



## Second Language Learners' Coping Strategy in Conversations with Native Speakers

Sachiko Terui, Doctoral Student  
Department of Communication  
University of Oklahoma (USA)

### Abstract

*One of the many strategies that many international students employ to cope with their lack of English proficiency is to pretend to understand or not to understand the conversational content exchanged with native English speakers. Combining autoethnography and iterative interviews this research explores the pretending behavior profoundly from non-native speakers' perspectives. During the iterative interviews, six students shared their personal experience specified in pretending behaviors. This study aims at informing the second language learning experience and promoting mutual understanding between native and non-native speakers in multi-lingual and multi-cultural societies. As a result, under the metatheme (Tesch, 1987) of pretending in conversation, pretending as a Communicative Strategy, eleven themes emerged. Non-native speakers' pretending behaviors are attempts to (1) protect self-esteem, (2) respond to social pressure, (3) express concern for others' feelings, (4) cope with anxiety, (5) keep conversation flowing, (6) keep conversation open, (7) avoid extra efforts, (8) fill in gaps, (9) make use of (an)other source(s), (10) elicit confirmation, and (11) take advantage of status.*

**Keywords:** International Students, Second Language Learners, Autoethnography, Multi-lingual Societies

The difference between second language learning and foreign language learning is mainly how the language functions in the language-speaking environment. When, for example, English functions as an essential communicative tool for the learner's survival, English is regarded as a second language (Brown, 2006). On the other hand, when non-native speakers study English in non-English speaking environments, where learners will not feel a desperate need to use English in daily life, it is considered a foreign language. In the latter situation, the foreign language is widely taught in schools, and "it does not play an essential role in national or social life (Broughton et al., 1978, p. 6).

Reflecting on my own language learning experience, I recall the moment when my life changed overnight. Under the auspices of the organization named Alliance for Language Learning and Educational Exchange that sends native Japanese speakers to American colleges as Japanese instructors, I arrived at Louisiana's Monroe regional airport on August 14, 2006 without knowing anyone personally. At the University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM), I began to play two roles simultaneously, that of a graduate student and of a Japanese language instructor. With my move to ULM, I became a member of a minority group rather than a

majority one and a language instructor as opposed to a language student. And, importantly, I became a second language learner instead of a foreign language learner.

As a non-native speaker in a native-speaking community, I began to feel desperate to communicate as others do, realizing how the level of my English speaking ability represents me in an English-speaking community. I felt I was no more than a little child. I strongly felt the need for a strategy to compensate for the gap, to get back to what I used to be: an effective self in the Japanese community. Driven by the idea that I should be able to communicate well since I was a graduate student and an instructor, which are among the social statuses that represent intellectual achievement in society, I found myself pretending both to understand and not to understand conversations. Furthermore, because I felt ashamed of the fact that I had very low English proficiency, and I was unable to function as an active member in the community, I didn't confess my behavior of pretending to understand English to anybody until my friend admitted his own pretending behavior to me. Thereafter, throughout conversations with non-native English speakers, I discovered that many international students share the same adaptive behavior but keep it to themselves

until the opportunity to confess arises.

### **Communication between Native and Non-native English Speakers**

Conversation with non-native speakers who have poor speaking ability can require time, patience, and energy on the part of the interlocutor. Such effort can cause frustration for both parties, possibly leading them to avoid communication and therefore impeding familiarity unless they have an already established relationship and/or are interested in one another. Awareness of the demands on the interlocutor also cause the non-native speakers to feel self-conscious about how they speak with others, and rather than motivating them to learn more, they may become discouraged from becoming proficient in the new language. Lack of interaction with others then creates uncertainty in their relationships and further prevents them from developing interpersonal relationships (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). In contrast, being aware of each conversational partners' situation might help both parties to develop the relationship.

This study analyzes pretending in conversations as a communicative behavior that has been adopted by many international students. There are a large number of studies conducted in the related areas, such as TESOL, discourse analysis, intercultural communication theories, and gerontological studies, and some of them discuss the behavior of pretending in conversations. However, these studies do not discuss this common and natural behavior of pretending as a communicative strategy. By investigating the motives of pretending, this study also aims at informing native speakers who interact with international students about the challenges that international students encounter on a daily basis. In addition, it aims to enhance mutual understanding and promote better relationships between native and non-native English speakers.

### **Literature Review**

International students have to deal with a psychological burden in their language learning process. Second and foreign language researchers have shown that language learning is always correlated with anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Foss & Reitzel, 1988; Phillips, 1991), and that there is a strong relationship between anxiety and oral competence in foreign language classroom situations (Phillips). However, the anxiety of language learners in foreign language classroom situations is different from that of second language learners

(Horwitz et al.). Unlike in the foreign language classroom, the anxiety that international students experience is related to actual communication with native English speakers, rather than to class performance and testing situations. Thus, international students adopt several strategies to cope with the anxiety and uncertainty caused by their language barrier. Morin (2007) reported that international students with less confidence in their oral communication skills tend to remain quiet in class, ask questions only after class, visit teachers' office often, put a lot of information on a Power Point or handout, rely on written communications more than oral interactions, guess from non-verbal cues, watch native speakers' mouths, and avoid having conversations over phone.

Although these previous studies of coping strategies are helpful, they did not explicitly focus on non-native speakers' behavior of pretending. Language learners may engage in two forms of pretending behavior: pretending that they do and that they do not understand what is being said. Hatch (1992) observed pretending behavior, which she called "faking it," in conversations between a native English speaker and a non-native English speaker. She noted that while pretending was effective in continuing the conversation smoothly, overall, it was not effective because participants were not able to "build a common theme or focus" (p. 22). Also, pretending might result in putting all communicative burdens on the interlocutor, that is, on the native English speaker.

Unlike foreign language learners, international students experience their social status changed upon arriving in the United States. Changes in social status that international students experience are similar to the disengagement that elderly people experience in their aging process, as studied by Cumming et al. (as cited in Nussbaum et al., 2000). While facing diminishing physical abilities is unavoidable in the aging process, studies (McCartney & Nadler, 1979; Thomas & Herbst, 1980; Sheie, 1985) suggest that no longer being able to hear as well as others around them affects elderly people psychologically by undermining their effective self-image. Elderly people who experience the disengagement process adopt pretending behavior to make up for their limited communicative ability. Just as Hatch (1992) argued above, Gomez and Madey (2001) noted that elderly people's strategy of pretending to understand in conversations is ineffective when considered in terms of its usefulness in aiding comprehension in the interaction. However, Gomez and Madey also indicate the possibility that



pretending can psychologically and socially help them to cope with their hearing problems. There is a fundamental difference, of course, between elderly people and international students: the hearing impaired elderly have language proficiency and adequate cultural background whereas international students possess acute hearing ability but lack language proficiency and host country cultural background.

Different studies related to counseling for international students (Redmond & Bunyi, 1993; Chen, 1999; Galloway & Jenkins, 2009) noted that language proficiency is one of the main factors that causes psychological pressure. However, a study by Powell (as cited in Hayes & Lin, 1994) shows that language proficiency of international students does not affect their satisfaction with interactions. Further, the relationship between international students' satisfaction and conversational contributions from native English speakers, such as restating words and slowing talk, is a statistically positive relationship. Recasting this situation again in terms of the hearing impaired senior, the "goal of [people who have difficulty in hearing] is not necessarily to reach perfect communication but to avoid unpleasant outcomes due to miscommunication" (Gomez & Madey, 2001, p. 223). For the international students, the goal is the same, to avoid unpleasant outcomes.

Although this literature review helps us to envision the difficulties that international students encounter on a daily basis, it contributes little to our comprehension of the pretending behavior as a communicative behavior of second language learners. Second language learners pretend both outside and inside the classroom. In other words, second language learners engage in pretending in conversations everywhere, and they experience the need to pretend similar to those with disability and/or in the aging process, even though they have no actual physical disability. The students feel less than normal because of the social and emotional burden that comes with miscommunication, and they have the impulse to hide that fact.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory is an approach to creating theory or to generalizing phenomena from many specific instances. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) emergent similarities should be categorized readily, not forcibly, into several themes in order to identify a variety of patterns. By collecting data from narratives and

interviews, the research in this paper uses grounded theory to generate a theoretical explanation on why and when non-native speakers adopt pretending behavior as a communicative strategy.

### **Narrative Paradigm, including Autoethnography**

Narrative Paradigm, including autoethnography, is one of the data collection procedures used in grounded theory. Walter Fisher (1985) advocated the soundness of the narrative paradigm noting that human beings are storytellers by nature and that they experience their lives in narrative form. Narratives allow investigators to understand the narrator's own experience more deeply and also to present it to listeners and readers "holistically in all its complexity and richness," as if narratives were providing a window into the narrator's personal beliefs and experience (Bell, 2002, p.209).

In addition to such narratives, researchers may include their own narratives as part of the data in their research. Autoethnography is derived from ethnographical studies, and it has the characteristic of representing researchers' own identities and their experiences of involvement with others (Bartholomae, 2004). In an autoethnographical study, the researcher employs moral dialogues, confessional tales, and the first person in his/her writings as a subject in narratives (Ellis & Brochner as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2002). Such introspection uncovers the cultural contexts through which the investigator's self is constructed, while illustrating how things in the culture make sense from both personal and academic perspectives (Hills, 2002).

In this study, both narratives and autoethnographic narratives are employed, collected from iterative interviews and autoethnographic journal writing. Narratives contribute to mapping the behavior of pretending by providing the readers with the opportunity to explore how communication works between non-native and native speakers, as well as what the reasons are for pretending and how such pretending behavior influences the relationship with native English speakers. Listeners and readers make decisions about whether to accept or reject these narratives by comparing narrator's beliefs and experiences with their own personal lives and experiences (West & Turner, 2004). Such subjectivity is the most powerful characteristic in the narrative paradigm. Data collected through narratives in this study are categorized readily supported by three theoretical frameworks below: Face-Negotiating Theory, Communication Accommodation Theory, and Uncertainty Reduction Theory.

### Face-Negotiating Theory

Attempting to understand and resolve the conflicts in intercultural communication is best understood through face-negotiating theory. This theory relates mainly to how people from different cultures perceive and manage conflicts. Ting-Toomey, the first researcher to promote it, asserts that people from different cultural groups have various concerns for saving face for themselves and others, which leads them to manage conflict in different ways (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Oetzel et al. (2000) defined face as “the claimed sense of favorable social self-worth and/ or projected other-worth in a public situation” and called the action to manage face facework (p. 400). While communicating, people try to maintain self-face by displays concerning their own image, other-face by displays revealing concern for their conversational partner’s image, and mutual-face by displays revealing “concern for both parties’ image or the image of their relationship” through the use of dominating, avoiding, and integrating facework (p. 400). For the categorization of ethnic/cultural identity, Ting-Toomey and Kurogi employed the concepts of individualism and collectivism developed by Hofstede (1986), which are social patterns that describe an individual’s psychological connection with or autonomy from others. People in individualistic societies regard themselves as independent, prioritize their personal goals over group goals, and therefore tend to protect self-face in communications, while people in collectivistic societies see themselves as part of one or more groups “willing to give priority to the goals of these [groups] over their own personal goals,” and therefore try to maintain other-face or mutual-face in communications (Triandis as cited in Oetzel et al., 2001, p. 239).

Oetzel et al. (2001) discussed pretending as one of several conflict management strategies, and they categorized pretending as an avoidance of facework in conflicts. In contrast, this study views pretending as integrating facework: non-native speakers employ pretending as a strategy due to concern for self-face, other-face, and mutual face. In this way, pretending can be defined as a communicative, face-negotiating strategy that is applied in cross cultural situations mainly caused by language barriers in conversations. By referring to the concept of self-face, other-face, and mutual-face, this study examines the types, situations, and motivations of facework when engaging in pretending in conversations.

### Communication Accommodation Theory

The more a language or its culture is attractive or

desirable, the more learners are motivated to acquire it (Krashen, 1982). This argument is also supported by the communication accommodation theory originated by Giles (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). During interactions with others, people adjust, modify, or regulate their vocal and non-verbal communicative patterns to resemble those of their conversational partners based on the judgment of whether the others are in a desirable group. People tend to converge in their conversations when they are attracted to others in a group. On the other hand, when people are not attracted to others in a group, they diverge and are less likely to show concern about accommodation of or toward each other. Expanding the conceptual framework of convergence and divergence, Zuengler (1991) observed the behavior of overaccommodation, which can lead communicators to misunderstandings. Despite speaker intention to accommodate others, listeners may perceive this behavior as disturbing and disrespectful because the effort of accommodation is too great. When speakers receive more than the proper amount of attention, the situation implies that they are in need of special treatment. Thus, overaccommodation may induce listeners to feel uncomfortable with the speaker, especially in regard to specific interactions. This type of miscommunication may occur when the speaker’s desire to build a relationship or contribute to smoothing interaction is stronger than that of the interlocutors.

Everyone engages daily in such communication accommodations unconsciously. By analyzing participants’ experience through narratives, this study seeks to investigate how international students’ perspectives, attitudes toward others, and cultural backgrounds influence their communication.

### Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Different studies have focused on initial interactions and uncertainty as factors that influence the communication process. Berger and Calabrese (1975) explored initial interactions and the role uncertainty plays in interpersonal communication. People act as naïve researchers as a means of predicting and explaining what goes on in initial encounters. As they spend time together expressing themselves through question-asking and self-disclosure, the level of uncertainty will be reduced and the level of intimacy will be increased (Douglas, 1990). The level of uncertainty also will be reduced when they find similarities to others (Berger & Calabrese). In addition, although Berger and Calabrese originally proposed this theory as communicative strategies in “initial interactions,” later studies (Berger, 1979; Booth-Butterfield, Heare, & Booth-Butterfield,



1991) added several exceptional situations to which this theory can apply, such as communication with hearing or visually impaired persons and individuals who do not share the same language. Gudykunst and Nishida (1984) examined this theory in intercultural communication based on Berger's argument that uncertainty varies in cultures in which verbal and non-verbal expressions for the same situation carry different meanings. In such situations, the communicators' uncertainty lasts longer than in other conversational cases, even after they have already passed the initial stage of interaction (Berger; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1984; Booth-Butterfield et al., 1991). As did the exceptional cases that Berger added to contextualizing uncertainty reduction, this study examines uncertainty reduction processes in interactions, including non-native English speakers, without limiting the interacting stage of the relationships to "initial interactions."

### **Research Questions**

Based on the researcher's personal experience and the theories discussed above, the following research questions were posed:

1. Why do non-native speakers pretend to understand/not to understand in conversations?
2. In what situations do they feel the need to pretend?
3. Does pretending behavior differ based on social status among the speakers? (Are there differences in pretending between graduate international students and undergraduate international students?)

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants**

Upon approval from the Human Subject Research Committee, three undergraduate international students and three graduate international students were recruited based on their language learning experience, about which the researcher was informed through previous personal interactions. All participants reported having habitually engaged in pretending as a coping strategy. Due to the main purpose of this research, participating international students were from non English speaking countries.

#### **Procedures**

Prior to the current study, a pilot study was conducted.

The pilot study recruited three international students to examine their reasons for pretending. Results from the pilot study revealed possible pretending behavior themes and as well as the voices and perspectives of non-native speakers in conversations with native speakers.

Having started from an inquiry on social phenomena, the researcher collected data for the current study through autoethnography and a series of iterative interviews focused on exploring the meaning of the lived individual's pretending experience and how that individual perceived that experience (Hills, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

In this study, the autoethnologic procedure of journaling was utilized for the comprehension of researcher's own experience. The narrative component involved a series of iterative interviews yielded in-depth and prolonged engagement with interviewees through interaction and observation.

Following the Seidman model (as cited in Rossman & Rallis, 2003), the iterative interviews were divided into three stages. Three iterative interviews were performed. These interviews warranted a specific purpose for each stage. The first interview was conducted to investigate each participant's personal background, such as participants' home country, age, gender, and native language; then, it searched for a general definition of pretending. The purpose of the second interview was to elicit their pretending experience(s), and the third interview was held for purposes of analyzing the prior interviews. At the end of the third interview, the participants were asked to rethink their definitions of pretending. Both the second and the third interviews were set approximately a month after the previous interview to provide the participants with time to reflect on their interviews. For the first and second interviews, the study employed the interview guide approach in which the researcher prepared specific topics to address while allowing leeway to pursue other conversations. The first two interviews were transcribed and analyzed for the purpose of refining the subsequent data-gathering procedure, finding themes of pretending behavior, and categorizing them. In the third interview, the dialogue interview style was employed. During this interview, the participant was shown the transcript with the researcher's categorization of perceived pretending behavior. The participant confirmed or negotiated the categorization and, together, the researcher and participant elaborated on their understanding of the

pretending behavior. Given the written consent of the participants, the researcher recorded the interviews with an audio recorder. The nature of this research requires trustworthiness of the data. The researcher's social status as a non-native English speaker made her a member of the participants' group rather than an investigator. With the established relationships that the researcher had with the participants, it is reasonable to believe that the participants remained open to their pretending experiences without feeling fear of any judgments regarding their confessional narratives.

### Data Analysis

Following the Grounded Theory research procedure (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 1990), data collected through researcher's journal writing and transcriptions from a series of iterative interviews was examined to identify similarities in pretending experiences. This analytical procedure was taken as soon as each data was collected and was continued throughout this study. After emerged similarities in pretending behavior were coded in each participant's data, each emerged similarity was examined for themes of pretending behavior to see whether they worked appropriately with the subsequent data. Thirteen themes were generated initially. After testing the similarities and exclusiveness among the themes, some themes were refined and merged, with eleven themes remains in the end.

### Results

#### Metatheme: Pretending as a Communicative Strategy

Following the pilot study, the metatheme (Tesch, 1987) of pretending behavior was confirmed: Pretending as a Communication Strategy. Under the metatheme, Pretending as a Communication Strategy, eleven pretending behavior themes emerged. International students described their pretending experiences as attempts to (1) protect self-esteem, (2) respond to social pressure, (3) express concern for others' feelings, (4) cope with anxiety, (5) keep conversation flowing, (6) keep conversation open, (7) avoid extra efforts, (8) fill in gaps, (9) make use of (an)other source(s), (10) elicit confirmation, and (11) take advantage of status. Each category was examined thoroughly to confirm its uniqueness. Each pretending behavior theme is described below.

### Pretending Behavior Themes

**Protect Self-esteem.** International students respond to their vulnerability by trying to maintain their own self-image, akin to what they were accustomed to in their native community. This effort to save one's self-image was seen in the participants' comments. Trying to keep a positive self-image in conversation with native speakers, Jessica said, "No one wants to look incapable." In addition to a desire to display general intelligence, a desire to display academic intelligence also evokes non-native speaker pretending behavior. Jessica shared her desire not to look foolish, saying, "I sometimes feel that maybe this is a damn [silly] question... my self-confiden[ce] is not that high at that time, so I thought that people think that I am silly and stupid by asking such questions. I tried to pretend." Monica also said, "I just don't want to be the person who always asks about the explanation." During my pilot study, one of the research participants, Dennis from Tanzania, said, "If you don't know what's going on, you keep your mouth quiet. You don't wanna speak totally strange. [Even if I don't understand what's going on around me,] I don't like to ask because I'm sure that I will ask more than once."

Even though such language-related communicative difficulties under these circumstances were predictable, many non-native speakers nonetheless struggle to cope with the differences between what they used to be in their home countries and what they are now. Like Jessica, Monica and Dennis described, non-native speakers seek for the way to maintain self-face in the new community. Due to such vulnerability, they become sensitive to the way the host community works, as described below.

**Respond to Social Pressure.** People always receive some influence from society (Larsen & Buss, 2005) because they value commonality in society (Thomson, 1997). Since individuals are raised to be "completely socially adjusted at any age," they often perceive others' expectations to be universal (Smith, as cited in Thomson, 1997, p. 634). The individual acquires this universality unconsciously in society and seldom questions its validity unless encountering others with different ideas of universality. This universality is apparent in international students' experience of humor in their host country. Monica from Colombia, whose English proficiency is high, shared an experience from her daily life:

I feel like I was forced to laugh just because



I don't understand the joke. [...] I wonder that they are thinking that I didn't understand because my laugh looked so fake. You know? I hate it though. That's when I pretend the most when people tell jokes and funny things that I am clueless. I think the humor here is totally different than back home. When I understand the jokes, and they are not funny to me, I am not going to laugh, but when I don't understand, that's when I laugh.

Similar to Monica, Phebe from China experienced social pressure to laugh with other people. She shared her specific experience:

Generally speaking, it's very frustrating. It's not understanding information or not. For example, I went to a comedy after I came to the United States. At that time, my English [was] already very polished, but I still couldn't understand slang in the comedy. So I didn't understand 99% of the comedy. Although I know that information in the comedy is useless to me, not understanding makes me so frustrated and so sad. All the people were laughing at the comedy. I was sitting there, but I didn't understand what's going on. At first, I pretended to understand the comedy, but I had to leave in the middle because psychologically I couldn't take that, just not laughing while other people are laughing.

In addition to the assumption of a shared sense of humor, social pressure created by language barriers also leads international students to pretending behavior. For example, Eddna reflected on a past shopping experience. She wanted to ask the cashier questions since she was not quite sure how the pricing system worked, but she ended up not asking anything. Eddna noted,

When paying money, everyone wants to make it clear what you are paying for. However, you also need to be aware of others to be fast whether you understand the conversation or not. There are people behind you. You are wasting their time.

Besides the social pressure that international students experience outside the academic institution, international students are exposed to social pressure in the academic field almost everyday. Professors constantly communicate their expectations of what every student should know. Monica felt such expectations from her professors:

At the first semester in graduate school,

professors said this many times, 'You are grad students, so you should know this.' I feel like they expect us to understand everything because we are graduate students, even though we are international graduate students. [...] We didn't go through the same educational process.

In this way, international students adopt pretending behavior in conversations both in and out of the academic institution to deal with the expectations of their host society.

### **Express Concern for Others' Reactions**

It is human to perceive others' feelings and adjust their behavior by seeing, hearing, and reading (interpreting) a message (Devito, 2007). As noted in the introduction of this paper, having conversations with non-native speakers with low proficiency requires time, patience and energy on the part of their interlocutors. International students who are aware of such requirements caused by their language ability often anticipate and adjust their communicative strategy to ensure pleasant conversations with native speakers: They pretend to understand rather than confessing their lack of understanding to avoid posing an extra burden on their interlocutors.

Eddna said that she pretended to understand conversations to avoid "bothering" others. Monica said that she is most likely to pretend when she sees "the person is in a hurry." In addition, in spite of having a good relationship with her boyfriend, who is a native English speaker, Monica sometimes does not want to ask him to repeat his words when she observes that "he is in a bad mood."

Because sometimes maybe I am not a patient person, I could think what if he is not patient enough just to repeat it for 4 or 5 times. [...] If it is not important, I am just going to pretend that I understood.

International students anticipate the potential burden they pose for their interlocutors and adopt pretending behavior for pleasant conversations and relationships. In this way, pretending behavior also assists international students in coping with the anxiety they experience with native English speakers.

### **Cope with Anxiety**

Leaving their hometown and coming to the USA, international students "lose the shared identity that comes from being with family and peers" (Hayes & Lin, 1994, par. 5). They become susceptible to anxiety

in the foreign country through losing their stable social status, and they often observe the “disparity between the ‘true’ self as known to the language learner and the more limited self as can be presented at any given moment” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). In studies regarding the relationship between language learning and mental condition, scholars have agreed that anxiety is a “major obstacle to be overcome in learning to speak another language” (Horwitz et al., p. 125).

Along with the anxiety created by the language learning process, international students feel an underlying anxiety about their ties to their host community. Since second language learners are not familiar with linguistic and sometimes socio-linguistic standards, communicating in English entails risk taking (Horwitz et al.). When they observe differences between what they were in their hometown and what they are in their new community, they may become self-conscious about their membership status. Usually determined by community members, membership status provides members with security. Not being accepted by others can undermine a person’s confidence and willingness to interact with other community members. This rejection reinforces the threat of being isolated from a community and causes anxiety because “humans evolved to live in groups” (Larsen & Buss, 2005, p. 253).

\* \* \*

*Of course, whenever I get lost in conversations, I try to understand and often ask. I am sure that people around me are always willing to help me by repeating the words slowly or restating with alternative expressions. However, I feel sorry if I ask them to help me many times in one conversation. My concern is that it interrupts their conversations, that they feel annoyed with repeating the same sentences, and that they are not going to let me join them because of the inconvenience caused by me. (Journal entry, January 25, 2007)*

\* \* \*

The desire to belong to society, to be accepted by others, and to be treated just like other people, is strong. Such desire is often recognized by people who have moved from one community to another and who have consequently lost a shared identity. When people do not find the same type of shared identity or they cannot re-establish it in a new community, desire for it increases and promotes anxiety.

Moving to the U.S. for the first time with very limited English ability, Monica experienced losing her shared identity. Monica communicated that she

sometimes worried about what other people thought about her and indicated that her pretending behavior was contingent on her comfort level. Monica shared her feelings, “If the person who is talking to me is close to me and not going to judge me, I will ask him to repeat the words.”

In addition to such circumstances, anxiety can be caused by memories of past conversations. For example, as native speakers in their home county, some now international students had experienced having conversations with non-native speakers. Upon moving abroad, these now international students’ own statuses changed from native to non-native speakers, and they found themselves recalling what they had felt when they were native speakers and how they perceived their non-native speaker interlocutors in conversations. Those who had perceived their non-native interlocutors negatively worried that their native speaking interlocutors would perceive them in a similar way. Inwon, a native speaker of Korean, remembered the interactions that he had had in South Korea with an international student from China studying at Inwon’s university. Inwon identified his own experience as a native speaker with the possible reactions of his new interlocutors in the U.S.

He is from China. He cannot speak Korean very well. He is not good at speaking and listening [to] Korean. When talking with him, first time I tried to understand his status. I care about him. But later, he didn’t understand what I said. After a while, I become getting choking [patting the chest a few times: this indicates his irritation]. [...] I told him the same things over and over again. [As pointing to a book,] “This is yours. This is yours. THIS IS YOURS!” [...] First time I talked to him, but later, I didn’t want to talk to him because although I said something, he didn’t understand. I notice this situation [is similar to my current one]. If I don’t understand native speakers here, maybe he, a native speaker, also will be choking [patting the chest a few times] like my experience. So, I pretend.

Many international students express their anxiety through recalling their own experience as native speakers. However, as a result of having anxiety due to thinking back on their own experience, international students persevere in their efforts to look for more opportunities to communicate with native speakers.



### Keep Conversation Flowing

As Berger and Calabrese (1975) noted, the level of uncertainty toward conversational partners decreases as they spend time interacting with one another. This is the process of fostering a relationship with others, and people put value on spending as much time as possible, so that they can increase their intimacy level. Since the interaction that international students have with others may keep uncertainty active for longer periods because of the language barrier, the strategy of not interrupting and not stopping the communication are a crucial means to building the relationship (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1984).

For initial conversations with people, Jessica said, “When you first met someone, you don't want to ask many questions even if you don't understand what he is saying. Let it go; let it flow. Keeping the conversation is better than interrupting sometimes.” Phebe shared her experience in which she utilized pretending to extend and build relationships:

The reason I said “yes” even though I didn't understand is just because I want to keep the conversation going. I was talking to my ex-boyfriend before I dated him. If I stopped the conversation too early, I [would] not have a chance to talk to him. I would never have a chance to make him my ex-boyfriend—future boyfriend at that time. Hopefully I can understand part of the conversation, so that I will be able to actually respond instead of saying “yes.” [...] You have to talk to get to know somebody.

Increasing familiarity among people is crucial to developing a relationship. However, having too intense an interaction in one sitting sometimes can inhibit the developing relationship. To ensure future conversations, the current conversation should end with keeping the door open for those that follow.

### Keep Conversation Open

Most of the international students in this study do not worry about pretending in casual conversations with their close friends as much as they do in formal conversations, such as conversations with persons who are in positions of authority, business-related communications, and conversations in official situations. Different from conversations with friends, such conversations are not easily retrievable. Certainly the “formality” level varies depending on the student's sense of situation. Although this is also closely related to the third theme, being concerned for others' feelings,

the observed motive is different from the previous themes. Avazbek from Uzbekistan does not show anxiety about conversations with friends, but he has a different attitude toward the business-related conversation.

If it is business related conversation, I cannot pretend. [...] I will just ask questions. But sometimes, if I ask more and more questions, the conversational partner, the person whom you are talking with, can get bothered. Then, you have to pretend. When I didn't understand them, I would try to ask them, but later. After asking a few times and didn't understand all the information, I will write the questions down, and when next time I meet them, I will ask more questions.

From this perspective, one can observe international students' motivation to develop pleasant relationship with English native speakers.

### Avoid Extra Efforts

Regardless of the fact that international students are highly motivated to learn English, they are also human. Although one of the popular purposes of study abroad is to learn a target language “as the mode of second language most approximating first language acquisition” (Brecht & Walton, 1994, p. 224), people may observe that international students on U.S. college campuses hang out with others from their home country. This tendency is especially true for those with more than a year of study abroad (Brecht & Walton). Most of the interviewed international students said that they speak their mother tongue when they are with people who speak the same language. Although every conversation can be an opportunity to practice, fatigue and the prospect of extra work sometimes decreases motivation to communicate using English.

\* \* \*

*While I was talking with others in English, I would always try to write a sentence in my head and read it, but my tongue didn't move as quickly as my thoughts. In speaking Japanese, I can do multiple things at once. But I cannot do it in English. Communicating in English is a complex multi-task. It requires catching the words that I know, guessing and searching the meaning of them, organizing them into what I want to say, composing sentences in English, reading them and trying to move the mouth and tongue properly. Before coming to the United States, I had a conversation in English for approximately an hour. I was very tired and could feel heat in my head. My brain was working*

*really hard. (Journal entry, May 10, 2007)*

\* \* \*

To live using only English is quite energy consuming, and it is sometimes frustrating and overwhelming. Dennis from Tanzania shared that he is unwilling to talk in English “when [he is] very tired.” Inwon from South Korea who had firmly decided not to speak Korean until his graduation changed his mind after his arrival. He said, “I couldn’t control this stress in the totally new world” and needed the comfort of familiar language and thought patterns. Similarly, Phebe who is a graduate student in Biology specializing in behavioral ecology—how the behavior of fitness affects survival—also speaks her native language (Chinese) with her Chinese friends. She explained this in terms of her graduate research as stating,

My theory is that we are, as an animal, constantly trying to reduce the amount of energy expenditures. Talking in your mother tongue requires less energy in thinking, especially when you struggle to find the right word to describe something; you use a lot of energy. We all tend to think in our home language in a relaxed situation. That is something subconscious.

Such stress management is part of an international student’s life. Fatigue lowers not only the motivation but also English speaking comprehension. Phebe shared her experience:

When I got really tired, and when people try to talk to me, I am totally out of focus. So I didn’t know what they are talking about. Sometimes my advisor asked me to do something. I know that at that moment I was absent-minded. I will say “yes, I understand,” although I was not really sure what I am supposed to do.

When I asked her weren’t the instructions from her advisor important to her, her response gave me the idea that this fatigue theme can also be supported by the first theme, protecting self-esteem.

I will figure it out later. Because if I say “no, I don’t know,” it implies that I didn’t understand his instruction. I don’t want to give him an impression that I am so stupid that I didn’t understand his instruction. His instruction is easy. The point is that I lost my focus. So I don’t want to mislead and have him think that I am silly. Later on, I will ask him again. I will ask some probing questions by rephrasing what he said.

Also, after realizing that they do not have to understand

everything, most of the research participants said they would ask questions when they regarded the information as “important” for them. Otherwise they will not put in the extra effort to understand the conversations. Jessica said, “I understand 30% or 40% [of the conversation]. There is 60% [information] that I don’t know. I will guess. If I think I need to know that, I will keep asking. I want to get the 60%. But if it is not the case, I will be just satisfied with what I already have, [even if that is only] 20% or 30%.”

\* \* \*

*Two different feelings stay in my heart all the time: Feeling motivated and overwhelmed. During my second semester in the Communication Department, I was still nervous and hesitated to speak out in classroom discussions; well, even now. While my classmates were discussing their opinions on the material, I was frantically organizing my thoughts and opinions in order to catch the timing to speak out. I often missed the opportunity, or even when I obtained the chance to say something, I stammered over and over again and got confused with what I was talking about. I think it was also very difficult for my teacher and classmates to understand my utterances. It was very frustrating. If the teacher didn’t require participating in the classroom discussions, I would definitely not speak out so much because I knew that I have to struggle a lot and feel embarrassed for not being able to discuss as effectively as my classmates do. When I feel overwhelmed, I prefer just sitting quietly in discussions pretending to understand what is going on. (Journal entry, December 16, 2007)*

\* \* \*

While being overwhelmed with the stress caused by language barrier, international students still try to improve their language ability. They sometimes utilize pretending behavior as a tool to gather the information they missed in conversation.

### **Fill in Gaps**

*Even though the person was speaking fast, I can catch the words if I already knew the words, such as “I” and “yesterday.” Those words are what I have heard and said so many times since I started to learn English. So, even when I got lost in conversations, I still had some idea of the gist. However, there is always some missing information. People pretend to understand in order to fill in the gaps that occur in the conversations. The more they wait, the more information they will get from the addressees, which may help to fill in the part of conversation they missed. People sometimes need to*



*pretend to understand in the conversation so that they can get more information. This may be much better described as “waiting” rather than “pretending.”*  
(Journal entry, February 7, 2007)

\* \* \*

According to the input hypothesis by Krashen (1982), second language learners increase their language ability when exposed to comprehensible input that consists of structures and vocabulary that are a little beyond the learners’ current level of comprehension level but understandable in the given context. Chomsky (1995) said people acquire language by receiving information, storing it in some manner, and then making use of this information in an actual situation. Krashen called this information input, and Chomsky argued that input should precede the actual speaking of sentences. In the environment where students cannot get feedback from a teacher, such input must be plentiful (Ellis, 1999). Thus, even though the conversations can be more than “a little beyond” them for their beginning level, students may be able to catch some familiar words. This “catching” is an important part of input. Nodding many times, Inwon said that he can understand the conversation if he knows “the conversational topic.” While pretending to understand, he can guess the topics and also gain additional information from the conversational partners.

**Make Use of (An)other Source(s)**

Yan and Kember (2004) reported that in the learning process, students rely on one another to accomplish their goal effectively. Their study showed that engaged students take time to acquire knowledge by putting forth some effort, whereas avoiding students tend to minimize the task and time. In terms of second language learning, however, even engaged international students may want to minimize the task and time because there is no time to prepare for the scheduled examination, and the performance opportunity comes and goes very quickly every day. Thus, international students make the most use of available sources to accomplish their goal to take less time and experience less stress.

Having Spanish speaking classmates, Eddna pretends to understand during class and ask her friends after the class if her understanding is right in Spanish. “I can rely on them. When I got lost in classroom, I feel safe. I will ask them later” (Eddna). Besides friends who share the mother tongue, international students rely on books and the International Student Office (ISO) as a supportive

organization. Monica, who is now a graduate student, compared her pretending behavior between when she was in the undergraduate program to how she acts now:

I pretended more in undergrad. During my undergraduate program, everything was based on a book. So I could have pretended in class, but I always go back to the book and read it. Going back to the book was pretty much what made me feel comfortable.

Similarly, even though Inwon could not understand the instructions of how to apply for a job at the university’s computing center, he felt at ease because he heard ISO in the directions.

I was just pretending to understand and went to the International Student Office because I know the international student office will help me. I don’t have to get the information in the conversation. If I have no one to help me, I would never pretend to understand because I have to know about it.

**Elicit Confirmation**

Receiving and understanding information correctly is an important but difficult task because of the language barrier. International students sometimes wonder if they have received the information correctly. Therefore, eliciting for repetition can be a source of confirmation. Even though Eddna thought she had understood the instructions from her professor, she pretended not to understand and asked for the instructions again. In the same way, Monica and Jessica also pretended not to understand by seeking to “double check, asking to say that with [or in a] different way” (Monica).

\* \* \*

*When I was in Ohio and asked a stranger where the building that I should be at for orientation was, I pretended not to understand the directions from her, even though I actually had a map in my brain, but was unsure. Consequently, she restated the explanation quite slowly, drew a map, and gave it to me which made me feel much more secure. (Journal entry, January 18, 2007)*

\* \* \*

As a strategy to get the additional information from the addressee, this theme can be similar to filling in the gaps. But, pretending in order to confirm the information is different from the eighth theme, filling in the gaps, in terms of the activeness. The difference is that while the non-native speaker in this current

confirming information, takes some action to obtain the information, in the filling in the gap theme the non-native speaker is passively waiting for additional input.

### Take Advantage of Status

Scott (2001), referring to the Women's Liberation movement, explained how people start to take action to create a better living environment. When the intention is to change or to get over an uncomfortable situation, people need to recognize the current situation by reflecting on self-image and social identity, and how others in society see or construct the self-image and social identity of others. Similarly, through daily conversations, international students gradually come to grips with their identity as non-native speakers in the United States after their arrival. And while they recognize the limitation caused by their lack of English proficiency, they also find positive aspects in not being able to understand English well.

Understanding his self-image as a non-native speaker, Avazbek makes jokes by pretending not to understand to see his friends' reaction. Phebe pretended not to understand while she was traveling in Sri Lanka. Trying to avoid having a conversation with street vendors, she said, "no English," although her English ability was good at that time. She said, "I talked to other street vendors in English to buy goodies. But if they try to sell me something, I will say 'no English.' It's a much easier way to get rid of the people who you don't want to talk to." Another international student answered the question, "Have you ever pretended not to understand?" saying:

I would pretend not to understand when I know it will benefit me. "Oh, I am sorry it was a misunderstanding. You know that I have a language barrier." I am using my disability as a way just to protect myself, you know, but...why not? [...] I think that I was pretending not to understand because I did something wrong. I said, "Well, I thought you had said something else." Actually, I think it was my fault. But I just like, you know, blamed it on the language barrier. I say, "Yeah, sometimes it happens" That is awful.  
(Anonymous student)

\* \* \*

*At the end of the "month long study abroad program," my suitcase became really heavy with the textbooks and souvenirs that I bought, and I didn't pay attention on the strict weight regulation that each airline company has for checking in baggage. On the*

*departure day from the airport in Ohio, the school director came with us to make sure that everything was going smoothly. When checking in my suitcase, the airline staff charged me \$75 dollars for an over weight fee since my suitcase was way heavier than the regulated weight. The school director spoke Japanese with a whisper, "Pretend not to understand them." Although I could understand what the airline staff said and why I had to pay the surcharge, I pretended not to understand. I said, "Sorry, I don't understand. I cannot speak English well..." The staff looked each other, discussed shortly, and decided to let me go. I was wondering if they would discover my pretending, but I successfully got through the situation. Hooray! I didn't have to pay! I know it was bad. (Journal entry, January 24, 2007)*

\* \* \*

Native English speakers who read this part may have increased doubts about the veracity of their interactions with international students. A more accurate perspective, however, would be that pretending, rather than being a planned or favored strategy, is simply a makeshift way of weathering the occasional conversation.

### Discussion

The purpose of this research was to investigate the reasons why non-native speakers engage in pretending behavior. Previous studies in related areas have shown that pretending is a less than effective strategy for improving language proficiency (Hatch, 1992), solving conflicts (Oetzel et al., 2000), or exchanging information (Gomez & Madey, 2001). Gomez and Madey pointed out, however, that pretending behavior can nonetheless effectively assist people in coping psychologically and socially with communicative problems caused by hearing difficulties. Thus, it is not too much to say that pretending in conversation is one of the communicative tools available to people, including international students, hoping to have pleasant conversational experiences. Similarly, the findings of this study show that the behavior of pretending is not a mere social behavior, but rather a communicative strategy that non-native speakers adopt in their language learning process with the overall goal being to compensate for their language barrier and to achieve comfortable communication with native speakers. In fact, under the metatheme Pretending as a Communication Strategy, identified in this research, eleven themes emerged. In depth interviews



and interpretive research approach enabled individual voices to envision each theme vividly.

Contrary to my prediction, there are not significant differences in pretending behaviors between graduate and undergraduate students. Phebe and Eddna said that their pretending behaviors are mainly because of their language barrier rather than their social status as a graduate student. Monica's quote in the second theme (Theme 2. Respond to Social Pressure), shows that she, as a graduate student, felt social expectations in the academic field. However, her pretending behaviors as a whole are very similar to ones with other undergraduate students in this research. It is important to note that Monica experienced the social pressure when professors, people around her, differentiated their expectation toward her as a graduate student compared to an undergraduate student. If a study focuses on pretending behaviors only in academic field, the difference in pretending behaviors between graduate and undergraduate students could be more significant.

Returning again to the parallels between the hearing-impaired elderly and international students reveals the specific relevance of some hearing-impaired studies to the protection of self-esteem. Through their aging process, some elderly people start to experience physical difficulties in hearing conversations. Likewise, international students, by crossing a border, begin to experience difficulties in understanding conversations. Regardless of the different causes and processes, both parties face a diminishment of their ability and therefore experience the difference between how they used to function in society and how they function after the disengagement process.

According to the study by Gomez and Madey (2001), the primary reason why hearing-impaired elderly pretend to understand the conversations around them is to persist in their perceived effectiveness in society. Nussbaum et al. (2000) also stated that being looked upon as productive and effective is quite an important factor as a member of society, which is true not only for the elderly but for all human beings. In pursuing perceived effectiveness, some of the hearing-impaired elderly and international students may consciously or unconsciously hide their diminished ability to avoid their interlocutors' adjusted communication strategies: for hearing-impaired elderly, their interlocutors may repeat words, simplify conversations, and articulate each word loudly and slowly, whereas for international students, their

interlocutors may adopt "foreigner talk," "children talk," "teacher talk," or "baby talk." Although many people find these communicative strategies effective and helpful, some of those hearing-impaired elderly and international students with high self-esteem deem these adjusted communicative strategies to indicate their incompetence in interactions (Hatch, 1992), in which non-native speakers regarded such communicative strategies are overaccommodation. These adjusted communicative strategies may compel the group of people who have difficulties in hearing or understanding to pretend in conversations.

Based on Communication Accommodation Theory by Giles (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991), avoiding the adjusted communication to keep an acceptable and presentable self-image or "self-face," to use the terminology of Oetzel et al. (2001), may support people when they join in a new community. Similar to the hearing-impaired elderly's experience of disengagement, many international students, having left their home community, are stripped of the self-image they possessed at home. Whether they try avoiding the adjusted communicative strategies or not, many international students face obstacles that interfere with the most mundane tasks, such as making a phone call. They no longer have the confidence that others around them take for granted, due to their lack of commonality in ways of thinking and culture. In this way, "the language learner's self-esteem is vulnerable to the awareness that the range of communicative choices and authenticity is restricted" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128).

Contrary to the claims by Ting-Toomay & Kurogi (1998) and Hofstede (1986), those findings show that participants' cultural background, whether individualistic or collectivistic, does not have significant influence on the behavior of pretending. Rather than the cultural background and the size of the conversational group, majority of the research participants reported in their interviews that they often adopt the pretending behavior in conversations with people who they do not know well. In addition to the level of familiarity with interlocutors, the level of language proficiency and familiarity they have with the language speaking community matter hugely to determine the attitude that non-native speakers have toward pretending behavior. Avazbek, who had high proficiency, sometimes played jokes on his native speaking interlocutors by pretending not to understand what was said to see their reactions. Although Avazbek sometimes experienced "having to pretend

to understand” to keep the conversation open, his attitude toward pretending behavior stayed mainly positive. It is possible that Avazbek’s background, coming from multi-lingual and multi-cultural community, contributes to building up a certain level of familiarity with the target language speaking environment. In contrast, in conversations with his close friends, Inwon, who had limited English proficiency, reported no inclination to try joking around with his interlocutors by using his pretending behavior. Describing the English speaking environment as a “totally new world,” Inwon kept the same attitudes toward pretending behavior in both formal and casual settings. In various conversational settings narratives, Inwon consistently showed his negative feelings toward his pretending behavior. Although the cultural background (individualistic or collectivistic) did not show significant influences on the pretending behavior, with larger number of participants from more various countries, it might become possible and beneficial to investigate how much influence the participants’ background, whether multi-cultural and/or multilingual community, has in terms of the attitudes toward pretending behavior.

As a different aspect of the seventh theme (Theme 7. Avoid extra efforts), this research can suggest that non-native speakers may feel so overwhelmed in their learning process that they quit making an effort. When people experience frustrations and difficulties often, and when they learn that those unpleasant situations are outside their control, they quit trying to get through the situation by making any extra effort. In some cases they may even remain in the unpleasant situations. Once people experience this state of helplessness, this attitude lasts quite a long time until they receive external stimuli to get out of the undesirable situation—again, a situation characterized by frustrations and difficulties beyond their personal control (Seligman, as cited in Larsen & Buss, 2005). Non-native speakers in the United States experience difficulties in terms of language barriers almost everyday, and those difficulties are, in a sense, outside of their control because language competence cannot be achieved within a day. Thus, by accepting that they cannot communicate in English fluently, some non-native speakers quit trying to improve their English ability and employ pretending instead. Although pretending can be an effective strategy to reduce immediate stress and frustration, it also has the risk of developing pretending as a long time behavioral pattern. Having passed his first semester at an

American university, Inwon, who often pretends to understand in conversations, shared his concerns about his pretending behavior:

When I don’t understand the conversation, I automatically pretend (Inwon’s emphasis added). But I try not to pretend so much because it can be a habit. I don’t want to pretend because I want to be able to speak English better.

In addition to the feeling of being overwhelmed, other factors, such as living in a community that has their own language as the primary language, can contribute to this phenomena described in eighth theme (Theme 8. Make use of [an]other source[s]).

The communicative difficulties described in this research are mainly due to non-native speakers’ limited ability because of the lack of language proficiency. For elderly people, on the other hand, the difficulties come mainly from their diminished hearing abilities through their aging process. Although the causes of the difficulties are different from one other, it would be worthwhile to assume that a group of non-native speakers and a group of elderly people share some similarities. Considering the 11 different themes in non-native speakers’ pretending behavior as a communicative strategy, is likely that elderly people’s pretending behavior has various themes in addition to “protecting self-esteem” (Gomez and Madey, 2001).

Despite the fact that grounded theory is most useful with larger data sets, it nonetheless guided this research, and it contributed to figuring out the focus of this study was on a small non-native speaking group, having only a few participants from different cultural background. In order to make this phenomenon more generalizable, it would be helpful to support the themes with a quantitative research method and much larger number of participants.

As many researchers have noted, people obtain information from media and use it in communicating with others. It would also be advantageous to examine how media depicts language acquisition and how people perceive and apply those depictions to the real world. Besides movies, there are different novels that depict the process of language acquisition and its contribution to cultural descriptions of intercultural communication. For people who have not experienced second language learning, media images can be the primary source to imagine the language learning situation. If their perception of how second language learners achieve a certain level of proficiency is based on media depictions, they are not likely to believe that



language learning is difficult, and they will have less patience and less willingness to undergo the communicative difficulties by interacting with non-native speakers. Such unwillingness and the expectation of less patience create pressure on non-native speakers and lead them to pretend in conversations.

### References

- Bartholomae, D. (2004). *Writing on the margins: Essays on composition and teaching*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Bell, J. S. (2002). Narrative inquiry: more than just telling stories. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36, 207-213.
- Berger, C. R. (1979) Beyond initial interaction: Uncertainty, understanding, and the development. of interpersonal relationships. In H. Giles, & R. St. Clair (Eds.), *Language and social psychology* (pp. 122-144): Oxford: Blackwell.
- Berger, C. R., & Calabrese, R. J. (1975). Some explorations in initial interactions and beyond: toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication. *Human Communication Research*, 1, 99-112.
- Booth-Butterfield, M., Heare, D., & Booth-Butterfield, S. (1991). The effect of communication anxiety upon signing effectiveness among the profoundly hearing-impaired. *Communication Quarterly*, 39(3), 241-250.
- Brecht, R. D., & Walton, A. R. (1994). Policy issues in foreign language and study abroad. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 532, 213-225.
- Broughton, G., Brumfit, C., Flavell, R., Hill, P., & Pincas, A. (1978). *Teaching English as a foreign language*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Brown, H. (2006). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. New York, NY: Prentice Hall.
- Chen, C. P. (1999). Common stress among international college students: Research and counseling implications. *Journal of College Counseling*, 2, 49-65.
- Chomsky, N. (1995). Language and nature. *Mind*, 104, 1-61.
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative sociology*, 13(1), 3-21.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2002) *The qualitative inquiry reader*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Devito, J. A. (2007). *The interpersonal communication book*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Douglas, W. (1990). Uncertainty, information-seeking, and linking during initial interaction. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 54, 66-81.
- Ellis, R. (1999). Input-based approaches to teaching grammar: A review of classroom-oriented research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 19, 64-80.
- Fisher, W. (1985). The Narrative paradigm: in the beginning. *Journal of Communication*, 35(4), 74-89.
- Foss, K. A., & Reitzel, A. C. (1988). A relational model for managing second language anxiety. *TESOL Quarterly*, 22, 437-454.
- Galloway, F. J., & Jenkins, J. R. (2009). The adjustment problems faced by international students in the united states: A comparison of international students and administrative perceptions at two private, religiously affiliated universities. *NASPA Journal*, 46(4), 661-673.
- Giles, H., Coupland, J., & Coupland, N. (1991). Accommodation theory: Communication, context, and consequence. In H. Giles, N. Coupland, & J. Coupland (Eds.), *Contexts of accommodation: Developments in applied sociolinguistics*. (pp. 1-68). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, H. L. (1967). *The Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York, NY: Aldine.
- Gomez, R. G., & Madey, S. F. (2001). Coping-with-hearing-loss model for older adults. *Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences*, 56, 223-225.
- Gudykunst, W., & Nishida, T. (1984). Individual and cultural influences on uncertainty reduction. *Communication Monographs*, 51, 23-36.
- Hayes, R. L. & Lin, H. (1994). Coming to America: Developing social systems for international students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development*, 22, 7-16.
- Hatch, E. (1992). *Discourse and language education*.

- New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Hills, M. (2002). *Fan cultures*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hofstede, G. (1986). Cultural differences in teaching and learning. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10, 301-320.
- Horwits, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. New York, NY: Pergamon Press.
- Larsen, R. J., & Buss, D. M. (2005). Personality psychology, domains of knowledge about human nature. (3 ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages.
- McCartney, J. H., & Nadler, G. (1979). How to Help your patient cope with hearing loss. *Geriatrics*, 34, 69-71, 75-76.
- Morin, A. (2007). Communicative behavior of second language speaking students. *Louisiana Communication Journal*, 9, 5-21.
- Nussbaum, J. F., Pecchioni, L. L., Robinson, J. D., & Thompson, T. L. (2000). *Communication and aging*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Oetzel, J. G., Ting-Toomey, S., Masumoto, T., Yokochi, Y., Pan, X., Takai, J., & Wilcox, R. (2001). Face and facework in conflict: A cross-cultural comparison of china, Germany, Japan, and the United States. *Communication Monographs*, 68(3), 235-258.
- Oetzel, J. G., Ting-Toomey, S., Yokochi, Y., Masumoto, T., & Takai, J. (2000). A typology of facework behaviors in conflicts with best friends and relative strangers. *Communication Quarterly*, 48(4), 397-419.
- Phillips, E. M. (1991). Anxiety and oral competence: classroom dilemma. *The French Review*, 65(1), 1-14.
- Redmond, M. V. , & Bunyi, J. M. (1993). The Relationship of intercultural communication competence with stress and the handling of stress as reported by international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 17, 235-254.
- Rossmann, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2003). *Learning in the field: an introduction to qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Scott, R. L. (2001). The conservative voice in radical rhetoric: A common response to division. In C. E. Morris & S. H. Browne (Eds.), *Readings on the rhetoric of social protest* (70-82). State College, PA: Strata Publishing Inc.
- Sheie, T. P. (1985). Adapting training for the hearing impaired. *Training and Development Journal*, 39, 100-102.
- Tesch, R. (1987). Emerging themes: The researcher's experience. *Phenomenology and pedagogy*, 5(3), 230-241.
- Thomas, A., & Herbst, K. G. (1980). Social and psychological implications of acquired deafness for adults of employment age. *British Journal of Audiology*, 14(3), 76-85.
- Thomson, I. T. (1997). From conflict to embedment: The individual-society relationship, 1920-1991. *Sociological Forum*, 12, 631-658.
- Ting-Toomey, S., & Kurogi, A. (1998). Facework competence in intercultural conflict: an updated face-negotiation theory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 22(2), 187-225.
- West, R., & Turner, L. H. (2004). *Introducing communication theory: Analysis and application*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Yan, L., & Kember, D. (2004). Engager and avoider behaviour in types of activities performed by out-of-class learning groups. *Higher Education*, 48, 419-438.
- Zuengler, J. (1991). Accommodation in native-nonnative interactions: Going beyond the "what" to the "why" in second-language research. In H. Giles, N. Coupland, & J. Coupland (Eds.), *Contexts of accommodation: developments in applied sociolinguistics*. (pp. 1-68). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

#### About the Author

Sachiko Terui is a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma. E-mail: terui@ou.edu. She would like to acknowledge the support of C. Turner Steckline Wilson, Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Louisiana at Monroe.

#### How to Cite:

Terui, S. (2012). Second Language Learners' Coping Strategy in Conversations with Native Speakers. *Journal of International Students*, 2(2), 168-183.