

Of these two ideals, some points are of particular interest for this research. Regarding the vision of the IELE, the author aims to explore and improve the English proficiency of the IELE’s students with regards to strategic competence and overall communicative performance. Such an endeavor will expound upon the interactional competence of the students as well by challenging their listening and speaking skills through task-based interaction while using oral ELF standards as a benchmark for assessment.

All the points regarding the *mission* of the IELE have direct and consequential effects on the development of this research and in particular, its methodology. Enabling the student’s ability to think critically while speaking English is tantamount not only to the ideals of the IELE, but also the author. By pursuing the improvement of strategic competence through task-based endeavors, “research suggests that pairing

communication strategies with appropriate metacognitive strategy training could enhance learners' awareness of strategy use and develop their communicative skills" (Nakatani 2005: 78). Ultimately, for students to approach better fluency in English, they need to consider not just what they are learning, but how and why they are learning it. The pedagogy to be used for the instruction of communication strategies intends to address these deeper issues of second language acquisition. These factors concerning the IELE's vision and mission have also helped to shape the rationale for this project.

## **Rationale**

Three core elements have been chosen based on their merits with regards to teaching and assessing the IELE's students' ability to negotiate meaning while communicating. They are ELF, Strategic Competence, and Task-Based Communication. Each of these elements is of equal importance to this proposal and follow no order of priority or hierarchy. Individually, each item has a wealth of research to support it and based on such; the author has chosen to combine the three.

## **ELF**

Many Assumption University students share neither a common culture nor a common mother tongue. As a result, English is a contact language in that it is the only language they share and are able to communicate with. Thus, previous studies of ELF tend to focus on the ethnography of its speakers. For example, many academics such as Jenkins (2002, 2007, 2009), Kirkpatrick (2007, 2010), and Seidlhofer (2004, 2008, 2011), have demonstrated the effectiveness of ELF in the communicative engagement of social settings involving people of different ethnicities. These studies tend to focus on such interactions through the lens of pragmatics and accommodation with regards to turn-taking, the status of the interlocutors, and contextual usage. These studies are socially oriented towards the study of interactional competence with regards to conversational maintenance. Even though the negotiation of meaning is touched upon to different degrees of detail within these studies, strategic competence is for the most part, not the focal point. One exception being Jenkins (2000) *The Phonology of English as an International Language*, with the establishment of the Lingua Franca Core (LFC). Through the isolation of specific segmental and suprasegmental factors, Jenkins was able to address specific intelligibility issues. This categorization of the LFC provides the metric for investigating strategic competence in this study.

The rationale is that by using the LFC as a standard regarding segmentals, suprasegmentals, and articulatory settings for pronunciation, the author will be able to assess which communication problems occur while underpinning why students use certain strategies instead of others. This rationale runs congruent with the idea that the students' achievement of intelligibility is usually a reciprocal effort as opposed to a singular one. In previous ELF research, that mutual intelligibility has been analyzed as a product of the ability to accommodate one another. This research proposal does not shy away from speech accommodation, but would rather examine its role in problem-solving with regards to strategic competence.

## **Strategic Competence**

As previously stated, university students using ELF need to be able to give and receive instructions while dealing with any misunderstandings during such interactions. With regards to listening and speaking in a foreign language such as English, studies have shown that breakdowns in communication frequently occur where reciprocal communication is required. Communication breakdowns arise when it comes time to demonstrate that the language learner understands what they have been told at that very moment. A pedagogical example is with common gap fill exercises where students are required to give each other the missing information that is necessary to complete the exercise. Some students can complete such tasks with relative ease while others have problems regarding their ability to convey meaning through giving instructions, or the opposite, to receive and comprehend the instructions. Those that don't immediately understand have a tendency to employ the strategy of what Firth (1996: 243) refers to as "let it pass" instead of acknowledging the misunderstanding as it occurs. These difficulties with strategic competence are not just isolated events by students of the IELE at Assumption University. Such observations have been made before by other researchers such as Dornyei (1995), Dornyei and Thurell (1991), and Dornyei and Scott (1995) with regards to strategic competence in general. Wei (2011) also provides examples regarding Chinese foreign language learners, and Kongsom (2009) has even conducted research with regards to Thai university students.

## **Task-based Communication**

Through task-based teaching and assessment, this study aims to investigate ELF's effectiveness in a communicative setting where it is imperative that common understanding be reached. In this regard, some of the pragmatic and sociolinguistic considerations of fluency hold less importance than the ability to demonstrate the strategic competence needed to negotiate meaning and be able to complete the task. This demonstration is important because it is the author's hypothesis that many IELE students are not as strategically competent for task-based ELF communication as they could be. Tasks are essential to this research because of their ability to elicit communication strategies from the participants. They provide a variety of methods for ascertaining information while also being creative and exciting instructional tools. Through open and closed tasks, reciprocal tasks, focussed and unfocussed tasks, among others, instruction will be given to the students on ways to improve strategic competence. A closed focussed task will also be used to conduct an assessment which will facilitate a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the students' performance. Through video recordings and discourse transcriptions, the author will analyze both a control and experimental group. From the transcribed videos, the author will target specific incidences of miscommunication and the related strategies used. While transcribing the discourse analysis, the LFC will be consulted to understand why the strategies were used. Through research dependent on task-based instruction and assessment, the following objectives need to be met to answer the research questions.

## Objectives

1. The primary purpose of this research is to raise awareness of the inherent value of strategic competence among IELE students by helping them to establish a better understanding of their English language abilities.
2. To develop and implement a pedagogy for teaching communication strategies that encourages students to focus on achievement strategies to negotiate meaning while improving their overall spoken English.
3. To bolster students' confidence so that they are more willing to communicate because of their capacity to ascertain task-based goals through the negotiation of a common understanding.
4. To investigate and develop a better understanding of the relationship between communication strategies, English as a Lingua Franca, and Strategic Competence.

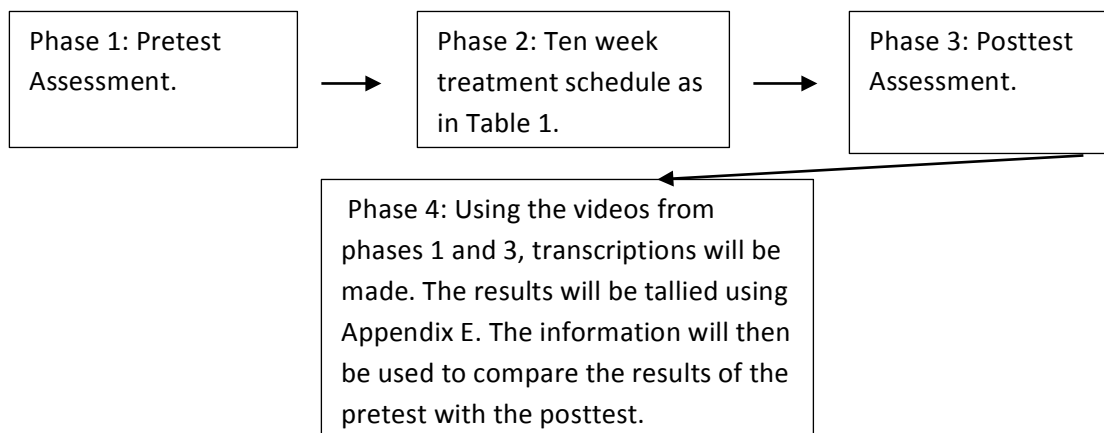
## Research Questions

1. Which of the Lingua Franca Core features are most dominant in the students' language?  
How do such features affect the students' communication?
2. What are the dominant communication strategies used for ELF task-based communication by IELE students?
3. How significant is the correlation between better overall communicative performance and receiving the treatment?

## Participants

The participants in this research will consist of 60 students from the BG1002 English course at Assumption University. Each participant is required to be a non-native speaker of English and to possess a "functional" ability of spoken English. It is believed that students from IELE's BG1002 classes are most suitable because they have completed the other foundation courses offered by the IELE.

## Figure 1: Phases of Research



## Treatment Outline

The treatment will consist of ten classes that are one hour long for a total of ten hours. After the ten hours of instruction are complete, the posttest assessment will commence. Through this pedagogy, the author will instruct the participants on the usage of the communication strategies found in Table 1. Each week will have separate exercises about the strategy to be taught and will outline the key concepts of each strategy while providing examples. “Task-based language teaching constitutes a strong version of *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)*,” (Ellis 2003: 30) and since a task is already being used as an assessment tool, the author believes that tasks can also be pertinent as tools of instruction. Nunan (2004: 4) relates this pertinence in that “a pedagogical task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning.” So by using tasks for both assessment and CLT, the participants will become more comfortable with the reciprocal aspects of language usage. Thus, with regards to this pedagogy, the target language of ELF needs to factor in reciprocity where accommodation and communication strategies are the focus, and the meaning to be expressed needs to be intelligible so that directives can be followed. Nunan (ibid: 35-37) provides seven principles for task-based language teaching which are scaffolding, task dependency, recycling, active learning, integration, reproduction to creation, and reflection. Scaffolding requires that the lessons and materials provide a framework of support in which ideas and concepts build upon each other. This framework of support also relates to task dependency in that each task relates to and builds upon the one that has come before. “Recycling allows learners to encounter target language items in a range of different environments, both linguistic and experimental.” Active learning is making sure that learners are “actively using the language they are learning.” Integration is making sure that learners are “taught in ways that make clear the relationships between linguistic form, communicative function, and semantic meaning.” Reproduction to creation is the idea that that language learners need to be able to use the taught forms in creative ways. Finally, there needs to be an opportunity for learners to reflect on what they are learning and how well they use it. These seven principles are to be considered when introducing the pedagogical sequence of the tasks to be used for teaching accommodation and communication strategies to improve Strategic Competence and Communicative Performance. Nunan (ibid: 31-35) proposes a six-step procedure that requires schema building, controlled practice, authentic listening practice, focus on linguistic elements, freer practice, and finally, the introduction of the pedagogical task. The example steps given here will reflect a general framework for teaching the communication strategies found in Table 1.

## **Treatment Outline: Class Duration: 1 Hour**

- **Step 1 Schema Building**

This step will be used to introduce what communication strategies and Accommodation are along with the purpose and definition of the strategies to be taught in the given lesson. The first lesson will cover the concept of accommodation and some strategies that will directly affect it. The focus will be the importance of convergence with regards to reaching a mutual understanding. This convergence comes from having confidence in one's own ability to communicate rather than being overly concerned with "errors." This step will also require the teaching of expressions and vocabulary that may be essential to using each communication strategy effectively.

- **Step 2 Controlled Practice**

In the controlled practice, the learners will use Accommodation and the communication strategies in a controlled environment that will be specific to the function of the strategy needed.

- **Step 3 Authentic Listening Practice**

In this step, the researcher will provide examples of "authentic or simulated" exchanges where the communication strategies are being used. These exchanges are intended to build upon the knowledge acquired from step 2.

- **Step 4 Focus on Linguistic Elements**

The linguistic elements referred to in this step are those that may interfere with intelligibility such as lexicogrammar or phonology. For example, learners may listen again to the exchanges from step 2 and identify what elements are causing the problems with intelligibility and what communication strategies could be used to help remedy the miscommunication.

- **Step 5 Provide Freer Practice**

All the steps up to this point will have led to spoken interactions that are very structured with the language learners reproducing what they have been instructed to do. For the learners to internalize what they have learned, "they should be encouraged to extemporize, using whatever language they have at their disposal to complete the task... Those who innovate will be producing what is known as 'pushed output' (Swain 1995) because the learners will be 'pushed' by the task to the edge of their current linguistic competence."



**Table 1: 10 Week Treatment Schedule**

Class	Subject Matter
1	Will introduce accommodation and communication strategies.
2	Performance Problem-Related Strategies: Self Repair and Other Repair.
3	<b>Direct:</b> ( <i>Resource deficit-related strategies</i> ) Circumlocution (Paraphrasing), Approximation, All Purpose Words, Literal Translation, Retrieval, and Mime.
4	<b>Interactional:</b> ( <i>Resource deficit-related strategies</i> ) Own-performance problem-related Strategies: Comprehension Check.
5	<b>Interactional:</b> Other-performance problem-related strategies: Asking for repetition, clarification, confirmation, and expressing misunderstanding.
6	<b>Indirect Strategies:</b> Own-performance problem-related strategies: Verbal Strategy Markers.
7	<b>Review:</b> Self Repair and Other Repair.
8	<b>Review:</b> Direct and Indirect Strategies.
9	<b>Review:</b> Interactional Strategies.
10	<b>Reinforcement:</b> All Strategies.

**Assessment**

Specific factors of language knowledge were considered in the development of the assessment task for this dissertation, and are based on what Ellis (2003: 27) refers to as the “transactional function, where language is used referentially to exchange information.” For our purpose, this sharing of information is in the form of directives and is considered to be a focused task. These focused directives are to be assessed on their communicative effectiveness that is determined by the usage of communication strategies to negotiate meaning with regards to intelligibility. For the task to be completed successfully, “speakers need to be able to identify and encode the referents they wish to communicate about” (ibid: 76).

A model for communicative effectiveness was developed by Yule (1997) with regards to *referential communication* where interlocutors exchange information by referring to the location of objects or people. The acts of reference were evaluated by how communicatively effective they were rather than their grammatical accuracy. The task devised as an assessment tool for this dissertation is an adaptation of Yule’s reference model combined with the research model of Shortreed (1993). Shortreed asked speakers to describe objects on a grid so that listeners could draw them onto an empty grid. Due to the task’s complexity regarding “less shared reference” and “more descriptive detail,” the results found that there was a great deal of “repair strategies” like “requests for confirmation” and “clarification” used (Ellis 2003: 94).

There are two elements in Yule’s model which are of considerable importance. The first element is that both participants in the task need to be able to identify the referent. Only the speaker will have a diagram that shows the location of the referent.

The listener will have to manifest and reproduce the referent in location as instructed by the speaker; hence the need to negotiate meaning by both interlocutors. Negotiation of meaning will also require a second element which requires the participants to be able to account for each other's role. They need to be able to recognize the importance of one another's perspective, make inferences of such, consider such inferences when communicating and respond to such communication accordingly. If both elements are adhered to accordingly, the task should be completed effectively with a high level of communicative performance which will make assessment easier.

The author will be looking at the overall performance of the participants while assessing their strategic skills. In this regard, the performance on the task becomes the construct that is the basis of assessment. As the construct, this task will be scored according to speed and the correctness of the resulting placement of the referent as previously discussed. This combination of speed and correct placement will create a score which will be deemed the variable considered *Communicative Performance*.

Once all the data with regards to *Communicative Performance* is collected from both the pretest and posttest, a statistical analysis comparing both groups will be performed. With these factors in mind, the task-based assessment of this dissertation would be categorized as what Baker (1989) as quoted in (Ellis 2003: 283-285) describes as an "indirect (analytic) and "performance referenced." It is *indirect* in that the context is "artificial" and based on "an analysis of the criterion performance in order to obtain measures of the specific features or components that comprise it. They seek to assess proficiency using specific linguistic measures, which are obtained from the test itself." Obviously, the task as such is an artificial construct. This artificiality enables the author to focus on the meaning negotiation component of the assessment. This act of negotiating meaning not only meets the criteria to classify this assessment as "performance-referenced," but also draws in the ELF context as a test "of the ability to perform specific functions or strategies." The findings of the assessment will be used to answer the research questions of the next section. It is the hope of the author, that by answering these questions, that a determination of the effectiveness of teaching *Strategic Competence* can be achieved.

## **Data Analysis**

The data compiled for each dyad and will be divided depending on whether the data belongs to the pretest or the posttest. There are many factors to be considered for analysis such as:

- Intelligibility and the issues that arise.
- Is communicative accommodation occurring?
- The communication strategies used.
- The number of times strategies are utilized.
- Timing with regards to how long a task takes to be completed.
- The accuracy of the completed tasks.

First, the recordings collected will be transcribed and then analyzed for raw data concerning miscommunication and the resulting communication strategies. Such strategies will be tallied and categorized according to Appendix A. The number of strategies used, completion time and task accuracy will all be dependent variables to be measured and compared between the two tests. The data analysis of these figures will create a better understanding of *Communicative Performance*. Using frequency distributions, a calculation of the frequency of communicative strategies used will determine which ones were relied upon the most. Such data is relevant with regards to the research questions to determine if strategies are being used, and if so, which ones. The statistical differences between the pre and posttest must be compared and evaluated to deduce accurate quantitative results. For such comparisons, paired t-Tests will be conducted.

### **Limitations**

The first limitation is the fact that only Assumption University students will be participating and the majority of which are Thai. For a proper sampling of international university students, it would be necessary to conduct multiple assessments in and outside of Thailand. Such an endeavor is too time-consuming and costly for a single researcher. Another limitation is with regards to the personalities and motivation of the participants. The students will be of a BG1002 level which most likely means that they are freshmen or second-year students. Issues of motivation will need to be addressed with regards to affective schemata, but there will always be a concern for what attitude the participants will have with regards to being assessed. For example, the use of a camera as a recording device may be deemed as intrusive by some students and will have an effect on their communicative performance by creating language usage anxiety.

### **Significance**

The importance of this research is that it offers another facet of understanding to the ELF research of the past. As mentioned, previous ELF research tends to focus on the pragmatic and sociological constructs of conversational English through ethnographic studies. Most notably, the use of speech accommodation in acts of convergence or divergence with regards to the interactions of different cultures. This research focusses on the strategies necessary for interlocutors to negotiate meaning and accurately perform tasks regardless of the ethnographic, sociolinguistic or pragmatic circumstances that may be present. These strategies are significant in that their relationship with intelligibility concerning the LFC will be established.

By focusing on instruction in communication strategies through task-based assessment to evaluate the pedagogical effectiveness of the lessons, different facets of strategic competence with regards to IELE students and ELF will be explored. This exploration is significant for curriculum development that focusses on interactional listening and speaking skills. This is particularly helpful for curriculums that tend to be oriented towards static one-way tasks that are devoid of interactional assessment. For example, if a speaking class only focusses on giving presentations, there may be a

small degree of interaction between class members, and between students and the instructor. Between students, such dialogues are not necessarily in English, and the interactions with the instructor are not formally assessed. Furthermore, there may also be no formal listening assessment, or as such, no interaction takes place. The pedagogy developed for this research intends to supplement the current curriculum of AU with a facet of communicative innovation that will improve IELE students' English language usage by developing their abilities to negotiate meaning to reach a better understanding. The focus on strategic competence and ELF will also have positive effects regarding interactional competence and or communicative competence as well.

## **Summary**

In summary, this paper has established the reasoning behind this research which is to explore, assess, and improve the communicative performance of IELE students through developing their ability to negotiate meaning via strategic competence. It is necessary to demonstrate to what extent strategic competence is taking place via task-based teaching and assessment. In answering the proposed questions, the author will be required to observe what comprehensible interlocution has occurred. Such questions require qualitative and quantitative data where the answers will substantiate and provide insight into how strategic competence can help students be better communicators in using ELF. In reiteration of the purpose of this research, it is not just about being able to get through a normal conversation; it is about using the language to get results. Thus a higher perspective of listening, speaking, and most importantly, student interaction is required. In short, through a trifecta of ELF, Strategic Competence, and Task-based instruction and assessment, the author intends to improve the communicative performance of international university students. In short, international university students need to be better prepared to handle situations involving miscommunication and misunderstanding as it is an important skill that will be invaluable to future employers such as those within the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) for example where English is used as the lingua franca.

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Appendix A

**Communication Strategies**

<b>Dyad Number:</b>	<b>Participant 1</b>	<b>Participant 2</b>	<b>Finish Time:</b>
<b>Communication Strategies:</b>			
<b>Accommodation Strategies:</b>	<b>Participant 1</b>	<b>Participant 2</b>	<b>Total Occurrences</b>
Attempts at Convergence			
<b>Direct Strategies:</b>	<b>Participant 1</b>	<b>Participant 2</b>	<b>Total Occurrences</b>
Circumlocution			
Approximation			
All Purpose Words			
Literal Translation			
Retrieval			
Mime			
<b>Own-performance:</b>	<b>Participant 1</b>	<b>Participant 2</b>	<b>Total Occurrences</b>
Self-repair			
Comprehension Check			
Verbal Strategy Markers			
<b>Other-performance:</b>	<b>Participant 1</b>	<b>Participant 2</b>	<b>Total Occurrences</b>
Other-repair			
Asking for repetition			
Asking for clarification			
Asking for confirmation			
Expressing Misunderstanding			