

**AN ANALYSIS OF DEBATERS AVOIDANCE COMMUNICATION
STRATEGY: A CASE STUDY AT TELEVISE ENGLISH DEBATE
COMPETITION**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the avoidance strategy of debaters in televised English Debate Competition by classifying the utterances of the debaters based on the avoidance communication strategy proposed by Celce Murcia, et. al (1995). The sources of the data in this research were the utterances from the debaters in the video uploaded by TVRI NTB's youtube channel and other supporting data from previous researchers. The data were collected by using qualitative interview, qualitative audiovisual, and digital material strategy and analysed by using the method suggested by Miles & Huberman (1994) which consist of data reduction, data display, explaining, and drawing conclusion. The result of this study shows that there were 48 utterances that can be classified as avoidance communication strategies which involved 6 debaters. The debaters used message replacement, topic avoidance, and message abandonment. And there were four factors influencing the use of the strategy, those are cultural differences, limited preparations, lack of confidence, and deal with big challenge.

Keywords: avoidance strategy, debaters, Televised English Debate Competition

INTRODUCTION

Language is very important for communication. Language is the instrument of communication (Hanna & Mahyuni, 2019). Language learning involves four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Speaking is a critical skill in language learning that requires various processes, including cognitive, physical, socio-cultural, and speaker knowledge. Thus, English speaking is considered as important because it can be seen in social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and television programs (reality shows, news, entertainment) often use English (I Wayan Yogananta Kusuma Jaya, Amrullah, & Thohir, L., 2020). However, English as Foreign Language (EFL) speakers may face several challenges in speaking English, such as lack of vocabulary, mispronunciation, and stuttering. This is in line as the problem in most of school in Indonesia faces problem in teaching English. Almost every teaching learning process admitted that it is not an easy job to do for teaching English as a foreign language is still facing many problems (Muaidi, Mahyuni, & Yusra, 2015). Speaking happens between speaker and hearer in the process to deliver the idea and give the feedback (Mukammal, M. Priyono, P., & Amrullah A., 2017). More speaking practice is crucial for improving students' English skills. One of the methods that can be used to train speaking skills is through debating, which involves presenting ideas or opinions while defending them.

Debating is an effective method for improving speaking skills, but EFL speakers may encounter problems, such as a lack of knowledge and communication issues. They may also use communication strategies, such as avoidance, to minimize communication problems. Avoidance strategies are often used by beginners due to limited vocabulary and insufficient grammatical knowledge. Therefore, understanding how EFL speakers employ avoidance communication strategies in English debates is crucial.

To address this issue, the focus of the research will be on the avoidance communication strategies used by participants in the Televisive English Debate Competition. The study will aim to identify how students use avoidance communication strategies in English debates, the factors that influence their use, and possible solutions to their communication problems. By understanding these factors, teachers can develop effective teaching strategies that can help students improve their English-speaking skills and communication strategies.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study uses descriptive qualitative to describe the findings. Qualitative methods rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse designs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The descriptive qualitative approach is appropriate for this research since the result of the data is in the form of a description, not a number or statistic form. It describes the debaters' avoidance strategy in debating. This research used qualitative audiovisual and digital material strategy to collect the data since the primary source of data for this study is in the form of videotapes. The data in this study taken from the video recordings on the YouTube channel of TVRI NTB on the Televisive English Debate Competition. Data analysis was made by making interpretations and meaning upon the generated data.

Data Collection Technique

According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), qualitative research may use several strategies as qualitative observation, qualitative interview, qualitative documents, and qualitative audiovisual and digital material. In this study, the researcher gathered the data

using qualitative interview, qualitative audiovisual and digital material strategy. Furthermore, there will be several steps in conducting the research such:

1. Selecting the content. In this step, the researcher started by watching the recorded videos of the TVRI English Debate Competition to sort the relevant videos for the research.
2. After sorting the relevant videos, the researcher downloaded the video as the source of data from the internet as the instrument in audiovisual and digital form.
3. Watching the videos multiple times and transcribing the utterances manually.
4. Selecting the utterances that are relevant to the avoidance strategy units from Celce-Murcia et al's perspective.
5. Coding the data. The set of rules that is used is the three units of avoidance strategy based on Celce-Murcia et al's perspective which consists of message replacement, topic avoidance, and message abandonment.
6. Putting the selected utterances into the table.

Table 1 The data card for debaters' avoidance strategy

No.	Units of Avoidance Strategy	Total	Percentage
1.	Message Replacement		
2.	Topic Avoidance		
3.	Message Abandonment		
Total			

Adapted from the model of Celce-Murcia et al's Communication Strategies (1995)

7. Interviewing the debaters to gain complementary data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The Use of Avoidance Communication Strategy

There are 48 utterances during the debate from 6 speakers that match avoidance strategy. The percentages are achieved using the percentage formula in which the number of the utterances is multiplied by 100% and divided by the total number of utterances. The data were classified after transcribing into the text, then classified them which utterance belong to certain units of avoidance communication strategy based on the characteristics in the theory of Celce Murcia et, al (1995).

Table 2 The data card for debaters' avoidance strategy

No.	Units of Avoidance Strategy	Total	Percentage
1.	Message Replacement	17	35%
2.	Topic Avoidance	23	48%
3.	Message Abandonment	8	17%
Total		48	100%

In addition, the study provides the data description in terms of avoidance communication strategy during the debate. Furthermore, the study provides several examples of utterances that categorized to certain units as follows:

1. Message Replacement

This strategy means to replace a topic with the new one in order to avoid communication breakdown (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). There are 17 utterances that

categorized to message replacement strategy. Some examples present in this study are follows:

In this example the speaker supposed to explain that pre-election is an activity of collecting society's preference of the candidate. The result will show the candidate's electability based on the society's opinion. However, the speaker did not provide clear explanation and suddenly jump to examples as the first example of the utterance below.

(1) *Definition, pre-election poll is an activity of collecting ..uhh.. people's opinion....aaa... the example of pre-election poll is Barometer Indonesia, and so on. (Prime Minister)*

(2) *because they are easy to influenceaaa... it is bad. For example, people from rural area, (Prime Minister)*

The examples above show the situations where the speaker tries to explain something but fails to provide a clear explanation. In both examples, the speaker stops at a point where the explanation is not yet clear and suddenly changes their explanation by giving an example.

The second example is similar to the first, in that the speaker attempts to explain something but fails to provide a clear explanation. In this case, the statement is not specific about what the topic is, but it is clear that the speaker stops at a point where the explanation is not yet clear and suddenly changes their explanation by giving an example too.

In both cases, the speaker seems to struggle to convey their message clearly and need to work on improving their communication skills. It is important to provide clear and concise explanations to avoid confusion and ensure that the listener understands the message being conveyed.

2. Topic Avoidance

Avoiding topic areas or concepts that pose language difficulties. The speaker pretends not to understand, changing the topic or not responding to the communication (Celce-Murcia et al, 1995). 23 utterances categorized to topic avoidance strategy. Some examples present in this study are follows:

In this example, the Prime Minister explains the impact of society having less knowledge of candidates as a reason for why it is acceptable to ban pre-election polls. However, their explanation is incomplete and unclear, as they abruptly stop in the middle of the sentence. This can be problematic, as it may leave the audience confused or uncertain about the Prime Minister's point. Additionally, by pretending as if the explanation is enough, the Prime Minister may come across as dismissive, which could undermine their credibility and effectiveness as a speaker.

(3) *because they have less knowledge of candidate ...aa.. that they that's why it is okay to ban the pre-election poll (Prime Minister)*

The prime minister seems to explain the impact of the society being less aware of the candidate however leaving it unfinished and pretends as if the explanation is enough. Overall, the example suggests a breakdown in effective communication between the speakers and their audience. To communicate effectively, speakers should aim to provide complete and concise explanations that fully address the topic.

3. Message Abandonment

The debaters usually leave a message unfinished because of language difficulties then jumped to the next message (Celce-Murcia et al, 1995). There are eight utterances categorized to message abandonment strategy. Some examples present in this study as follows:

The prime minister starts by stating the goal of their proposal, which is to allow people to freely choose their own candidate without any influence from pre-election polls. However, before the prime minister can finish their explanation, the opposition interrupts with a POI, causing the prime minister to pause momentarily. After the interruption, the prime minister declines the POI and then decides to move on from their unfinished explanation of the goal, instead shifting focus to explaining their arguments in favor of their proposal.

(4) Our goal is to let people have their own decision to choose their own candidate and not causing ..POI please! (Opposition)...aa.. (PM silence) ...aa..no thanks ..aa.. now, I am going to explain my arguments. (Prime Minister)

This behavior shows that the speaker abandons the explanation of their goal and it can be seen as ineffective communication in which it leaves the audience confuse about what the government team would like achieve. It occurs because the speaker is not ready to get respond from the opposing team and make the speaker poses silence and then abandon the explanation.

The Influencing Factors

Based on the interview results conducted to six respondents, the debaters acknowledge that they faced communicative goals and used avoidance strategy to convey their message during the performance in the debate. There are several factors influencing the use of the strategy based on the interview.

In these transcriptions, the speakers mentioned that English-proficiency is one of the influencing factors that affect their performance.

(1) It..aa.. influence me using the strategy because I don't use English every day and ..aa.. there are vocabulary that I don't know (speaker 1)

(2) Because my vocabulary are very little and I don't understand what the opponent say (speaker 2)

Speaker 1 mentioned that they don't use English on a daily basis and encounter unfamiliar vocabulary. This factor suggests that they may struggle to employ effective debate strategies due to language barriers. When engaging in a debate, it's crucial to have a strong command of the language to understand the arguments presented, express one's own ideas clearly, and effectively counter the opponent's points. Aline with speaker 1, speaker 2 mentioned that limited vocabulary makes them not able to understand the opponent's points. Therefore, limited English proficiency can hinder these abilities, making it challenging to formulate well-structured arguments, convey nuanced thoughts, and fully comprehend the opponent's points.

(3) This is our first time join debate and we never practice our English (speaker 3)

Speaker 3 states that it's their first time participating in a debate, indicating a lack of practice and experience in English speaking specifically in a debate context. Participating in debates requires not only language skills but also familiarity with the format, rules, and techniques used in debating. Experience helps develop critical thinking, logical reasoning, and the ability to present arguments persuasively.

Other than the factor mentioned above, the other speaker explained that preparation time is very important for them.

(4) Yes, we feel very frustration because the time for case building suddenly ends and the committee however, we don't finish our case (speaker 4)

The speaker expressed that preparation time is very crucial during the debate. Debating often involves a tight timeline, and speakers must manage their time effectively to ensure they present their arguments and respond to counterarguments within the allotted

time. Poor time management can result in speakers failing to present their case fully, leaving out critical points, and being unable to respond adequately to the opposition's arguments. In turn, this can diminish the speaker's ability to present a convincing argument and influence the debate's outcome.

(5) This is our first time join debate, we never practice debate before ..aa.. and we don't confident to speak in front of other people, but it feel very good to learn (speaker 5)

Speaker 5 mentioned that it's their first time participating in a debate and expresses a lack of confidence in speaking in front of other people. This factor highlights the role of self-assurance and comfort in public speaking. Lack of confidence can impact one's ability to effectively articulate arguments, engage with the audience, and convey ideas convincingly. Additionally, being new to debating suggests a lack of experience and familiarity with the dynamics of debates, including structure, strategies, and effective communication techniques. This lack of experience can further contribute to the challenges faced by Speaker 5 in effectively participating in the debate.

(6) This competition is very hard to do because beside speaking in English we also have to listen what our enemy explain and we have limited time to prepare and not aware of the motion sometime (speaker 6)

The speaker 6 states that the competition is challenging because, in addition to speaking in English, they also have to listen to the opposing team's explanations. This factor underscores the multitasking aspect of debating, where participants must simultaneously process and respond to arguments while remaining attentive to the opponent's points. Moreover, the limited preparation time and occasional lack of awareness regarding the motion further compound the difficulty. These factors can impede the speaker's ability to fully understand the opponent's arguments, craft effective counterarguments, and respond in a timely manner.

In conclusion, there are several involving factor that mentioned by the speakers namely English-proficiency, lack of practice and experience, limited preparation time, lack of confidence, and challenging condition.

Lack in Debate Performance

1. Unstructured Arguments

During the debate most speakers are not aware of structured arguments which lead to the use of the avoidance strategy.

Leader of Opposition

A: *We believe that banning the publication of pre election polls is not necessary because like the current general election system, it is already good.*

R: *We both know that Indonesia has several times held election using the proportional system. Although in a different format. Yeah, professional system used so far is same as a system that is accordance with Indonesia and condition and can and can represent our bluer and heterogeneous society because we use multiparty system whose number are To the wheel of people and accordance with statutory relegation real regulation Pre-election is useful to find out which candidate is most high degree of electability. So that, it can be a strategy of political parties and carrying the candidates name.*

E: *(not provided)*

L: *(not provided)*

In this argument, the leader of opposition is able to argue and defend negative side by saying that the system is already good therefore it is not necessary to change it. However, the first problem of the speaker appeared on how the speaker was not able to

fulfill the general structure of an argument in which the speaker did not provide evidence and link back to complete the assertion and reasoning due to the lack of knowledge regarding the motion. The second problem appeared on how the debater was not able to give step-by-step analysis on explaining how the current situation is already perfect and therefore no changes should be made. Both problems happened because the debater has less knowledge regarding the topic of the motion which resulted on jumping analysis.

2. Lack of The Use of Rebuttals

Another main thing to be considered for assessing a debater's speech is the presentation of their rebuttals. There are several ways in giving rebuttals according to Muhammadin, et al (2014), those are A+ vs A-, pointing out inconsistencies, and pointing out irrelevancies. However, the debaters use few amount of rebuttals and resulting on the lack of the respond.

a.) A+ vs A-

Leader of Opposition

...how the Democracy Party will continue to run and people can still monitor the increase in the voters number for each candidate, for example there is no...

Deputy Prime Minister

Even if they say pre-election poll can be information source for the society to understand more about the candidate, but how would people have more information about their candidate? We think it is already done through campaign. Telling the society the programs and the problems that they interested in. So, we think it is not necessary to use pre-election poll as a method of giving information to society. And even if they say that pre-election poll is very good in providing data for the candidates quality improvements. We think, the candidate therefore don't have enough time to do more campaign because the poll is conducted too close to the election date. However, to change people's choice or attract voters the candidates need to do real action that can be seen by society in order to choose them such as "Blusukan ke pasar" as what Jokowi did.

The rebuttal from the deputy prime minister tried to debunk the claim from the leader of opposition who argue that the poll can be the source of data and evidence for the society to monitor the candidate. The speaker tried to explain how the source of information for the society to monitor the candidate is already achievable through campaign and how relying on pre-election poll's publication as data source can lead to harm for the democratic system because it can motivate the candidate to do black campaign. Therefore, the argument from the opposing team on how the publication of pre-election poll can be the source of information cannot be credited and the credit goes to the government team.

Discussion

The Use of Avoidance Communication Strategies in Debate

According to the theory of avoidance communication strategy by Celce-Murcia et al. (1995), there are three units within the strategy which are message replacement, topic avoidance, and message abandonment. The debaters tend to use all of the units to overcome their communication problems. They try to keep their speeches in order to deliver argumentation clearly. There are several problems that the debaters faced during this debate session besides the communication problems. First, limited time. The debaters start debating after 15 minutes of preparation. The time is very limited for debaters to discuss their arguments and explore the ideas. Second, the debaters are not well aware of the motion

given which is "THW Ban Pre-election Polls". This motion is rather new for all debaters and they found difficulty to define the motion clearly. Third, the debaters are not used to communicating using English. The debaters found that the target language items or structures desired to convey their messages or argumentation are not available.

Most of the debaters used all of units of the avoidance strategy, which are message replacement, topic avoidance, and message abandonment. The first unit that most debaters used is topic avoidance. Topic avoidance is when a speaker tries to avoid topic areas or concepts that pose language difficulties. The speaker pretends not to understand, changing the topic or not responding to the communication. All of them used topic avoidance to avoid the topic area that they are not familiar with. The involving factor is also because of they are not used to communicate using English, so they feel it is hard to listen and speak using English.

The second unit that is mostly used by debaters is message replacement. This unit means to replace a topic with the new one in order to avoid communication breakdown. This unit is used because of the debaters have limited capacity in explaining the related issue in the debate and they are not aware about the general structure of an argument. That is why they tend to jump to another message while the first message they tried to explain is unfinished.

The third unit that debaters used is message abandonment. This type of avoidance strategy is when a speaker leaves a message unfinished because of language difficulties then jumped to the next message. This unit is used due to the lack of information regarding the topic, but this unit is less preferred because the debater chooses to argue even if it is may not correct in order to get more credit as their effort to convince the judges during the limited time.

Eventually, all speakers in the debate implement avoidance communication strategy during their speeches in the debate. The strategy is applied in order to deliver clear argumentation and reach better communication among the speakers. The strategy helps speakers to recognize and repair communication breakdowns, work around gaps in one's knowledge of the language, and learn more about the language and in the context focusing on pragmatic function of communication. The strategy is activated when speakers are unable to express message successfully since their linguistic resources are limited and less knowledge upon the motion.

The Influencing Factor

Communicating successfully means to pass on meaningful messages to the listeners. This study needs to analyze the factors that make all speakers choose to use avoidance communication strategy to avoid the communication breakdown, especially during the debate session. There are 5 factors influencing the preferences of strategies:

1. English-speaking proficiency

In the debate, the speakers are very diverse in the speaking proficiency because some of them are used to English speaking in their school even out of their school. Hidayat (2021) found that English speaking proficiency is not affecting the use of avoidance strategy however, in this study it is found out that English speaking proficiency is one of the influencing factors that make the debater used the avoidance communication strategy. This is also in line with the finding from the study that is conducted by

2. Cultural differences

The way the speakers convey their ideas based on their background is one of the involving factors in line with the study that is conducted by Hidayat (2021). Some speakers mentioned that they practice debate sometimes with their coach meanwhile

the other speakers said that they never practice debate before. This creates different background behind several speakers that make their performance different in the debate.

3. Limited preparation

All speakers agree if the time limit is one of the most factors that influence them to speak in public. First, the debaters only have 15 minutes to build the ideas or it is called as case building. One of the most difficult skills in debating is preparing cases especially for government team. At this moment, all speakers must discuss what argumentation that they should bring to the debate. Both teams find it difficult to come up with a good case statement and supporting arguments in the 15 minutes. It is also required to think hard in the limited time to create good argumentations. One of the problems here is about the motion which is not really familiar for the debaters so they need more time to discuss with their team but the time is only 15 minutes. Time for speech in debate session for each speaker is 7.20 which is too short for some debaters and maybe too long for some debaters who have not enough preparation for the ideas.

4. Lack of confidence

It occurs when speakers made mistakes in their speech. Then, they were shy to continue their debate. Most of speakers seems to have lack of confidence especially during the speech. The speakers from both teams usually get stuck in the middle of speech, making it difficult to find the sentences to continue the speech. They actually don't know what to say with the motion and they were afraid whether the ideas are relevant or not to other ideas. The speakers are also afraid that if the ideas cannot be explored well, they will lose the debate competition. These problems mostly happened to all speakers.

5. Deal with big challenge

Debate can be imagined as a big challenge. It makes the speakers frustrated. They must have good ability in speaking, self-confidence, up to date with recent information, and understand the motion especially for the unfamiliar or difficult motion. The speakers have to think hard and deliver the ideas in a good manner, method and matter.

In conclusion, the factors that influence speakers use the strategy are not merely because of the language proficiency level and task types but it is also because of some problems that faced by debaters at the debate session. These factors might happen to all speakers to choose whether or not the avoidance communication strategy is suitable for them when there is a difficulty in delivering the idea to someone else.

Solution to Improve Debating Performance

1. Using A-R-E-L Structure

Argument is the main thing that makes a team can win a debate. To make a clear argument it should be delivered in A-R-E-L structure. Under the motion given for the debater "THW Ban Pre-election Polls" debaters are able to explore ideas on the impact to the society, candidate, or government.

In government side, one of the ideas that can be explored in the A-R-E-L structure is the impact of pre-election polls to society can create fraction.

A: The pre-election polls can create fraction in society.

R: Our society has several layers which can be grouped into fanatic and not fanatic to the candidates. The type of society that is not fanatic is not very affected by the existence of the publication of the pre-election polls. However, the type of society that is very fanatic can be easily triggered by the pre-election polls' publication. Furthermore, the existence of media exposure that always exaggerate the news can be very harmful to this fanatic society. This type of society always has the belief that

the candidate that they support is the best and always neglect all the good value from the opposite candidate no matter what. Eventually, this behavior from the fanatic society can create chaos and leads to civil war because of their intention to always championing their own candidate. This is also very harmful to the democracy which holds the value that everyone has the right to own their voice. This fraction will make certain group of society wants to make other group society voiceless.

- E: In 2019, the election for Indonesian President that involves two candidates which are Jokowi and Prabowo, the society are shaped into two sides. These grouped fanatic supporters are even referred to name of Kampret for the supporters of the Prabowo and Cebong for the supporters of the Jokowi. The supporters are easily triggered to mock each other back then even happen to do physical war.
- L: Eventually, the existence of the pre-election polls' publication is very harmful and can lead to fraction in society and needed to be banned.

2. Using A-R-E-L Structure

There are several ways in giving rebuttals according to Muhammadin, et al (2014), those are A+ vs A-, pointing out inconsistencies, and pointing out irrelevancies. In providing rebuttals toward the opposite team, it can be presented as shown down below:

a.) A+ vs A-

As the government team argues that pre-election publication polls can create fraction in society, opposition give the opposite claim by saying that the pre-election polls will not create fraction in society. And later it should be presented in form of A-R-E-L to make it clearer.

b.) Pointing out inconsistencies

This type of rebuttals is used if there is inconsistency happened in the opposite team. The example of explaining inconsistency can be pointed out by explaining if any speakers from the opposing team clashes other speaker within the team such like when the first speaker mention that pre-election polls can be the source of research data for the candidates and suddenly the second speaker mention that the pre-election polls can be manipulated. It means that the data is not reliable at the beginning for the candidate to use it as source of research.

c.) Pointing out irrelevancies

This type of rebuttals is used to point out if there is certain speaker is not relevant to the motion. For example, when the leader of opposition mentions that "Citizen play a role in democracy or called civic empowerment", this explanation has no relevancy to the motion because regardless of the position, either in government or opposition the citizen will still be perceived as important stakeholder in democracy.

CONCLUSION

This study has discussed about the communication strategies employed by debaters in debate, the dominant factors influencing the strategies used by debaters. The conclusions of this study are as follow:

1. The study found how avoidance communication strategy is employed by debaters that are in line with theory proposed by Celce Murcia, et.al (1995). The debaters tend to use the avoidance communication strategy to maintain their communication goal in the debate by adopting message replacement, topic avoidance, and message abandonment.

2. There are five factors influencing the debaters to use avoidance communication strategy in the debate, namely English-speaking proficiency level, cultural differences, lack of confidence, deal with big challenge, and limited preparation.
3. Debaters can improve their performance by adopting AREL structure and three types of rebuttals namely A+ vs A-, pointing out inconsistencies, and pointing out irrelevancies. This can improve the structure of the speakers' speech and eventually help the debaters to have better communication to the audiences.

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