THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NEGOTIATION FOR MEANING STRATEGIES ON EFL LEARNERS' ORAL PROFICIENCY DEVELOPMENT IN TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION TASKS

Wilawan Champakaew   *Mae Fah Luang University*
                                         wilawan_c41@hotmail.com

Wanida Pencingkarn   Chiangmai University
                                           wanidapen@gmail.com

Abstract

This article investigates how Foreign Language learners' proficiency affects meaning negotiation strategies in two-way communication tasks. First year Thai students majoring English (n = 30) participated in a 12-week Listening and Speaking I course in the academic year 2011. The participants were placed in three groups with different based on their English placement scores: high, mid and low proficiency groups. They were trained to use five meaning negotiation strategies before taking part in three different two-way communication tasks which consisted of problem-solving task, information gap task and story-telling task. While performing the tasks, the participants' conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed to analyze their strategies. In addition, their oral proficiency was analyzed by using authentic assessment throughout the study. The findings showed that negotiation for meaning strategies were facilitative in enhancing students' oral proficiency development.

Key words: Negotiation for Meaning Strategies, Two-way Communication, L2 Oral Proficiency

Introduction

The term negotiation for meaning is very important in interaction. In Long's (1983) Interaction Hypothesis, he contended that input is an

important factor for language acquisition; however, modified interaction is the necessary mechanism for making language comprehensible, as it allows learners to adjust or modify less comprehensible message and make them intelligible to the interlocutors. (Long, 1996).

Negotiation for meaning is the process in which the learner and the interlocutor provide and interpret the utterance carried by the learner or their interlocutor, or the input, which provokes adjustments to linguistic forms, conversational structure or message content until they reach mutual understanding (Gass and Mackey, 2006).

A number of studies on modified interaction or negotiation for meaning (e.g., Gass & Varonis, 1985b; Long, 1983, 1983b; Pica & Doughty, 1985a cited in Oliver, 2002) suggested that the process of negotiating for meaning is facilitative of L2 acquisition. It is facilitative because it provides language learners with three crucial elements for L2 acquisition—namely comprehensible input, comprehensible output, and feedback. Accordingly, in achieving communication skill, one important criterion is that "there must be strategies for meaning negotiation between the speakers, i.e., the learner must be involved in interpreting from what they hear and constructing what to say, not reliant on the teacher or textbook to provide the language" (Hedge, 1993).

In terms of communication, the process of negotiation for meaning functions both as a means to prevent conversational trouble and repair mechanism to overcome communication breakdown. When there is a communication breakdown, the interlocutors discuss the problematic items, and then they continue to talk. The strategies for meaning negotiation used during interaction included different kind of questions asked by the interlocutors in order to facilitate L2 acquisition; for example, confirmation checks (Is this what you mean?), comprehension checks (Do you understand?), or clarification requests (What? Huh?) (Gass and Selinker, 2008). The result of meaning negotiation strategy requires a modification of language, which leads to uptake of new vocabulary or correct form. Through the processes of repetition, segmentation, and rewording, interaction can serve to draw learner's attention to form-meaning relationships and provide them with additional time to focus on encoding meaning (Pica, 1996; Gass, 1997). Moreover, negotiation can help learners to notice mismatches between the input and their own interlanguage which is an initial step in L2 development. Likewise, Pica et al (1989) believe that through "negotiation of meaning" learners gain opportunities to make efforts in producing new L2 words and grammatical structures.

In addition, meaning negotiation strategy is viewed as a vehicle to language proficiency. As it has been described as leading language learners to greater awareness of their language and to further development of language proficiency (Ko, Schallert and Walters, 2003). Many studies have shown that meaning negotiation strategies can enhance learners' fluency. Sommat (2007) observed the effects of the patterns of negotiation of meaning strategies on the English language used in communicative information gap tasks by Thai lower secondary school students. The results suggested that the negotiation of meaning strategies used in the "Spot the Differences" tasks were effective in promoting students' oral English communicative competence. Also, Nakahama's study (2001) suggested that conversational interaction has the potential to offer substantial learning opportunities at multiple levels. Similarly, Ko et al. (2003) showed that 11 out of 21 students gained higher mean scores on their second storytelling task following the negotiation of meaning session; or the question and answer session, in which the teacher and students interacted with the storytellers. However, the mean scores were not significantly different. Therefore, negotiation of meaning used as a strategy in conversational interactions is effective for developing the learners' oral communicative competence.

Generally, many of the two-way communication task studies were conducted in experimental settings where NS-NNS were involved, and few studies have explored EFL[2] learners' negotiating in classroom. Moreover, most of the two-way communication tasks conducted in many studies used a single task such as a jigsaw task (Sato & Lyster, 2007), a picture description task or jigsaw task (Trofimovich et al., 2007, Sato, M. and Lyster, 2007), a spot-the-difference task (Gass, and Lewis, 2007). However, in this study, three different two-way communication tasks were selected; problem-solving tasks, information gap tasks and story-telling task.

Methodology of the Study

Research Questions

1. What types of negotiation of meaning strategies (i.e. comprehension check, confirmation check, clarification checks, appeals for help and repetition) were produced by EFL learners with different language proficiency in two-way communication tasks?

2. What are the effects of the use of negotiation of meaning strategies in two-way communication tasks on L2 oral proficiency across levels of groups of students among different levels of language proficiency?

Participants

The participants were 30 first year English major students (male 10, female 20) in a Listening and Speaking I Course at Mae Fah Luang University, an autonomous university in Thailand in 2010. Each participant had completed a minimum of eight years of English study prior to entering the university. Their ages ranged from 17 to 19. They were placed into three different oral proficiency levels: high, medium, and low. High proficiency level was determined at equal or higher than 50 out of 80, and medium was determined between 36-49, and low was determined between 25-35.

Negotiation for Meaning strategies training

The high, medium, and low learners received explicit training of strategies for meaning negotiation at the pre-teaching and while-teaching stages. At the initial period, they were introduced to the strategies, and at the beginning of each two-way communication task, they were reminded of the strategies uses.

The five negotiation of meaning strategies described by Long (1980, 1983a) and Pica and Doughty (1985a) were the basis of the study; they were comprehension check, confirmation check, clarification requests, asking for help, and repetition.

1. *Comprehension check*: These are made by the speaker to check if the preceding utterance has been understood by the listener. They usually consist of questions, either tag questions, repetition with rising intonation, or questions or any expression to establish whether the message has been understood by the addressee, such as:

   a. Do you understand?

   b. You know what I mean?

   c. Do you get it?

2. *Confirmation checks*: These are made by the listener to establish whether the preceding utterance has been heard and understood correctly. They include repetition accompanied by rising intonation

expressions that the speaker would like to make sure that it is understood, as in

a: I was chuffled. [sic]

b: You were pleased?

a: Yes.

3. *Clarification requests:* These are made by the listener to clarify what the speaker has said and include statements such as "I don't understand," wh-questions, yes/no questions, and tag questions or expressions that elicit clarification of the utterance such as

a. What?

b. Huh?

c. Uh?

4. *Asking for help:* any expression that shows that the speaker has trouble such as

a. Could you say it again?

b. Pardon me?

5. *Repetition:* these include the speaker's partial, exact, or expanded repetitions of lexical items from his or her own preceding utterances.

Two-way Communication Tasks

Brumfit (1984 in Hedge 1993) defines the aim of communication in the classroom as to "develop a pattern of language interaction within the classroom which is as close as possible to that used by competent performers in the mother tongue in normal life". In his discussion, Brumfit (1984 in Ellis 1997) claimed that communication tasks will help develop learners' communication skills and they will contribute incidentally to their linguistic development. That means, communication tasks aid fluency by enabling learners to activate their linguistic knowledge to use in natural and spontaneous situations, such as when taking part in conversation. Therefore, communication tasks in the class can create opportunities for the language learners to use the target language and develop their linguistic competence, especially two-way communication tasks.

Two-way tasks were claimed to be facilitative in triggering the production of strategies for meaning negotiation. According to Doughty and Pica (1986), a two-way task, in which both participants have shared information in order to complete a task, encourages the speakers to produce

more negotiation of meaning. Additionally, two-way tasks provide an opportunity not only to produce the target language, but also through conversational adjustments, to manipulate and modify it (Gass and Varonis 1985). The two-way communication tasks in this study comprised problem-solving tasks, information gap task and storytelling task.

Problem-solving task

Problem-solving task is considered as a two-way task in the study. As defined by Willis (1996), problem-solving tasks involve a more intellectual and analytical skill from learners. In addition, a two-way problem-solving task is designed to encourage co-operation and conversational negotiation. In this study, there were three problem-solving tasks where participants were expected to solve real-life problems. For example, participants discussed their personal problems to find solutions, or giving them a situation in which they exchanged their opinions or come up with a decision.

Information gap task

Information gap is a task that involves conveying or requesting information from the pair or group members (Brown, 2001). There are two important characteristics in information gap task. Firstly, the focus is on the information and not on language forms. Secondly, it requires communicative interaction to reach the goal. The information gap task is widely interaction research methodology (Pica, Kang, and Sauro, 2006). This task has been found to generate more opportunities for the participants to negotiate than tasks that do not require a convergent outcome, such as opinion exchange and free conversation. In this study, there were three information gap tasks in which the participants were required to complete portions of incomplete passages, or they were given a person's picture and they had to describe the person as well by asking for information of their friend's picture.

Story-telling task

The story-telling task is considered a two-way task which provides rich possibilities for students to learn from one another and share experiences while receiving important practice in using English (Ko et al., 2003). During the task, the students were required to tell a 4-5 minute personal narrative about an embarrassing, exciting, sad or funny event from their lives to their peers.

Data Collection Procedure

There were seven high proficiency students, 16 medium proficiency students, and low level proficiency students. They received explicit training of negotiation for meaning strategies prior to the tasks.

The students received the training on strategies for meaning negotiation at the beginning of each task and engaged in three types of two-way communication tasks for a period of 12 weeks.

Their conversations were audio-recorded by the researcher as an instructor and her research assistant observed the classes. In addition, the focus group was carried out at the end of the study to obtain the students' perspectives on the effectiveness of the negotiation of meaning strategies. The transcriptions were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively and the negotiation strategies used to negotiate for meaning were identified.

Data Analysis

The study was a quasi-experimental, one group design. The data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively to identify of negotiation for meaning strategies, as well as oral proficiency development while they were performing two-way communication tasks.

The quantitative results were obtained from the transcription of the participants' interaction in the two-way communication tasks. The frequency of strategies for meaning negotiation used by participants of different language proficiency levels was measured according to the coding scheme. The coding scheme for five types of interactional features was drawn from the interactional analysis in L2/ FL acquisition research (Doughty and Pica 1986; Long 1983; Foster 1998):

1. Comprehension Checks (CPC)
2. Clarification Requests (CFR)
3. Confirmation Checks (CFC)
4. Appeals for Help (APH)
5. Repetition (REP)

The students' oral proficiency was analyzed by using descriptive statistics. The qualitative results were obtained to counterbalance the quantitative data from the focus group which helped the researcher to gain more perspectives on the effectiveness of negotiation for meaning strategies of the students.

Results and Discussions

Research Question I
The production of negotiation for meaning strategies by EFL learners with
different language proficiency in two-way communication tasks

    The question was directed to an examination of the occurrence of the
negotiation for meaning strategies used by the students among different
language proficiency: two-way communication tasks; problem-solving tasks,
information gap tasks, and story-telling tasks.

    Figure 1   The occurrence of negotiation for meaning strategies in
problem-solving tasks in three different language proficiency groups
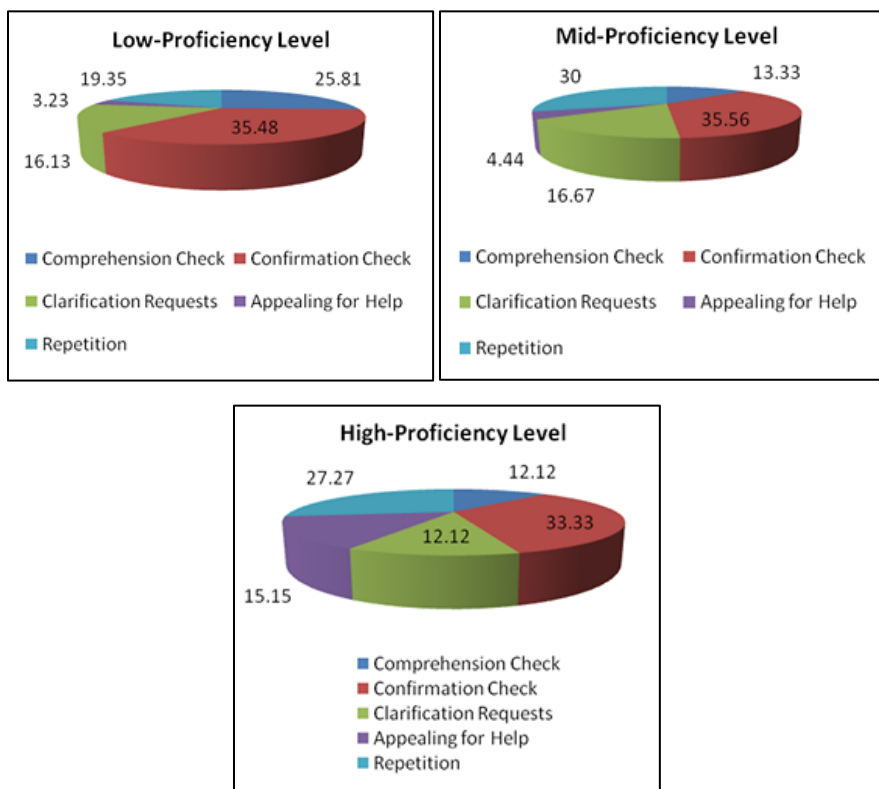
From Figure 1, most of the learners at all proficiency levels employed
confirmation check the most in problem-solving tasks. For the low
proficiency students, the three frequently used strategies were confirmation
checks (35.48), comprehension checks (25.81), and repetition (19.35).
While for the medium proficiency students, used confirmation checks

(35.56), repetition (30.00), and clarification requests (16.67). The high proficiency students, used confirmation checks (33.33), repetition (27.27), and appealing for help (15.15).
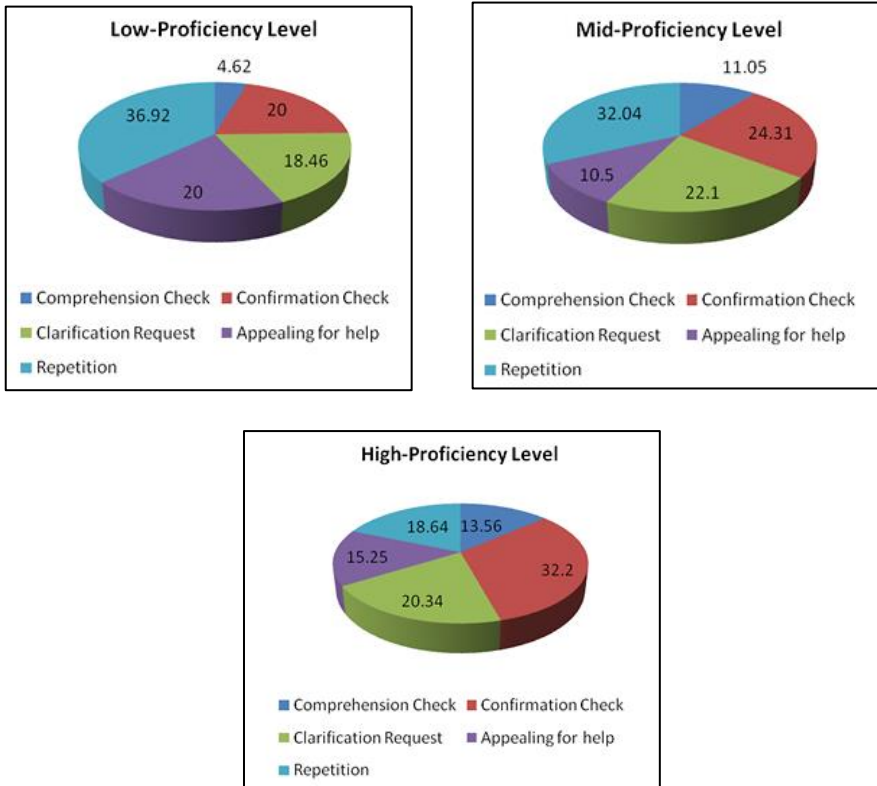
Figure 2. The occurrence of negotiation for meaning strategies in information gap tasks in three different language proficiency groups

From Figure 2, low and medium proficiency students produced the highest instances of repetition strategies. For low proficiency students, the top three frequently used strategies were repetition (36.92), confirmation check and appealing for help (20.00). As for the medium proficiency students, they were repetitions (32.04), confirmation checks (24.31), and clarification requests (22.10). Among the high proficiency students, confirmation checks (32.20), clarification requests (20.34), and repetition (18.64) were noted.

The Effectiveness of Negotiation for Meaning Strategies on EFL Learners' Oral
Proficiency Development in Two-way Communication Tasks

89

Figure 3. The occurrence of negotiation for meaning strategies in story
telling tasks across three language proficiency groups
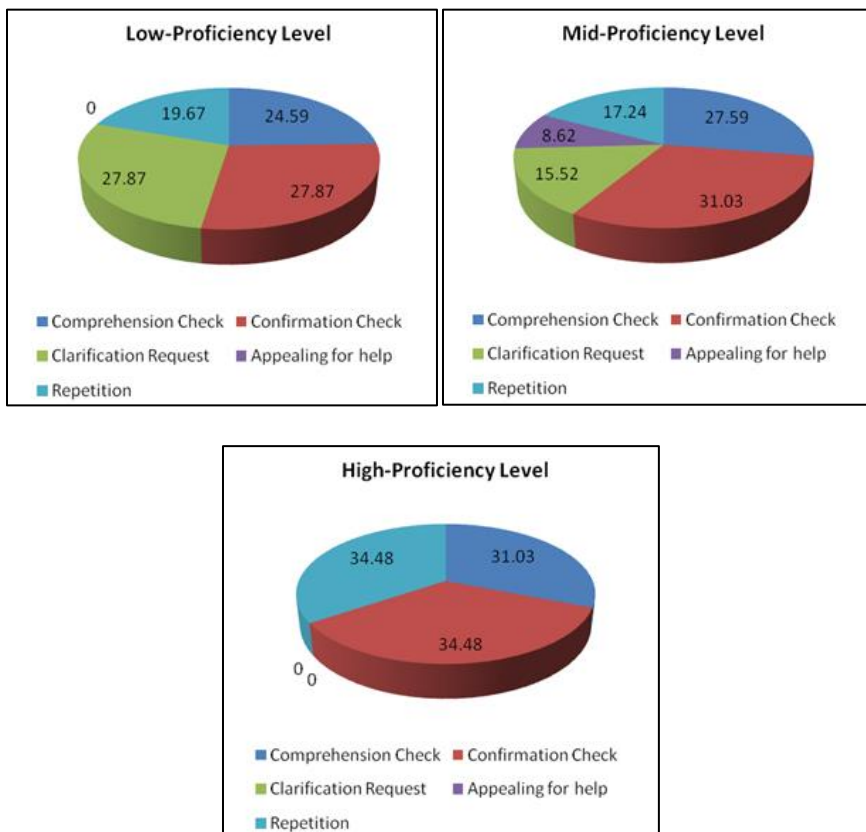
From Figure 3, it is evident that EFL learners employed confirmation
check strategy the most. For the low proficiency students, the first three
frequently used strategies were confirmation checks and clarification requests
(27.87), and comprehension checks (24.59). As for the medium proficiency
students, they were confirmation checks (31.03), comprehension checks
(27.59), and repetition (17.24). Among high proficiency students, they were
confirmation checks and repetition (34.48), and comprehension checks
(31.03).

Overall, confirmation check was mostly produced by learners across
all levels of proficiency in all the problem-solving and story-telling tasks.
The result is consistent with many findings that confirmation checks were
used more significantly during interactions either in NS (native speaker)-

NNS (non-native speaker) conversations or NNS-NNS. Long & Sato (1983) stated that confirmation checks were used more significantly in the native speaker (NS)-non-native speaker (NNS) conversations than other strategies. Oliver (2002) also claimed that NNS–NNS dyads used more negotiation for meaning strategies than NNS–NS dyads. His study also suggested that confirmation checks and clarification requests were greatly produced in both adult and child dyads.

Research Question 2:   *What are the effects of the use of negotiation of meaning strategies in two-way communication tasks on L2 oral proficiency among three groups of students with different language proficiency?*

Negotiation for meaning strategies facilitated the interaction among the students. As in the table below, it showed that students using the strategies to cope with their conversations could improve oral proficiency scores in each two-way communication tasks.

I.   Problem-Solving Tasks

Table I.I illustrates the results of the oral proficiency score of the low-proficiency students performed in three problem-solving tasks. Each participant's oral proficiency score and mean score were included, and their oral proficiency level was identified according to the set criteria based on an analysis of the students' performances.

Table I.I: Oral Proficiency Score (out of 25) of low-proficiency level students in problem-solving tasks

Problem-solving tasks / Low-proficiency students number	I	2	3	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level of oral proficiency
1	10.5	14.5	14.5	13.2	2.3	Fair
2	10.5	15.5	11.5	12.5	2.6	Poor
3	12.5	16	14	14.2	1.7	Fair
4	11.5	16.5	14	14.0	2.5	Fair
5	12.5	16.5	14	14.3	2.0	Fair
6	12.5	17	15.5	15.0	2.3	Fair
7	8.5	15	12.5	12.0	3.3	Poor

From Table 1.1, low-proficiency students 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 gained
higher scores of oral proficiency in problem-solving tasks 2 and 3. Overall,
two students who had poor level of oral proficiency, and five of them had a
fair level of oral proficiency in problem-solving tasks.

Table 1.2: Oral Proficiency Score (out of 25) of medium-proficiency level
students in problem-solving tasks

Problem-solving tasks Mid-Proficiency students number	1	2	3	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level of oral proficiency
1	14	16	13.5	14.5	1.3	Fair
2	16	17	16	16.33	0.6	Good
3	13.5	19	18	16.83	2.9	Good
4	14	18	17	16.33	2.1	Good
5	15.5	15	16.5	15.67	0.8	Fair
6	13	15	15.5	14.50	1.3	Fair
7	14.5	15	15.5	15.00	0.5	Fair
8	15	17	16.5	16.17	1.0	Good
9	13	16	15	14.67	1.5	Fair
10	17	20	17	18.00	1.7	Good
11	17.5	20	18.5	18.67	1.2	Good
12	16.5	16.5	14.5	15.83	1.1	Fair
13	14.5	18	16	16.17	1.7	Good
14	14	18	13	15.00	2.6	Fair
15	16	15	15	15.33	0.6	Fair
16	14.5	16.5	15.5	15.50	1.0	Fair

From Table 1.2, medium-proficiency level students 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13,
16 and 17 gained higher scores of oral proficiency in problem solving tasks
2 and 3. Overall, nine medium proficiency students had fair oral proficiency
level, and seven of them had good oral proficiency in problem-solving tasks.

Table 1.3: Oral Proficiency Score (out of 25) of high-proficiency level students in problem-solving tasks

Problem-solving tasks / High-Proficiency students number	I	2	3	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level of oral proficiency
I	18.5	18	19	18.5	0.50	Good
2	18.5	19.5	19	19.25	0.50	Good
3	20	21	21	21.00	0.58	Very good
4	20	22	21	21.50	1.00	Very good
5	19	20	19	19.50	0.58	Good
6	19	19	17.5	19.75	0.87	Good
7	18.5	19.5	20	19.33	0.76	Good

From Table 1.3, high-proficiency students 2, 3, 4, and 7 gained higher scores of oral proficiency in problem-solving tasks 2 and 3. Overall, five high-proficiency students had good level of oral proficiency, and two of them had very good oral proficiency in problem-solving tasks.

2. Information gap Tasks

Table 2.1 below illustrates the results of the oral proficiency score (out of 25) of low-proficiency students performed in three information gap tasks. Each participant's oral proficiency score and mean score were included and their oral proficiency was identified according to the set criteria based on an analysis of the students' performances.

Table 2.1: Oral Proficiency Score (out of 25) of low-proficiency students and mean scores of information gap tasks

Information gap tasks / Low-proficiency students number	I	2	3	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level of oral proficiency
I	13	15.5	19	15.83	3.01	Fair
2	13	14	19	15.33	3.21	Fair
3	19	14	12.5	15.17	3.40	Fair
4	19.5	17	18.5	18.33	1.26	Good
5	19.5	15	18	17.50	2.29	Good
6	21	18	19	19.33	1.53	Good
7	13	13.5	17.5	14.67	2.47	Fair

From Table 2.1, low-proficiency students 1, 2, 6, and 7 gained higher scores
of oral proficiency in problem-solving tasks 2 and 3. Overall, two students
had poor level of oral proficiency, and five of them had fair level of oral
proficiency in information gap tasks.

Table 2.3 below illustrates the results of the oral proficiency score (out of
25) of medium-proficiency students performed in three information gap
tasks. Each participant's oral proficiency score and mean score were included
and their oral proficiency level was identified according to the set criteria
based on an analysis of the students' performance.

Table 2.3. : Oral Proficiency Score (out of 25) of medium-proficiency level
students and mean scores of information gap tasks

Information gap tasks / Mid-proficiency students number	1	2	3	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level of oral proficiency
1	19	18	19.5	18.83	0.76	Good
2	17	18.5	19.5	18.33	1.26	Good
3	20	21	19	20.00	1.00	Good
4	20	20	20	20.00	0.00	Good
5	15	18.5	19.5	17.67	2.36	Good
6	18.5	18.5	19.5	18.83	0.58	Good
7	19.5	17	18	18.17	1.26	Good
8	19.5	18	19	18.83	0.76	Good
9	15	16	19	16.67	2.08	Good
10	17	16	21	18.00	2.65	Good
11	20	19	22	20.33	1.53	Very good
12	20	17	19	18.67	1.53	Good
13	19	16	17.5	17.50	1.50	Good
14	19.5	17	18.5	18.33	1.26	Good
15	14	17.5	15	15.50	1.80	Fair
16	20	18	19.5	19.17	1.04	Good

From Table 2.2.3, mid-proficiency level students 1, 2, 5, 6, and 9 gained
higher scores of oral proficiency in information gap tasks 2 and 3. Overall,
one student had very good oral proficiency, 14 students had good oral
proficiency, in information gap tasks.

Table 2.4 below illustrates the results of the oral proficiency score (out of 25) of high-proficiency students performed in three information gap tasks. Each participant's oral proficiency score and mean score were included and their oral proficiency level was identified according to the set criteria based on an analysis of the students' performances.

Table 2.4: Oral Proficiency Score (out of 25) of high-proficiency students and mean scores of information gap tasks

Information gap tasks / High-proficiency students number	I	2	3	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level of oral proficiency
I	21	20	23	21.33	1.53	Very good
2	21	19	18.5	19.50	1.32	Good
3	22.5	20	21.5	21.33	1.26	Very good
4	19.5	20.5	20	20.00	0.50	Good
5	20.5	19	21.5	20.33	1.26	Very good
6	21	20	20	20.33	0.58	Very good
7	21	20	21	20.67	0.58	Very good

From Table 2.4, high-proficiency students I, and 5 gained higher scores of oral proficiency in information gap tasks 3. Overall, five students had very good level of oral proficiency, and two of them had good level of oral proficiency in information gap tasks.

3.   Story-telling tasks

Table 3.1 below illustrates the results of the oral proficiency score (out of 25) of low-proficiency students performed in two story-telling tasks. Each participant's oral proficiency mean scores apart from their oral proficiency level was identified according to the set criteria.

Table 3.1: Oral Proficiency Score (out of 25) of low proficiency students and mean scores of story-telling task

Story-telling task / Low-Proficiency students number	I	2	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level of oral proficiency
I	16	13	14.5	2.12	Fair
2	15	13	14	1.41	Fair

3	14.5	12.5	13.5	1.41	Fair
4	14	16	15	1.41	Fair
5	13.5	14	13.75	0.35	Fair
6	16	17.5	16.75	1.06	Good
7	12.5	12.5	12.5	0.00	Poor

From Table 2.3.1, low-proficiency students 4, 5, 6 gained higher scores of oral proficiency in story-telling task 2. Overall, one student had good level of oral proficiency, and six of them had a fair level of oral proficiency in story-telling tasks.

Table 3.2 below illustrates the results of the oral proficiency score (out of 25) of medium-proficiency students performed in two story-telling tasks. Each participant's oral proficiency score and mean score were included and their oral proficiency level was identified according to the set criteria based on an analysis of the students' performances.

Table 3.2. : Oral Proficiency Score (out of 25) of mid-proficiency level students and mean scores of story-telling task

Story-telling task / Mid-proficiency students number	1	2	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level of oral proficiency
1	13.5	15	14.25	1.06	Fair
2	16	15	15.5	0.71	Fair
3	16	18	17	1.41	Good
4	16.5	16.5	16.5	0.00	Good
5	15	15	15	0.00	Fair
6	18	18	18	0.00	Good
7	17	15.5	16.25	1.06	Good
8	16	15	15.5	0.71	Fair
9	16	15	15.5	0.71	Fair
10	15	15	15	0.00	Fair
11	17	20	18.5	2.12	Good
12	14	15.5	14.75	1.06	Fair
13	15	15	15	0.00	Fair
14	15.5	16	15.75	0.35	Fair
15	14.5	15	14.75	0.35	Fair
16	14	15	14.5	0.71	Fair

From Table 2.3.2, medium-proficiency level students 1, 3, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16 gained higher scores of oral proficiency in story-telling tasks 2. Overall, five students had good level of oral proficiency, and 11 of them had fair level of oral proficiency in story-telling tasks.

Table 3.3 below illustrates the results of the oral proficiency score (out of 25) of high-proficiency students performed in three information gap tasks. Each participant's oral proficiency and mean scores and their oral proficiency level was identified according to the set criteria based on an analysis of the students' performances.

Table 3.3: Oral Proficiency Score (out of 25) of high-proficiency level students and mean scores of story-telling tasks

Story-telling task / High-Proficiency students number	1	2	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level of oral proficiency
1	16	17	16.5	0.71	Good
2	16	17	16.5	0.71	Good
3	16.5	20	18.25	2.47	Good
4	20	21	20.5	0.71	Very good
5	17.5	19.5	18.5	1.41	Good
6	15	20	17.5	3.54	Good
7	19	21	20	1.41	Good

From Table 3.3, all of the high-proficiency students gained higher scores of oral proficiency in story-telling task 2. Overall, one student had very good level of oral proficiency, and six of them had good level of oral proficiency in story-telling task.

In summary, negotiations for meaning strategies help students develop their oral proficiency in two-way communication tasks. In all groups of proficiency, it was found that the substantial number of students who employed those strategies while they were performing two-way communication tasks could gain higher oral proficiency scores in the following tasks. These findings suggest that negotiation for meaning strategies facilitated oral proficiency development among EFL learners.

Conclusions

The findings of this study showed that EFL learners at different proficiency levels used confirmation check strategies significantly in problem solving tasks and story-telling tasks which are two-way communication tasks. In this study, the students at all levels of proficiency; low, medium, or high proficiency, were aware of using confirmation check strategy, such as, "Really?", "Right?", or "OK?", to confirm their understanding with their interlocutors as the strategy is a common expression. As Long and Sato (1983) insisted that confirmation checking is one of the three most important processes; *comprehension checks, confirmation checks* and *clarification requests,* involved in the speaker and interlocutor's attempts to understand and be understood.

However, in information gap tasks, repetition strategy were used more frequently among low proficiency students and medium proficiency students, but the high proficiency students used confirmation check strategy. It might be claimed that type and frequency of negotiation for meaning strategy use may vary according to learners' oral proficiency level (Nakatani, 2005). Low proficiency students could seek for a simpler strategy such as repetition to solve communication breakdown while high proficiency students were able to choose more appropriate negotiation for meaning strategies.

Moreover, information gap task was found to be the most effective in promoting the use of negotiation for meaning strategies. The two-way communication tasks such as problem-solving task, information gap task and story-telling task in this study provide an opportunity for learners to negotiation for meaning. As the students had a chance to negotiate meaning, they were able to improve their communicative competence (Sommath, 2007, p.117). Therefore, two-way tasks could be adopted in courses for developing communicative interactional skills in foreign language courses.

From the study, it was evident that the uses of negotiation for meaning strategies improve students' oral proficiency. For example, in problem-solving tasks, low-proficiency students who produced more negotiation for meaning strategies such as comprehension check, confirmation check, clarification request, appealing for help and repetition tended to be more proficient in speaking than the others who had not produced any negotiation for meaning strategies. Such training prompted the students to be aware of choosing the effective strategies during their interactions. Also, negotiation for meaning strategies through conversational interactions were useful in improving pronunciation, forming questions and answers, getting better at

pair work, and learning new vocabulary. Therefore, the use of negotiation for meaning strategies enhanced the oral proficiency of the learners.

The result of this study was similar to the study carried out by Nakatani (2010) which suggested that the use of strategies for maintaining discourse and sending signals for negotiation could have a positive impact on students' oral proficiency development. In his study, there was an analysis on the effects of awareness-raising training on Oral Communication Strategy (OCS) use among ESL students in Japan. The experimental group improved their oral proficiency more significantly than those in the control group. It is also found that the explicit strategy training can enhance EFL learners' OCS use and help develop their target language interaction. Moreover the experimental group became aware of how to use achievement strategies and avoid reduction strategies.

It could be suggested that the frequent use of negotiation for meaning strategies could contribute to the oral proficiency development of EFL learners with sufficient proficiency in all levels of proficiency. Nakatani (2010) suggested that negotiating bahaviors enable learners to gain opportunities to develop their productive capacity in the target language. The more frequently the students engaged in negotiation, the better score in oral proficiency they gained. Similarly, the results from the focus group showed that during the students' interaction, they recognized the use of negotiation for meaning to maintain the conversation flow and fill the conversation gaps. They view these strategies as significant tools in making conversations as occurred in their real world situations; and therefore enhance their language learning in terms of language proficiency.

It is also suggested that training in negotiation for meaning strategies should be provided to the students as they are facilitative in language development. Negotiation entails interactional adjustment, or some kind of modification or reformulation of the utterance, so that language learners learn to make their input comprehensible to their interlocutor, and at the same time promote their language acquisition (Gass and Mackey, 2006).

However, there was no control group in this study as the researcher aimed at providing strategies training to all participants. In further studies, a control group should be included into the study. From the findings, two-way communication tasks are facilitative in using various types of negotiation for meaning strategies among all learners during their interaction for mutual understanding. The effectiveness of other types of two-way communication tasks should be investigated in developing learners' fluency and accuracy.

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