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CHALLENGES IN OVERCOMING THE USE OF TOPIC FRONTING AMONG TESL TRAINEES IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract:

Communication strategies include the use of nonverbal or paralinguistic communication strategies such as the use of mime, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact as well as the use of pauses for emphatic expressions could be assimilated. Communication strategies also include the use of verbal communication strategies which need to be learned and developed. One of the verbal communication strategies is a Malaysian classified variety, topic fronting. The issue is that, despite being an achievement communication strategy, topic fronting does not abide by the English language grammatical rule. Thus, a high use of this strategy among ESL learners might affect them adversely especially in academic discourse. This study looked into this strategy among the TESL trainees in two universities from two states in Malaysia. The findings obtained from their focus group discussions (FGD) identified the utilisation of topic fronting in online interactions and methods of overcoming it as well as the inculcation of suitable communication strategies. This study's findings show a low utilisation of topic fronting (1.142 per thousand words) with the highest theme on the "concession of topic fronting in teaching" at 2.20% average. In the effort to inculcate the TESL trainees' awareness of their use of topic fronting communication strategy, they need to be involved in active FGDs and be provided with communication strategy trainings on alternative strategies, specifically linguistic strategies like exemplification, circumlocution and paraphrasing.

Keywords:

Communication Strategies, Focus Group Discussion, Topic Fronting

Introduction

Strategic competence is the use of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to enhance the effectiveness of one's communication by emphasising the use of effective strategies in negotiation of meaning (Nakatani, 2005; Canale, 1983a, 1983b) and those developed in the first language can be freely transferred to second language use (Paramasivam, 2009; Kellerman, Ammerlaan, Bongaerts, & Poulisse, 1990; Bongaerts & Poulisse, 1989). Richards and Schmidt (2009) identified communication strategies as techniques that learners use to overcome communication problems caused by a lack of linguistic resources in order to convey their intended meaning. Prior to that, Færch and Kasper (1980) stated that learning could only happen with an achievement purposed communication strategy. One of the latest additions, Soekarno's (2019) study showed that communication strategy training is an effective method to implement the use of achievement strategies in technical interactions. Before the pandemic, research on the use of communication strategies were having a high impact on the education system but a high volume of studies has now moved into the new norm. This would necessitate the application of communication strategies into a wider perspective.

Background of the Study

In 2020, the world came face to face with a global pandemic from the COVID-19. Malaysia introduced the nationwide Movement Control Order (MCO) on 18 March 2020, which was initially announced to last to 14 April 2021. However, this was extended several times. The MCO prohibited mass gatherings, movement within the country, and most industries and all education institutions were ordered to close. Localised MCOs restrictions were introduced in the states of Sabah and Selangor were later introduced in response to high outbreaks in those states. The participants of this research were selected as samples from the severely afflicted states.

The world today is looking at a different environment not just in language learning but most importantly in communication practice. With this in mind, perception towards the use of communication strategies would also need to change. One of the aspects that is in need of change is the acceptance towards an obsolete norm, the use of topic fronting which was cited as a characteristic of the Malaysian variety of English by Benson (1990). Topic fronting is a communication strategy where the speaker makes use of subject plus predicate syntactic structure to parcel up information to emphasise the topic. This is derived from Clennell's (1995) Discourse-Based perspective communication strategies which uses topic plus comment syntactic structures to portion information. However, topic fronting is a deviation from acceptable Native speaker use of English. The outcome of this research should inculcate the use of suitable achievement strategies among Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) trainees which will be transferred to future ESL learners' global use.

Research Objective

This research was an exploratory case study on the use of topic fronting communication strategy in a TESL programme during a COVID-19 lockdown and its aftermath. The objective of the research was to examine the use of topic fronting communication strategy among TESL trainees in Malaysia. To address this objective, the study had obtained the opinion of the participants through several sessions of focus group discussion (FGD). The topics were:

> Session 1: Are there any changes in the use of communication strategies among TESL trainees in online interactions?
> Session 2: Are the participants aware of the use of topic fronting among TESL trainees or of their own use of the strategy?
> Session 3: Should TESL trainees accommodate the use of topic fronting in their interactions with future ESL learners?
> Session 4: How will TESL trainees inculcate the use of suitable achievement-based communication strategy in the interactions of ESL learners?

The utilisation of the opinionnaire from Soekarno's (2019) study, the Oral Communication Strategies Inventory (OCSI) as a supporting instrument to the interview response was intended to familiarise the participants with the communication strategies by allowing their self-reports of the frequency of their use of communication strategies in the OCSI before and following the FGD to create an awareness of the strategy use. Learners' awareness is an important element in gauging the effectiveness of the FGD in a sense that a higher awareness especially in more matured learners would create more confident interlocutors. This paper answered the research question of "How do TESL trainees inculcate the use of suitable communication strategy in the interactions of ESL learners to overcome the use of topic fronting?"

Research Gap

The post pandemic situation is forcing us to eradicate topic fronting as we face virtual interactions with a higher number of Native speakers than ever before. Past research had identified that topic fronting is a part of the communication strategy grouped as collaborative strategies together with tonicity devices and fillers, which are used in conversational maintenance. A useful strategy that emphasises the topic in order to prepare the interlocutor for details to follow, topic fronting is generally accepted as a Malaysian communication strategy. However, one still has to concede that despite its usefulness, topic fronting is a deviation from acceptable Native speaker use of English. Since in relation to the degree of English authenticity, the TESL programme has emphasised on being as authentic as possible, which brings us to question the principles for its tolerance on the use of topic fronting among future Malaysian language learners. This is not a singular representation as another course which deals with materials development also focuses on the authenticity of teaching and learning materials (Native speech) used by the trainees. This will eventually transpose to their future students who will be

significantly accustomed to the implementation of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in the Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menegah (KSSM). Thus, this study will look into the actual use of topic fronting among Malaysian learners as represented by the TESL trainees and possible methods to remove this anomaly in the effort to produce near Native speech pattern.

The Malaysian Use of Communication Strategies

Many second learners regard speaking ability as the measure of knowing a language and value ability to converse more than the ability to read write or comprehend oral language. On the other hand, many second language teachers view mastery of language as the ability to apply the learned rules such as syntactic features, vocabulary specifications and possible prosodic features, and they use drills and communicative practice to instil accuracy and confidence in speaking. Communicative competence is defined as comprising grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). When a communication problem crops up in a conversation, interactional modifications are utilised to bridge the gap and continue the conversation. Among the most prevalent of these interactional modification or communication strategies used among Malaysians are the use of fillers (Soekarno & Ting, 2014), code switching (David, 2013; Then & Ting, 2010) and topic fronting (Soekarno; 2019; Ting & Phan, 2008; Ting & Kho, 2008; Benson, 1990).

In Soekarno's (2019) study, the procedure of communication strategy training involving 23 limited English proficiency learners that was carried out over 13 sessions was observed, with each session focusing on a different communication strategy. The communication strategy training shows a decrease in hesitant speech as seen in the reduced use of fillers (Soekarno & Ting, 2021, 2020; Soekarno, 2019). The theoretical contribution of the study was in the identification of certain communication strategies which are more trainable and have greater impact on the communicative ability such as the use lexical repetitions which can create a better communicative impact instead of becoming a "disfluency" (Lennon, 1990).

The Issues of Topic Fronting

Fronting generally refers to any construction in which a word group that customarily follows the verb is placed at the beginning of a sentence under the English grammar (Nordquist, 2020). Identified as *"front-focus" or "preposing"*, this type of fronting has a variation of purposes in discourse, especially in the conservation of cohesion. It can be used to maintain the movement of textual information, express contrast, and provide emphasis to specific elements. When utilised in dialogues, topic fronting allows the speaker to place the focus at the beginning of a sentence to make a story more interesting. However, fronting can also trigger something called inverted subject-verb order (Pearce, 2007). By moving the subject out of its natural environment, it involves a shift of emphasis and represents another aspect to this focus device. This technique is a very common feature in Old English and this inverted order had an extensive dramatic force and was very distinctive of lively narrative sequences. A sample that still retained a kind of mock dramatic effect is shown here in Tolkien's work:

> Deep down here by the dark water lived Old Gollum, a small slimy creature.
> Suddenly came Gollum and whispered and hissed.
>
> (Tolkien, The Hobbit, chp. 5 p. 77)

As the above example illustrates, this construction always involves fronted phrases (e.g., directional and positional adverbials) and the verbs are intransitive (typical verbs of movement or location). In these examples, the verbs *"lived"* and *"came"* have shifted to precede their subject Old Gollum and Gollum. Further example of topic fronting from Wolcott and Vinciguerra (2011) shows that it is not suitable for technical utterances and second language teaching as this will create confusion especially among limited proficiency learners and absolute beginners, such as the famous Star Wars Jedi master Yoda**, "**Powerful you have become Dooku, the dark side I sense in you."

Cited as a characteristic of the Malaysian variety of English by Benson (1990), topic fronting is where the speaker makes use of subject plus predicate syntactic structure to portion the message by emphasising the topic. A deviation from acceptable native speaker use of English, but in the context of communication strategy use, topic fronting was viewed positively as it facilitated information transfer (Ting & Kho, 2009). They also stated that Clennell (1995) had identified this specific method of information transmission was familiar to his participant who was a Malay learner. The speaker made use of subject plus predicate syntactic structure to parcel up information to emphasise the topic (Ting & Phan, 2008) producing utterances such as, "The scope, it intends to find out the problem faced by them during teaching practice, and their effort in seeking help." Soekarno and Ting (2016) reported that since proficient speakers are better at using discourse strategies for meaning enhancement (Ting & Phan, 2008), it is beneficial to train less proficient speakers to develop "collaborative discourse skills" (Clennell, 1995, p.16). Nakatani (2010) also focussed on only achievement strategies, and this was the approach used in the present study.

All these studies have shown the success of communication strategy training in both ESL and EFL contexts (Kaivanpanah & Yamouty, 2009) while Soekarno's (2019) study expands the domain to the EOP context involving technical further than the general English language. At the end of her research, Soekarno (2019) indicates that for communication strategy training to be effective, it is better to commence with the tonicity devices, moving on to time management, then to lexical repetition before proceeding to the negotiation of meaning strategies and finally concluding with lexical strategies to suit the learners with lower-level language proficiency or the absolute beginner. These group of learners would be similar to the ESL learners that the current TESL trainees will face in their practical training and future employment. The researcher has observed from her participation in the TESL programme that absolute beginners is quite a common group in several areas in the state of Sabah and would be rampant topic fronting user.
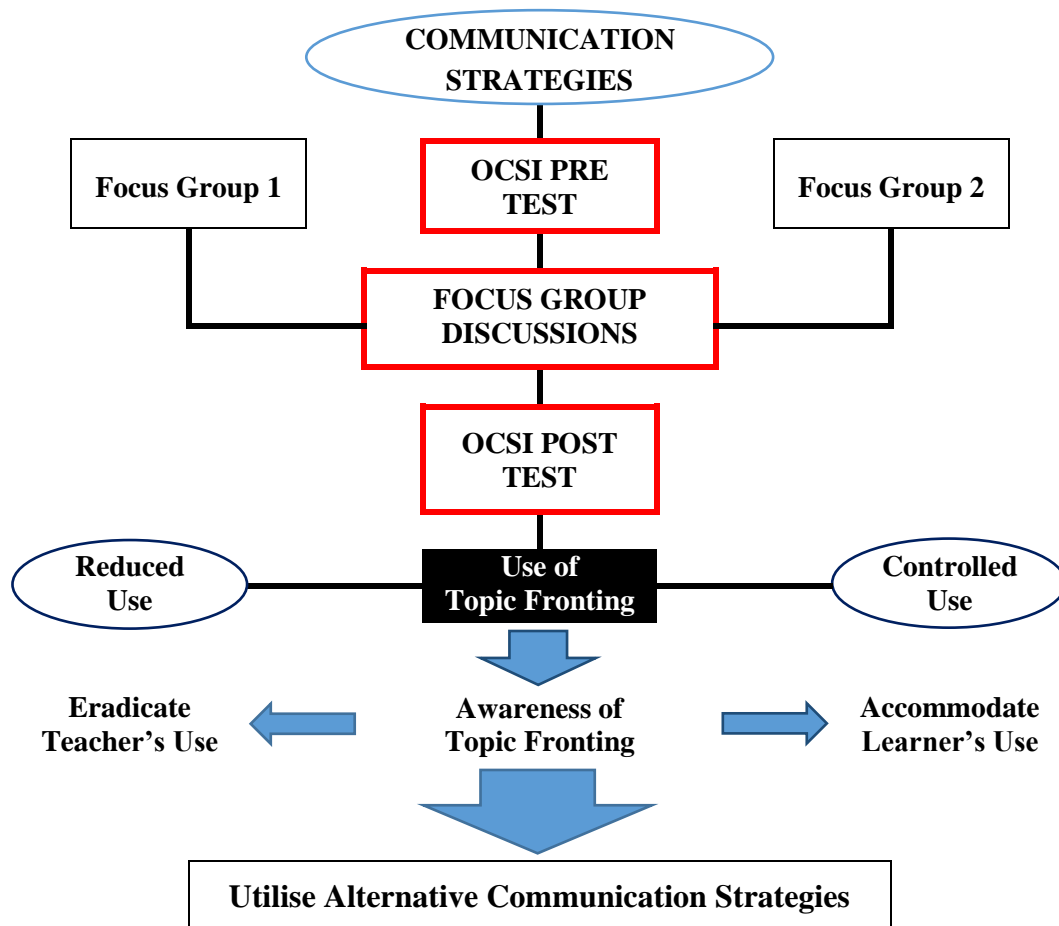
Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

This research used the qualitative approach that utilised the FGD and an OCSI opinionnaire proposed in Soekarno's (2019) research (Appendix 1). This study aimed to explore the nature of the phenomenon of concern or learn about the views of individuals with the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Zhu & Carless, 2018; Creswell, 2012, 2003). The FGD was conducted weekly or in a predetermined period based on the agreement with the participants. These FGD data were then transcribed and analysed thematically. Thematic analysis as summarised by Caulfield (2020) is a deductive method that involves approaching the data with some predetermined themes one expects to find reflected there, based on existing theories or knowledge thus attaining the study confirmability. This technique also ensured the dependability of the findings in a sense that these findings can be replicated.

Research Participants

Given that one of the biggest areas impacted is the educational domain, this study looked into groups of participants representing states of the highest COVID-19 lockdown in Malaysia.   This population is represented by TESL students from Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu and Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam.   The number of participants chosen for the study was based on the suggestion provided by Morse (1994) of six respondents for qualitative studies.   Thus, this paper had two focus groups of seven to nine participants of similar level of English proficiency as well as areas of specialisation which is in linguistics and pedagogy.   This focus group comprised 16 students selected from Band 4 Malaysian University English Test (MUET) passes which is equivalent to the CEFR B1-B2.   The selection of the Bachelor of Education with TESL trainees in the focus group was based on purposive sampling.   In this study, the UMS participants were classified as Focus Group 1 (P01 – P07), while the UiTM participants were in Focus Group 2 (P08 – P16).

Research Instruments

A focus group is a small, but demographically diverse group of people whose reactions are studied through interactive and directed discussions by a researcher (Morgan, 1996). It is a form of qualitative research consisting of interviews on perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service, concept or an idea. This study utilised Google Meet as its online platform and adapt the procedure from Beltis' (2019) procedure for conducting a focus group discussion.

The probe questions look into the trainees' opinions and responses yet at the same time identify their use of communication strategies.   During this process, the researchers took notes and recorded the vital data. This study used a focus group that should not have any reliance on the use of topic fronting due to their higher, homogeneous proficiency and awareness of Native English speech pattern.   The FGDs were recorded and transcribed for the thematic analysis of the participants' response, opinion and perception.   Their language use was also examined for any utterance of topic fronting communication strategy in relation to session 2.

The OCSI used in this study in adherence to No. 3 (Prepare focus group questionnaire) of Beltis' (2019) procedure for participants to report the frequency of communication strategy used was adapted from Nakatani (2006). The reliability and validity of the OCSI has been verified by Nakatani (2006) in a simulated communicative test. The Cronbach's alpha for the 32 items he used was .86, which indicates a highly acceptable internal consistency (Nakatani, 2006). A validated self-report questionnaire such as the OCSI is useful for needs analysis before communication strategy training (Ting, Soekarno, & Lee, 2017; Oxford, 1996). These 23 items on the awareness of the frequency of communication strategies use formed the basis of coding for the transcriptions with other communication strategies. In this study, the OCSI were used only as the supporting instrument to inculcate the use of suitable communication strategies among the trainees. The Likert scale in the response for the Frequency of Using Speaking Strategies in English shows the continuum from "Almost Never" (1) to "Always" (5). The OCSI pre-test was conducted 30 minutes before FGD1 while the post test was conducted 30 minutes after FGD4.

Data Analysis

The recorded presentations were transcribed as close to the speakers' articulation as possible to identify any subtle changes. This was necessary to identify the difference of frequency in communication strategy usage for the various functions and purpose within its context. The initial unit for the frequency count of communication strategies was based on total words spoken to accommodate the fillers which were a part of communication strategies. The coding was conducted by applying the inductive approach which involves allowing the data to determine the themes. The study found six themes from the transcriptions of both universities' FGDs. The findings are then presented as they emerged from the transcriptions.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1: Comparative analysis: TWS and Frequency of Topic Fronting

SESSION	PARTICIPANT (%)	TOTAL WORD SPOKEN	FREQUENCY OF TOPIC FRONTING						
			T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	Total
UiTM FGD1	88.89	12 036			1	2			3
UiTM FGD2	77.78	9384	1	1	4	1	3	2	12
UiTM FGD3	100.00	9523					4	2	6
UiTM FGD4	100.00	5301	1	2	1	1	2	1	8
UMS FGD1	100.00	6524	2	1		2	1		6
UMS FGD2	100.00	6215	1	1		1			3
UMS FGD3	100.00	7983	3	1	1	6			11
UMS FGD4	100.00	7631		2	3	2	1	3	11
TOTAL	766.67	**64597**	8	8	10	15	11	8	60
AVE. %	95.83		1.60	1.33	2.00	2.14	**2.20**	2.00	7.50

Theme 1: Understanding Topic Fronting

For the first theme, the participants were observed to be able to adhere to the FGD protocol in providing the foundation of their discussions. Despite not providing any definite understanding of topic fronting in their first session like their UMS counterpart, the UiTM participants reverted to this theme in latter sessions (S2 and S4). This study identified that this theme is almost touched by every speaker who would express their comprehension, either as they have understood it or as by referencing the terms provided by the moderators. This defining technique is then corroborated by an exemplification which is an achievement communication strategy (Dörnyei, 1995; Willems, 1987; Færch & Kasper, 1983b). Exemplification is a mode of symbolisation characterised by the relation between

a sample and what it refers to. As a part of the compensatory strategies for interaction repairs such as restructuring, circumlocution and approximation (Soekarno, 2019), it reflects well to complement the TESL trainees' linguistics proficiency. Similarly, for the English majors in Wang, Lai, and Leslie's (2015) study, exemplification, substitution, approximation, literal translation and circumlocution accounted for 76.16% of 902 instances of strategy usage.

> Excerpt 1
> "So, what I understand about topic fronting is like, when in classes before, the lectures that their lesson. They will tell us what we will learn about today. So, in their lesson, they would just talk about that one specific topic, what goes into the topic. So that is what I understood."
>
> (UMS FGD1: P02)

As the response to the research question, this is the type of communication strategy that TESL trainees could utilise as it is not only an achievement strategy, it also does not deviate from the Native speakers' speech pattern.

Theme 2: Function of Topic Fronting

For the second theme, the researchers observed the lowest number coded in this study with only 1.33% average (Table 1). The majority of the participants identified the primary functions of topic fronting was to simplify their explanations by channelling the students' concentration on the specific content and disregarding the grammatical accuracy in the said instructions. A few also believed that it is an uncommon strategy utilised by Native speakers in their literary work. As shown in Excerpt 3, the participant's lack of familiarity induced him to provide a circumlocution where he attempted to "describe characteristics or elements of the object or action instead of using the target language structure" (Ting & Phan, 2008).

> Excerpt 2
> "And topic fronting. Topic fronting may be familiar within Malaysian English speakers, but for native English speakers to the fronting is very rare and it is usually used only in literature."
>
> (UiTM FGD4: P10)

> Excerpt 3
> "Yeah. I think. for example, if a teacher wanted to communicate something that is a little bit complex. I think they can incorporate. They can use topic fronting to make what they're trying to explain a little bit easier for their students to understand. Especially, when it comes to I believe the teaching of language English language or probably also Malay, any other language to make it easier for them to understand for students to understand, the teacher can use topic fronting."
>
> (UMS FGD1: P04)

As the response to the research question, this is the type of communication strategy that TESL trainees could utilise as it is not only an achievement strategy, it also does not deviate from the Native speakers' speech pattern.

Theme 3: Awareness of Topic Fronting

The third theme was accumulated as a reflection to FGD 2 which was related to the participants' own awareness on their use of topic fronting. With 2.00% average (Table 1), the participants had a more diverse perspective on this theme including the opinion of Participant P09 in Excerpt 4 which reflects not just his application of topic fronting but that topic fronting is a language capability that should be appreciated by TESL trainees. The participants discussed its commonality in their daily lives which also involves L1 influences. The finding here showed two opinions where the UiTM FGDs produced a language-based thinking while the UMS FGDs produced an application of topic fronting on their daily lives.

> Excerpt 4
> "I think it has been a problem and a difficulty, because we've been brought up with just this one, like SVO kind of speech. And then like, since it's quite rare for us to be talking that we and to be hearing those stuff, I think, might take some time for us to adapt with it. And then how we can deal with it is by implementing more and more topic."
>
> (UiTM FGD2: P09)

> Excerpt 5
> "When students want to ask questions, like, we, for example, when we ask about homework, we don't say, do we have a homework now, which only say, 'Teacher homework.' That's all. And for the teachers, most teachers don't usually say. 'Oh, so today we have homework?' No or so. 'Today we have exam.' No, we all often I often hear the teacher always use topic fronting such as a test next week, just like that."
>
> (UMS FGD4: P03)

As the response to the research question, since the use of topic fronting communication strategy among TESL trainees was oblivious to them, they should participate in communication strategy training to be more familiarised to alternative strategies.

Theme 4: Utilisation of Topic Fronting Among Future Students

The researchers observed that the fourth theme reflected the participants' collective opinion on the utilisation of topic fronting among their potential ESL learners in the future. Primarily obtained from the UMS third FGD with 6 occurrences, this theme ranged from obtaining better comprehension in their own speech production, to providing an alternative tool for clarification. The use of topic fronting communication strategy among TESL trainees in online interactions were as simplification and clarification tool utilised due to its familiarity as an existing Malaysian communication strategy (Benson, 1990). Quite a substantial number of participants also remarked that their more naturalistic sound would be more familiar to the learners instead of a more learned sounding English.

Excerpt 6

"Okay, so for me, my point will be only related to my previous point, which is I've mentioned that topic fronting is a strategy to make something become more comprehensive or easy to understand, so I'll be only using topic fronting in the class."

(UMS FGD3: P05)

As the response to the research question, since the TESL trainees saw the need for simplification and clarification strategies, they should participate in communication strategy training to be more familiarised to alternative strategies.

Theme 5: Concession of Topic Fronting In Teaching

Being the highest theme with 2.20% average (Table 1), theme 5 looks into the extent of deviation the participants would allow in their classrooms. In Excerpt 7, Participant P10 stated that she would accept her learner's use of topic fronting to the minimum and only among the limited proficiency ones. This is also shared by Participant P11 who claimed that as the learners would have been exposed to topic fronting, she would allow them limited use. An observation on what could only be identified as a countermeasure was proposed by Participant P06 (Excerpt 9) who insisted that topic fronting could serve as another method akin to paraphrasing similar to second learners of Arabic in Saudi Arabia (Rabab'ah & Bulut, 2007).

Excerpt 7

"Um, I think I agree with if I just now I would avoid as much as I can using something as well, but depending on the on my own learners, depending on the level of competency in English language. If there are in the lower level, I would accept them using topic fronting, but I would not encourage them. But if they are in higher level, I would restricted in, in discouraging them of using this topic fronting."

(UiTM FGD3: P10)

Excerpt 8

"Hmm, I agree with them. Yeah, because I think like you said, it's a part of the entertainment already. So, we cannot stop. Let's say if I'm a teacher now and I prohibit my students, from using it 100%, like you cannot use this, *Haram*. If you use this, I give you like, shame, but they expose to that thing. So, it will be very hard to, to actually stop them like as a whole, but maybe you can actually tell them, okay,"

(UiTM FGD3: P11)

Excerpt 9

"Uh, yeah. Okay, not so true, but I just want to, to strengthen my point before that [p] topic fronting is one of our communication strategy. To teach our future students, yeah, our future stud[.] our futures students later on where, where we, where we try to use the normal struct[.] sentence structure to them and they are not understand what we are talking about. And, and then we could and we can try to paraphrase our sentence again and use the topic fronting strategy."

(UMS FGD3: P06)

As the response to the research question, since the TESL trainees saw the need for paraphrasing strategies, they should participate in communication strategy training to be more familiarised to alternative strategies.

Theme 6: Avoiding Topic Fronting

Theme 6 is the only theme gathered from the FGD with almost no presence during the UMS FGD sessions. The reality is that this represents a universal perspective among Malaysian English language speakers in Sabah. The participants generally regarded topic fronting as an acceptable strategy but also fear that "the student will actually normalize the use of topic fronting in terms of their like daily conversation or even in the academic writing" (Excerpt 10: Participant P01). What they have not realised is that this is an ingrained strategy which will not pose any problem because the general outlook of the Malaysian community is not on the mastery of the English language but only its utilisation. Thus, any form of English is acceptable as long as it is comprehensible.

> Excerpt 10
> "Because sometimes, maybe if the student is only exposed to topic fronting,
> most of the time during the lessons, perhaps the student will actually
> normalize the use of topic fronting in terms of their like daily conversation
> or even in the academic writing. So, in my thoughts, in order, we can
> actually get rid of these topic fronting."
>
> (UMS: FGD4: P01)

As the response to the research question, TESL trainees could overcome the use of topic fronting communication strategy by avoiding from normalising it in their teaching.

Inculcation of the Awareness of Topic Fronting Use among TESL Trainees

Table 1 shows that out a total of 64597 TWS, there were only 60 times of topic fronting were used making it 0.929 per thousand words. As the word length of the transcripts for the three sessions differed, the total number of communication strategies was normalised for comparison across training session (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). The convention is to calculate per 1000 words (ptw) as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Total number of communication strategies}}{\text{Total words spoken}} \times 1000$$

in reference to Soekarno and Ting's (2021, 2020, 2016) application where the number of communication strategies used was counted as raw frequencies. The highest number of topic fronting use is in the UiTM second FGD with 12 utterances which represented all the six themes obtained from the discourse. The low number is reflective of the participants being TESL trainees and therefore, have more control and self-awareness in their own speech pattern compared to non-trained undergraduates.

To summarise the findings in this study, the use of topic fronting communication strategy among TESL trainees were not something that they were aware of before their

participation in the study and their transcripts showed that they have a low utilisation of topic fronting. The TESL trainees came up to a consensus of avoiding the use of topic fronting in their future teaching altogether, however, they will permit the lower proficiency ESL learners in their class to resort to topic fronting if necessary. Meanwhile, this study discovered that to inculcate the TESL trainees' awareness of their use of topic fronting communication strategy, they need to be involved in active FGDs and be provided with communication strategy trainings on alternative strategies, specifically strategies like simplification, clarification and paraphrasing.

Conclusion

Communication strategy has been identified as a concept through which language users, particularly second users get their intended meanings across whenever they are having difficulties which include confusion about the right choice of phrases for a particular message. These strategies range from self solving strategies to interactional strategies and unfortunately, also include the use of topic fronting which have been identified by scholars as the traditional convention among Malaysian speakers of English. Despite classified as a distinction of Malaysian communication strategy, topic fronting is a deviant of the English speech pattern. This research does not deny the classification of topic fronting strategy as a Malaysian based strategy nor does it argue the importance of communication strategy use among ESL learners. This study concludes that teaching specific communication strategy phrases which simultaneously impose the English Native speech patterns on ESL learners should become a new pedagogical approach.

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Appendix 1: Extract from the OCSI Opinionnaire

No.	Frequency of Using Speaking Strategies in English	Almost Never				Always
1.	I try to make eye-contact when I am talking. *Saya cuba menggunakan pergerakan mata bila bercakap.*	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I use gestures and facial expressions if I can't express myself. *Saya menggunakan pergerakan tangan dan mimic wajah bila saya tidak dapat mengatakan sesuatu.*	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I try to speak clearly and loudly to make myself heard. *Saya cuba bercakap dengan jelas dan kuat agar perkataan saya kedengaran.*	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I change my tone on some words to show that they are more important. *Saya mengubah nada suara ke atas sesetengah perkataan untuk menunjukkan kepentingan perkataan itu.*	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I repeat some words with rising/falling tones when I'm speaking. *Saya mengulangi sesetengah perkataan dengan naik/turun nada bila bercakap.*	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I announce the topic before giving details (e.g. My sister, she likes cakes). *Saya mengumumkan tajuk sebelum memberi perincian.*	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I pay attention to the listener's reaction while I'm speaking. *Saya memberi perhatian terhadap reaksi pendengar apabila saya bercakap.*	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I ask others to explain when I do not understand something. *Saya bertanya orang lain untuk menjelaskan sesuatu yang saya tidak faham.*	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I ask the listener directly if he/she understood what I was saying. *Saya bertanya pendengar saya jika dia memahami apa yang saya katakan.*	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I reword what others say to check if I have understood something correctly. *Saya mengulas apa yang orang lain katakan untuk memeriksa jika saya memahami sesuatu dengan betul.*	1	2	3	4	5
11.	I repeat what others say to show that I have understood important issues. *Saya mengulangi apa yang orang lain katakan untuk menunjukkan saya memahami isu-isu penting.*	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I use other ways of explaining if I can't express myself. *Saya menggunakan kaedah lain untuk menjelaskan sesuatu jika saya gagal mengatakannya.*	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I give examples if the listener doesn't understand what I am saying. *Saya memberi contoh-contoh jika pendengar tidak memahami apa yang saya katakan.*	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I repeat what I want to say until the listener understands. *Saya mengulangi apa yang saya ingin katakan sehingga pendengar faham.*	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I translate directly from another language when I can't communicate well. *Saya menggunakan alih bahasa secara langsung bila saya tidak dapat berkomunikasi dengan baik.*	1	2	3	4	5

16.	I mix words from another language when I can't communicate well. *Saya mencampur aduk perkataan dari bahasa lain bila saya tidak dapat berkomunikasi dengan baik.*	1	2	3	4	5

17.	I use words which are familiar to me. *Saya menggunakan perkataan yang saya ketahui.*	1	2	3	4	5
18.	I reduce the message and use simple expressions. *Saya memudahkan mesej dan menggunakan perkataan yang mudah.*	1	2	3	4	5
19.	I replace the original message with another when I can't say what I have to say. *Saya menggantikan mesej asal dengan mesej lain jika saya gagal mengutarakan kehendak saya.*	1	2	3	4	5
20.	I leave a message unfinished because of language difficulty. *Saya meninggalkan sesuatu penyataan kerana kesukaran bahasa.*	1	2	3	4	5
21.	I give up when I can't make myself be understood. *Saya mengalah jika saya tidak dapat membuat diri saya difahami orang lain.*	1	2	3	4	5
22.	I ask other people to help when I can't communicate well. *Saya minta bantuan orang bila saya tidak dapat berkomunikasi dengan baik.*	1	2	3	4	5
23.	I use fillers (well, let me see…) to give myself time to think. *Saya menggunakan kata pengisi untuk member masa kepada diri untuk berfikir.*	1	2	3	4	5