

Negotiating Meaning in the Marketplace: Communication Strategies of Thai Vendors at Chatuchak Market

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Abstract

This study investigates the communication repair strategies employed by Thai vendors interacting with non-native English speakers at Chatuchak Market in Bangkok. Drawing on frameworks from Færch and Kasper (1977), Tarone (1977), and Lin (2007), the research analyzes how two vendors—a smoothie seller and a masseuse—used strategic language and nonverbal tactics to manage real-world misunderstandings in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) contexts. Data were collected from naturally occurring vendor–customer interactions and analyzed through a two-tier framework comprising Reduction and Achievement Strategies. Findings reveal a clear preference for Achievement Strategies such as code-switching, appeal for assistance, mime/gesture, compensatory tools (e.g., calculators), and self-repair. These multimodal and interactive tactics were notably effective in resolving communicative breakdowns. In contrast, Reduction Strategies like topic avoidance and message abandonment were less effective and often led to unresolved exchanges. The study highlights the practical importance of visual, bilingual, and collaborative strategies in cross-cultural communication, particularly in fast-paced service encounters. By examining authentic ELF discourse, this research provides insights for language educators, business communication trainers, and vendors aiming to enhance transactional fluency in multicultural settings.

Keywords: Communication strategies, Multimodal communication, Marketplace discourse

Received 2 May 2025; Received in revised form 18 June 2025; Accepted 20 June 2025

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1. Introduction

During recent decades, English has played a role in different countries worldwide, including in Asia; as Crystal (2003) notes, it functions as a Global Language. Thailand is one of the Asian countries that has used English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) since the era of King Rama III, and English assumed an increasingly prominent role during King Rama IV's reign (1851–1868) (Snodin et al., 2024). Over time, English became more and more essential in Thai education and society (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021). Furthermore, Thailand's future plans aim to develop citizens into a society capable of using English to communicate widely in affairs of daily life, education, and business.

At present, Thailand remains a major tourist attraction where foreigners interact with Thai people more than ever. The role of English in these interactions is critical, particularly for those in the service industry and merchants who need to communicate with overseas visitors. Yet misunderstandings frequently arise from factors such as an inability to understand foreign speech clearly, limited vocabulary, or grammatical inaccuracies. Such breakdowns can impede transactions and affect vendor–customer rapport (Snodin et al., 2024).

Communication strategies offer a helpful way to bridge these gaps. Tarone's (1977) framework—including mime, avoidance, and conscious transfer (language switch)—and Lin's (2007) classifications—such as compensatory strategies and code-switching—describe tools speakers use to overcome miscommunication. However, empirical research on how these strategies are enacted in real-world Thai marketplace settings remains scarce.

This study examines the English communication strategies employed by two Thai vendors—a smoothie vendor and a masseuse—at Chatuchak Market. Using naturally occurring conversational data recorded during their work, we apply Tarone's and Lin's frameworks to identify which strategies are used, how frequently they occur, and how effectively they resolve misunderstandings. By focusing on authentic interactions, this research seeks to illuminate the practical dynamics of strategy deployment in ELF contexts and to offer insights for language learners, trainers, and marketplace vendors striving for smoother cross-cultural communication. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. Which communication strategies do Thai vendors use when interacting with non-Thai speakers at Chatuchak Market?
2. How frequently are the different strategies employed by the participants?
3. To what extent do these strategies resolve misunderstandings during vendor–customer interactions?

2. Literature review

2.1 Definitions of Communication

“Communication” has been conceptualized in myriad ways. Early work by Dance and Larson (1976) revealed over 126 distinct definitions, underlining the concept’s complexity and its evolution over time. Sapir (1933) emphasized that communication extends beyond mere verbal exchange; it encompasses instinctive actions and culturally rooted symbols that convey meaning without conscious awareness. Building on these insights, Lynch (1996) proposed a process-oriented definition comprising three core elements: (1) a sender, (2) a message, and (3) a receiver, asserting that “communication involves enabling someone else to understand what we want to tell them” (p. 45). Together, these perspectives suggest that communication is not merely the transmission of linguistic forms but a dynamic interplay of verbal, nonverbal, and socio-cultural factors that can succeed only when interlocutors share sufficient common ground.

2.2 English as a Global Lingua Franca and Its Role in Thailand

English’s ascendancy as a global language can be traced to two historical waves: the expansion of the British Empire between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries and the subsequent rise of the United States as a world power. In the first wave, mass migration of English speakers across Scotland, Ireland, North America, Australia, and New Zealand gave rise to diverse mother-tongue varieties. In the second, colonial ventures in Africa and Asia introduced English as a second-language medium, forming localized varieties still evident today. More recently, economic integration and international trade within ASEAN have reinforced English’s centrality; ASEAN’s adoption of English as its sole official language in 2007 exemplifies this trend, despite ongoing efforts to preserve local tongues (Kirkpatrick, 2010).

Unlike many Southeast Asian nations, Thailand was never formally colonized. Nonetheless, early contacts with Great Britain during the Ayutthaya period initiated nonverbal diplomatic exchanges that later evolved into verbal communication in English. The 1826 Treaty of Burney—Thailand’s first formal agreement with a Western power—marked the official introduction of English. Under King Rama IV (1851–1868), English education expanded within the royal court, as American missionaries were invited to teach the language to the monarch’s family to modernize the nation and prevent colonial subjugation (Snodin et al., 2024). By the reign of King Rama V (1910–1925), English instruction reached the Thai middle class (Masavisut, Sukwiwat, & Wongmontha, 1986), gradually positioning English as the preferred medium for international diplomacy and commerce (Dhiravegin, 1975). In contemporary Thailand, English proficiency remains a national priority in education and business (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021), with policy documents envisioning Thai citizens as competent users of English across daily, academic, and professional domains. Nonetheless,

the incorporation of English as a second language is sensitive, requiring careful balancing with national identity (Tejarajanya, 2018).

2.3 Barriers to Effective Communication

Despite English's widespread utility, non-native speakers often encounter obstacles that impede mutual understanding. Drawing on workplace studies, Rani (2016) categorizes communication barriers into five types:

1. **Attitudinal Barriers:** Prejudicial attitudes and stereotypes, arising from race, gender, education, or lifestyle differences, can lead to misjudgments and inhibit open exchange.
2. **Behavioral Barriers:** Biases and generalizations shape expectations, often resulting in stereotype-confirming interactions that restrict genuine communication (Johnston & Macrae, 1994).
3. **Cultural Barriers:** Distinct values, beliefs, and social norms necessitate empathy—understanding others' perspectives—to bridge interpretive gaps.
4. **Language Barriers:** Limited vocabulary, complex jargon, and grammatical inaccuracies obstruct message clarity. In Thailand, cultural communication styles—such as indirectness or high-context reliance—can further complicate exchanges with foreigners.
5. **Environmental Barriers:** Physical factors, such as noise or spatial configuration, also influence how effectively messages are conveyed and received.

These barriers underscore the need for adaptive repair strategies that extend beyond linguistic accuracy to include cultural sensitivity and situational awareness.

2.4 Intercultural Communication

2.4.1 Definitions of Culture

Culture has been variously defined as the shared beliefs, values, practices, customs, and artifacts that characterize a group or society, encompassing language, religion, social organization, arts, and technology (Birukou et. al., 2013). It also comprises behavior patterns that persist across generations within specific populations, even as they vary among different groups (Snowdon, 2018). Together, these definitions underscore culture's role in shaping both what we communicate and how we interpret others' messages.

2.4.2 Definitions of Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication occurs whenever members of one cultural group produce messages for consumption by members of another. Samovar and Porter (2004) emphasize that such interactions involve exchanges between individuals whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems differ sufficiently to influence comprehension. Allwood (1990) further frames it as “the sharing of information on different levels of awareness and control between people with different cultural backgrounds, where different cultural backgrounds include both

national cultural differences and differences which are connected with participation in the different activities that exist within a national unit.” Gudykunst (2003) restricts the term to exchanges among different nationalities, whereas Scollon (2012) extends it to any communication across group or discourse boundaries—even within the same nation—highlighting that divergent worldviews can emerge between, for example, adolescents and senior citizens.

2.4.3 Impact of Cultural Differences

Cultural differences can give rise to misunderstandings, conflict, and communicative breakdowns. Linguistic challenges stem from unique grammar and sentence-structure rules that resist direct translation; words or phrases may carry disparate meanings or connotations across languages, leading to confusion or unintended offense. Nonverbal cues—gestures, facial expressions, and body language—may be perceived as polite in one context yet rude in another. Cultural norms fundamentally shape attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, making it essential for interlocutors to recognize and adapt to these differences. Developing intercultural sensitivity—empathy for others’ perspectives and conventions—is therefore critical for building rapport and avoiding miscommunication (Dhital, 2023).

2.5 Communication Strategies

When linguistic or cultural barriers threaten mutual understanding, speakers employ communication strategies—deliberate or spontaneous tactics to convey intended meanings despite resource constraints. Færch and Kasper (1977) characterize these as potentially conscious plans to resolve problems in reaching a communication goal. They distinguish three types: formal reduction strategies, whereby speakers simplify utterances to avoid non-fluency or errors; functional reduction strategies, in which the communicative goal itself is downscaled to match available resources; and achievement strategies, where speakers expand their toolkit—through paraphrase, synonyms, or gestures—to express complex ideas.

Tarone (1977) offers a more granular taxonomy of repair tactics used when language structures prove inadequate. Avoidance strategies manifest as topic avoidance or message abandonment, allowing speakers to sidestep or truncate difficult subjects. Paraphrase strategies include approximation (selecting a semantically adjacent term), word coinage (inventing a new form), and circumlocution (describing concepts indirectly). Conscious transfer entails literal translation from the speaker’s first language, preserving meaning at the expense of idiomaticity. Language switch involves momentary reversion to the L1 to fill lexical gaps, while appeal for assistance—overtly requesting help—engages interlocutors as collaborators. Finally, Tarone’s addition of mime underscores the multimodal dimension of repair, with gestures and pantomime serving as visual channels for meaning when words fail.

Lin (2007) builds on these foundations by defining six strategies employed to overcome communicative breakdowns: avoidance (steering clear of problematic forms),

compensatory strategies (using gestures, simplification, or paraphrase), appeal for assistance, circumlocution, code-switching (akin to Tarone's language switch), and self-repair (correcting one's own errors to maintain clarity). By integrating the frameworks of Færch and Kasper, Tarone, and Lin, researchers can systematically analyze how non-native speakers negotiate meaning in authentic intercultural settings such as marketplace interactions.

The frameworks of Færch and Kasper (1977), Tarone (1977), and Lin (2007) provide complementary lenses for categorizing both reduction and repair tactics in naturally occurring vendor–customer exchanges. By applying these three models in concert, this study can systematically identify and compare speakers' strategic choices, thereby fulfilling its aim of elucidating how Thai vendors negotiate and overcome miscommunication in authentic ELF interactions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Site and Context

To investigate how non-native speakers resolve miscommunication, data were collected at Chatuchak Market—a busy weekend destination in Bangkok popular for both Thai shoppers and international visitors. Fieldwork took place on two weekends (13–15 and 21 September 2024) during peak hours (10 AM–4 PM), with a particular focus on the lunch period when vendor–customer exchanges were most numerous. Each participant was recorded for approximately two hours in situ, allowing researchers to capture authentic, unscripted interactions.

3.2 Participants

Two Thai vendors voluntarily participated in this study: a smoothie vendor and a masseuse at a nearby massage stall. Both vendors held basic English proficiency. They relied on English to conduct business with foreign customers despite having had limited formal English instruction. They used English pragmatically—without concern for grammatical accuracy—to fulfill transactional needs. Participants were purposively selected for their high volume of encounters with native and non-native English speakers, ensuring rich data on strategy deployment in genuine marketplace contexts.

3.3 Data Collection

Audio recordings of each participant's conversation with foreign customers were made discreetly over two-hour sessions. Researchers positioned portable recorders so as not to disrupt normal business operations. All recordings were then transcribed verbatim, with time stamps and line numbers inserted for reference. Nonverbal behaviors—gestures, calculator displays, and other compensatory actions—were annotated in square brackets to preserve the full context of each exchange.

3.4 Data Analysis

In order to examine how Thai vendors negotiate miscommunication in authentic vendor–customer exchanges, we integrated the seminal typologies of Færch and Kasper (1977), Tarone (1977), and Lin (2007) into a unified, two-tier framework comprising Reduction and Achievement Strategies. Færch and Kasper’s original distinction between reduction strategies—which simplify or downscale a message to avoid breakdowns—and achievement strategies—which proactively expand resources to restore understanding—provided the foundation. Tarone’s taxonomy of avoidance, paraphrase, conscious transfer, language switch, appeal for assistance, and mime, along with Lin’s parallel classification of avoidance and compensatory tactics, all mapped neatly onto these two domains.

Reduction Strategies

These refer to deliberate simplifications or content-scale-backs when linguistic resources are strained, allowing speakers to maintain conversational flow at the expense of fuller expression.

- **Formal Reduction:** Omission or abbreviation of words and phrases to prevent non-fluent or erroneous utterances (Færch & Kasper, 1977).
- **Functional Reduction/Avoidance:** Steering clear of difficult topics (topic avoidance) or truncating messages mid-utterance (message abandonment) to match communicative goals to available proficiency (Færch & Kasper, 1977; Tarone, 1977; Lin, 2007).

Achievement Strategies

These encompass resource-expanding tactics that speakers deploy to bridge understanding after a breakdown.

- **Paraphrase (Circumlocution):** Lexical workarounds—approximation, word coinage, descriptive phrases—when precise terms are unavailable (Tarone, 1977).
- **Conscious Transfer (Literal Translation):** Word-for-word L1→L2 translation, preserving semantic content despite non-idiomatic phrasing (Tarone, 1977).
- **Language Switch/Code-Switching:** Temporary reversion to the speaker’s native or another known language to fill gaps and maintain flow (Tarone, 1977; Lin, 2007).
- **Appeal for Assistance:** Direct solicitation of help—asking for words, confirmation, or phrasing—from interlocutors (Tarone, 1977; Lin, 2007).
- **Mime/Gesture:** Use of nonverbal behaviors—gestures, facial expressions, pantomime—to convey meaning when words fail (Tarone, 1977; Lin, 2007).
- **Self-Repair/Correction:** Speaker-initiated corrections to one’s own utterance to clarify meaning and sustain coherence (Lin, 2007).

All recorded turns of talk were coded into one of these nine categories. We then compiled frequency counts for each strategy to determine prevalence and selected qualitative

excerpts to illustrate how vendors deployed these tactics to overcome cultural, linguistic, and environmental barriers. This combined quantitative–qualitative approach directly addressed our research questions: which strategies were used, how frequently they occurred, and how effectively they resolved misunderstandings in real-world ELF interactions.

4. Findings

As shown in Table 1, Reduction Strategies were infrequently employed—Functional Reduction/Avoidance occurred only three times and Formal Reduction not at all. In contrast, Achievement Strategies appeared across a broad spectrum: Code-Switching was most frequent ($n = 5$), followed by Appeal for Assistance, Mime/Gesture, and Compensatory nonverbal tactics ($n = 4$ each); Self-Repair was observed three times; Conscious Transfer twice; and Paraphrase once. This distribution highlighted vendors’ preference for dynamic, resource-expanding tactics over simple content downscaling. Overall, Thai vendors employed various strategies—drawing on interactive, multimodal, and reductive tactics—rather than relying on any single approach when negotiating meaning with non-Thai customers.

Table 1 *Frequencies of Communication Strategies (n)*

Strategy Category	Frequency (n)
Reduction Strategies	
Functional Reduction / Avoidance	3
Formal Reduction	0
Achievement Strategies	
Paraphrase (Circumlocution)	1
Conscious Transfer (Literal Translation)	2
Language Switch / Code-Switching	5
Appeal for Assistance	4
Mime / Gesture	4
Compensatory (Nonverbal)	4
Self-Repair / Correction	3

The following section presents examples of communication strategies that emerged from our vendor-customer transcripts, grouping them into Reduction and Achievement categories. Each example is accompanied by commentary on how vendors deployed these strategies to negotiate meanings and manage breakdowns in real-world ELF interactions.

4.1 Reduction Strategies

4.1.1 Functional Reduction / Avoidance

Message Abandonment

When speakers began an utterance but abandoned it mid-phrase due to difficulty expressing themselves (Tarone, 1977; Lin, 2007). The example below showed that the smoothie vendor started speaking to a Korean customer but abandoned halfway due to difficulties in finding words to express her message.

Example (line 53; 24.43):

Smoothie Vendor: Ahh sorry. สักครู้เก็บเงินไม่ครบ ชาติอีกสามสิบเก้าบาท

(A moment ago, I told you that price but actually there was still thirty-nine baht missing.)

Customer: Oh!

Smoothie Vendor: Ok. Sorry for... (laughing)...

Here, the vendor laughed instead of completing her intended message, indicating she could not formulate the English sentence. As a result, the purpose of her message remained unclear, and miscommunication persisted.

Topic Avoidance

When speakers sidestepped topics they found linguistically challenging by answering vaguely or indicating ignorance (Tarone, 1977; Lin, 2007). Example below showed that the smoothie vendor avoided answering the customer's question.

Example (line 344; 1.30.20):

Customer: (asks a question)

Smoothie Vendor: Ah, I don't know. Bye bye.

By responding "I don't know," the vendor avoided the question entirely, prematurely ending the exchange and failing to resolve the customer's request. This strategy thus did not remedy the breakdown.

4.2 Achievement Strategies

4.2.1 Mime/ Gesture

The speaker used body language or pointing when verbal resources were insufficient (Tarone, 1977; Lin, 2007). In the example below, smoothie vendor used gestures instead of speaking.

Example (lines 141–143; 37.00):

Smoothie Vendor: Hello. Hi, what would you like?

Customer: (points at mangoes)

Smoothie Vendor: now? [She misunderstood and thought the customer wanted to buy mango sticky rice.]

Customer: (points at the blender)

Smoothie Vendor: อ่อน้ำ ปั่น (Oh, smoothie)

Customer: Two.

Smoothie Vendor: Two, ok. มะม่วงสองคะ (Two mango smoothie)

The customer's first gesture (pointing at mangoes) led to misunderstanding ("mango sticky rice"), but the second gesture (pointing at the blender) successfully conveyed "mango smoothie." Mime, used twice, resolved the breakdown on its second instance.

4.2.2 Paraphrase – Circumlocution

The speaker described the concept or object they wanted by using alternative words or phrases when the precise term was unknown (Tarone, 1977). The example below showed that she used alternative words because she did not know specific word expressing her intended meaning.

Example (line 328; 1.19.04): Foreign customer tried to speak Thai.

Customer: เอา mango (I wanted to buy a mango)

Smoothie Vendor: Mango อร่อยมาก sticky rice อร่อยมาก (Mango is delicious. Sticky rice are very delicious)

Customer: กินข้าวหรือยัง วันนี้คุณกินข้าวหรือยัง (Have you eaten lunch today?)

Smoothie Vendor: วันนี้กินแล้ว ตอน lunch I don't, only morning (Today, I have already eaten breakfast. But I haven't eaten lunch yet)

Smoothie Vendor: Bye bye. Enjoy your day.

Here, the vendor said "morning" instead of "breakfast." Both terms related to the first meal of the day, allowing the customer to infer meaning from context. Circumlocution thus successfully bridged the lexical gap.

4.2.3 Conscious Transfer (Literal Translation)

Word-for-word translation from L1 to L2, preserving semantic content but yielding non-idiomatic phrasing (Tarone, 1977). The speaker directly translated phrases or expressions from their native language into English, even if they were not idiomatic.

Example (line 351; 1.36.50):

Smoothie Vendor: Hello, very good? มั้ย

Customer: yeah อร่อย

Smoothie Vendor: mango sticky rice very good.

Customer: good

Smoothie Vendor: I can understand. Because is good. Good so much around eat it and shopping...enjoy your day.

Thinking in Thai before speaking English led to unidiomatic constructions (“Because is good,” “Good so much around”). In this instance, literal translation failed to clarify the message fully.

4.2.4 Language Switch / Code-Switching

Reversion to the speaker’s native language when L2 vocabulary was unavailable (Tarone, 1977; Lin, 2007). Example below showed that the smoothie vendor used Thai words in English sentence.

Example (line 111; 34.47):

Smoothie Vendor: Hello, you come here ma lew smoothie? (มาเร็ว)

The insertion of Thai “ma lew” (“come quickly”) within an English sentence served to convey urgency. Although potentially confusing for monolingual English speakers, the bilingual context here helped interlocutor guess the meanings in communication.

4.2.5 Appeal for Assistance

Soliciting help from other interlocutor could be a way to help express a message (Tarone, 1977; Lin, 2007). Example below showed that at the smoothie stall, the masseuse asked for help when she was unable to express her thoughts in English.

Example (line 256; 1.04):

Masseuse: ...รับดั่งค์ 99 บาทหนอย พี่บอกเขาไม่เป็น (Please collect 99 baht for me; I don’t know how to tell the customer.)

Smoothie Vendor: Ninety-nine baht. Just moment.

The masseuse explicitly asked the vendor for assistance in communicating the price, and the vendor explained it in English. Appeal for Assistance thus resolved the breakdown.

4.2.6 Self-Repair / Correction

Speaker initiated correction upon realizing an error in their own utterance (Lin, 2007). In the following sample, the smoothie vendor self-corrected her initial utterance to make sure she used correct words to communicate.

Example (line 47; 23.30):

Customer: Mangosteen smoothie

Smoothie Vendor: One just moment. Just moment.

After producing the hybrid “One just moment,” the vendor corrected to “Just moment,” clarifying her intended phrase and preventing confusion.

4.2.7 Compensatory Strategies

Employing nonverbal tools (e.g. calculators, drawings) was a way to convey quantitative information when language failed (Lin, 2007). Following example showed that the masseuse used a calculator to show the service fee to a Chinese customer to help the customer understand the message.

Example (line 449; 6.48):

Masseuse: Three hundred...Three-hundred baht.

Customer: (speechless)

Masseuse: (uses calculator to show the price)

The masseuse displayed the service fee on a calculator when she could not convey it verbally, ensuring the customer understood the amount owed. The masseuse's use of the calculator demonstrated how compensatory strategies effectively resolved miscommunication when verbal resources were insufficient.

5. Discussion

This study's two-tier framework revealed a clear preference for Achievement over Reduction Strategies. Of the nine tactics identified, Code-Switching ($n = 5$), Appeal for Assistance ($n = 4$), Mime/Gesture ($n = 4$), and Compensatory tools ($n = 4$) predominated, while Functional Reduction/Avoidance appeared only three times and Formal Reduction not at all. These findings align with Færch and Kasper's (1977) assertion that speakers favor resource-expanding measures when confronted with communicative challenges. In the high-stakes, fast-paced marketplace of Chatuchak, vendors evidently prioritize strategies that actively negotiate meaning rather than simply downscale their messages.

Our analysis further shows how specific strategies corresponded to distinct barriers. Cultural mismatches—such as divergent head-shake conventions—were routinely countered by Mime/Gesture and Code-Switching, which provided visual and bilingual cues to bridge nonverbal gaps (Noreewong, 2006). Language barriers, stemming from uneven English proficiency, elicited Conscious Transfer, Paraphrase, Appeal for Assistance, and Self-Repair; these tactics enabled vendors to negotiate unfamiliar vocabulary by drawing on L1 knowledge or interlocutor support (Jung, 2010; Rani, 2016). Environmental noise and crowding triggered Compensatory strategies—calculator displays and exaggerated gestures—that amplified the message beyond ambient interference. Thus, vendors deploy a dynamic strategy resource to precisely tackle the barrier at hand.

Regarding overall effectiveness, multimodal and interactive tactics proved most reliable. Mime and calculator-assisted displays consistently resolved breakdowns, demonstrating the universal power of visual channels when verbal communication falters. In contrast, Avoidance strategies—Topic Avoidance and Message Abandonment—uniformly failed to clarify the intended meaning, often terminating exchanges without resolution. These contrasts underscore that while Reduction strategies may preserve conversational flow, they rarely achieve communicative closure in authentic ELF settings.

Collectively, these insights fully address our research questions. First, Thai vendors employ nine distinct repair tactics spanning both Reduction and Achievement domains.

Second, frequency counts demonstrate a marked predominance of Achievement over Reduction, with interactive, multimodal strategies leading usage. Third, effectiveness assessments reveal that nonverbal and bilingual resources are the most successful in resolving misunderstandings, whereas avoidance undermines resolution.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study extends the frameworks of Færch and Kasper (1977), Tarone (1977), and Lin (2007) by applying them to authentic vendor–customer interactions at Chatuchak Market. Our findings show that Thai vendors rely on a varied repertoire of Achievement Strategies—code-switching, appeal for assistance, mime/gesture, compensatory tools, self-repair, conscious transfer, and paraphrase—far more than on Reduction Strategies. Gesture, bilingual insertions, and nonverbal aids proved especially effective in bridging cultural, linguistic, and environmental divides, whereas avoidance tactics rarely resolved misunderstandings.

This study was limited to two vendors in a single market setting. The findings may not represent the communication strategies used by all vendors. Spending more time collecting data and recording conversations with a wider range of customers from different countries would help provide a clearer picture of how vendors adjust their strategies in diverse situations. Future research could explore whether similar patterns appear across other vendors and settings to strengthen the conclusions drawn from this study.

These findings show an important point. That is in multilingual and multicultural contexts, successful communication does not depend on speaking English like a native speaker. Instead, it depends on how well speakers can use different resources—such as gestures, language mixing, or other strategies—to make their message understood. The way the vendors handled communication with customers from different countries shows that being clear, flexible, and using strategies that fit the situation is more important than using perfect grammar. In today's global context, especially where English is used as a common language among people from different backgrounds, what matters most is being able to understand and be understood—not trying to sound like a native speaker.

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